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The End of Rebirth

In a talk given during the winter monastic retreat this year, Ajahn Viradhammo explains how practising in the world, be it in the monastery or outside, brings us to the point where our outer responsibilities and inner work unite.

In Buddhism we speak of two levels of consideration. The first is the conventional level of "me", as a person, and "you", as a person. For example, there is "Viradhammo": fifty-ish, quickly getting out of shape, has duties, is a senior monk at Amaravati; his Mom is in Canada - and he has a little scar on his head with three stitches. That is "me", as a person. There is the sense here of a person, of social responsibility, of a position in society; of the age of the body, of its genetic and cultural make-up. This is the packaged sense of self that a typical person works with, which is quite valid.

At this level, the considerations are morality, right livelihood, responsibility for the environment, social action, expression and creativity. This is one level we operate on, where we can find all kinds of fulfillment; it is a very rewarding thing to be able to work to express and create something. However, it is not liberating - because things change. We really notice that it is not liberating when someone criticises what we are doing. You might think you are doing a great job but when someone pokes a few holes in it, then you see how un-liberating it is - how bound one can be to it. If all we are trying to do is to find fulfillment on the level of family, social action and creativity, then of course our hearts are never fully appeased, because those conditions are always changing and they depend on so many other factors which are beyond our control. If my whole sense of fulfillment is my family, but then my kids leave home, or someone dies, or my child comes home with a red Mohican - what do I do if my whole life is dependent on that?! So we would say that fulfillment on this level is not where liberation lies, it is not a refuge - although that is not to put it down.

The second level is the Dhamma level, the level of liberation of the heart. When we develop a Buddhist lifestyle, we can see how our families and our social positions can actually be our 'monasteries'. They are the place where we practise inner vigilance and contemplation.

Whether you are an artist, a doctor, a photographer or on the dole, that is your monastery, that is where you practise.

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Whether you are an artist, a doctor, a photographer or on the dole, that is your monastery, that is where you practise.

I was in New Zealand for nine years and was involved with a very beautiful monastery project. During that time there was the necessity to function on the social level - I had to work and to organise things - but, through all that, the most important things to consider were suffering and non-suffering: the inner world. We built this lovely meditation hall (half my monastic life has been spent on building sites!). One whole side of it was open, and we had doors that were ten feet by ten feet - pretty big doors! However, the joiner who was making the doors up was not very efficient. He would always tell us that the doors were coming next week - and this went on for four months! On the wordly level, we had to say to him, "Hey, listen! We have a contract, you are not meeting your responsibilities." But on the inner level, we all had to take responsibility for our annoyance at this joiner. So both levels were operating.

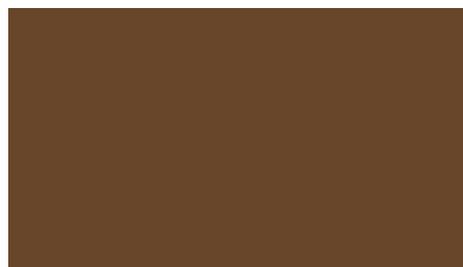
This meditation hall is convertable. There is a cloister at the front, onto which these huge doors open. On top of the cloister we had a marquee custom-made, so we could double the size of the hall on big occasions. We got the best tentmaker in New Zealand to make this marquee - but it was faulty. We had to take tough steps to ensure he didn't rip us off, but we still could not hate him. Sometimes we wanted to; the mind was saying, "What a rip-off! What are we paying this man all this money for?"

Our practice was right there; the tentmaker was our monastery. So without denying the necessity and the challenge of living in the world, we also recognise the inner world. If we view those two worlds skilfully we find a balance between conventional reality and the inner work. Then the tentmaker becomes a person with whom I learn to stand up for what is right, rather than putting my tail between my legs and running away. He helps me learn to be patient.

This inner world is what we work with on a retreat. Although we should not forget the conventional world - Buddhism is not just a weird experience called retreat! We cannot spend our life on a retreat, we have to live in the world. The gift of a retreat, of course, is that we don't have to do so much social re-organising. If the toast is burned, it's burned; we don't sue the cooks. So we work with whatever we have, and we have the freedom to observe. A retreat offers the opportunity to look at suffering and non-suffering.

"The hub of the wheel is the centre of knowing and being; this can take it all. This is where the unconditioned lies."

Maybe in your own lives you have difficulties to deal with - mortgages or recalcitrant teenagers? Don't try to solve those problems now! Instead, I suggest you work with that very feeling of anxiety or worry as a present condition. This is the skill of moving from the conventional, social level of "me", as a person, to the impersonal level of basic Dhamma elements. This level



of the teaching then breaks down our conscious experience to fundamentals which we can look at, no matter what our social situation is. For example, thought - mental activity - is one of the fundamental things we have been looking at. If this activity is always kept on the personal level, it's, "Well, what am I going to do tomorrow? I don't know... We need to do this; but what if we do that? Yes, let's try this, then we'll do that..." All that is on the personal level - but on the Dhamma level, this is simply planning, worry, thought.

If we remain on the personal level, there will always be this to-ing and fro-ing - struggling. It is only on that impersonal level of consciousness that we can understand not-self anatta. It's not that life itself is impersonal - we still have our individual kamma, but it is on this level that we can penetrate to a liberating understanding, by passing beyond ignorance. We are not going to avoid the tentmakers and the joiners altogether; life is always going to be that way.

There are many teachings that can help us; for example the Four Noble Truths or Dependent Origination paticca-samuppada. Sometimes, we might feel over-whelmed if we try to figure these out, but in time we come to see that it's a really beautiful package, intellectually very lovely. More than that, these teachings encourage us to look in the right place, and show us the path to freedom. They take us away from the personal situation with the joiner or the tentmaker, directly to a fundamental sense of stress. So we develop the ability to examine on this level all the time. If I can look at the "aggro" I feel towards the joiner and take it out of the personal realm by simply looking at it as stress, then I will be able to understand any "aggro" I may have for the rest of my life and know how to deal with it.

Last night we talked about craving tanha, the sense of wanting: wanting to become, wanting to get rid of, or simply wanting something essentially nice. Craving is a fundamental human characteristic, neither right nor wrong, just part of the package. The three kinds of tanha - bhava tanha, vibhava tanha and kama tanha - should be understood.

Bhava tanha is the craving for being. Notice how much on retreat we are being something or someone? Sometimes there is a feeling of being kidnapped by the memory; we find ourselves back in time. Or maybe it is a future possibility; in thought, there is the sense of being a person - of becoming - through anticipation and expectation. If we are not aware of that, then our attention will be pre-occupied, kidnapped by a constant level of stress in the mind. Then there is vibhava tanha, which is a



repression. We have a lot of ideals about what we should not be and what we should not have. Vibhava tanha is the desire to get rid of those things.

Kama tanha is the craving for sense pleasure. Around the body there is a lot of kama tanha. We like comfort in this body, we don't like arthritis or pain; yet one of the lessons in this life, for some seemingly cruel reason, is that we need to witness to bodily pain. That is part of life. So, on the social level, we deal with the pain. We find some Chinese herbs or get the acupuncturist to poke us, whatever we have faith in; we work on that level. But, on the Dhamma level, we reflect: there is sickness. Why is there sickness? Because there is birth. That is just the way it is - like it or not. So sickness is something which needs to be learned about, as is pain.

On a retreat you get pain; I hope you don't get too sick or painful, but you will probably feel some pain in the knees or the back, or somewhere. So there is pain, and there is craving for comfort; that is a basic, fundamental instinct which needs to be understood. Now if one can understand the craving for non-pain and be at peace with pain, then one obviously has done oneself a great service. So try to use the feeling of pain to examine craving, to understand the wanting and see the end of wanting. The same holds true for the emotions and the way sense-consciousness works.

The Buddha encouraged us to consider how human consciousness and the human body are involved with pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings and sensations; to use feeling (vedana) as a framework for contemplation. When you are thirsty, you drink a glass of orange juice; it is pleasant. When you are sitting here and your knees hurt, that is unpleasant. That is very obvious. So no matter what you are finding pleasant or unpleasant - the body, the weather, a person, or your own mind - notice the feeling of pleasant-unpleasant-neutral; consider attraction-repulsion-neutrality.

When we are not in touch with Dhamma we often don't consider these fundamental states of mind. We just enjoy the pleasant and try to minimise the unpleasant - which seems like a logical thing to do. But then that keeps us very restless, because no matter how hard we try to do this, there will always be pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. Sense-consciousness is this way.

Seeking the pleasant, trying to be rid of the unpleasant is samsara. The more we do this, the more we want to do it, and the more we have to do it. We become addicted to this way of operating. We get into this very restless phenomenon called rebirth - becoming, doing, all the time. And this takes us away from our real home. This takes us away from the unconditioned, because pleasure and pain are always conditioned. As they change, we feel the need to change. As we grasp pleasure and pain, we find ourselves being spun around the samsaric wheel.

The wheel is one of our traditional images. The rim of the wheel represents sense experience - the contacts we experience, pleasant and unpleasant - all of it spinning around. Grasping the rim of a wheel simply wrings us around with the general momentum. So grasping the pleasant, then trying to hold onto it and afraid of losing it, we make tremendous effort to keep it going; or getting angry at the unpleasant - in both cases we continue to spin around endlessly. But the hub of the wheel is the centre of knowing and being, and this can take it all. This is where the unconditioned lies. If we can summon awareness and be that still centre of knowing, there are still comings and goings - but we have a refuge. This is what Ajahn Chah called, "our real home."

This is the basic structure that the Buddha asks us to look at. Our sensitive body contacts objects. That contact produces pleasant, unpleasant, neutral feelings - vedana. From there comes craving tanha, the grasping of craving upadana, and the whole process of becoming bhava and rebirth jati. If one carries on like this over time, it becomes a habit. It is then very difficult to return to the still centre of being, because one is so restlessly engaged with that which moves, with the emotions and the thoughts.

Why are we kidnapped so much? Even though we sit here determining, "I will not get kidnapped!" - it's very hard, isn't it? Don't think you are alone in this, we are all in the same boat! It is very difficult because of our habits, our kamma. Even though we might have really good intentions, situations arise where we feel anger or fear. That is kamma.

What we are trying to do is to break up all these kammic patterns. The way we can do this is by beginning to look at Dhamma, rather than remaining stuck on the level of personality. The contemplation of feelings vedanupassana is one of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It requires careful attention to notice this basic structure of the way that some things attract our attention, while others repel. We can try it with an emotion, with a bodily feeling, with a thought; or with people. On this retreat maybe you find difficulty with someone, or maybe you fall in love with them. Notice how some people are physically very attractive, while some are not. Some people have a lot of charisma, and others don't. Notice how you are attracted or repelled; look at that very simple movement of the heart. This is where our habitual emotions are really arising from.

If you can know that movement and learn to not follow or react to it, then you begin not to suffer. For example, your own psyche, the things you don't like about yourself, the emotions you think should not be there; all these come up as very unpleasant. So ask, "What does an unpleasant emotion feel like?" Or in meditation you might sometimes experience tranquillity, bliss or bright lights, or notice how beautiful silence is, how really attractive that is... but then comes the coarseness of the sound of the JCB! So we attach to the pleasant and the refined, and we try to get rid of the ugly. But what is it that knows pleasant and unpleasant?

Sometimes when you are sitting, the mind is bored, the eyes look around, and you find yourself attracted to someone... ah!... and then you start to create. Romance. There is the creation of "me" and "that person", and what "we" are going to do, what is going to happen to "us" - sometimes it's called a "vipassana marriage" - and then suddenly the bell rings! It can happen with hatred too, for example when there is something unappealing about someone. Rather than just noticing our desire to pull away from them, sitting with that until it reaches neutrality - we become very critical, caught in aversion, and try to push them away. But in contemplation of feelings, we can simply bring up an image of a person, and be mindful of the attraction or aversion. That takes us to peace of the mind - to neutrality, rather than identification with the feeling itself.

Quite often we are so caught up with the craving for pleasure that we don't even notice neutrality, which we find boring. As Luang Por Chah said, the neutral, the ordinary is like the space between the end of the out-breath and the beginning of the in-breath. It is very calming but we don't tend to notice it, because we want excitement - we seek to react to difficult or frightening things.

The practice of vedanupassana requires refined attention; taking this theme for contemplation to break down the whole self-structure. So no matter what you may be as a self, as a person, suggest to yourself that today you are going to simply try to notice attraction and repulsion in the mind. That way you are contemplating Dhamma, instead of just being a person. Then ask, "What is it that knows that which you are noticing?" That knowing is where we find our freedom. This structure is very analytical, but in Buddhism we need a certain amount of

analysis.

You have a body with senses; you live in an environment with which you have contact; that contact produces pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings. Right there is where you work. Then you have tanha: wanting the pleasant, not wanting the unpleasant, and the sleepiness and delusion around the neutrality. When that wanting arises, there might be grasping of it, believing in it; you really think that if you follow it you will be truly happy, or that to get rid of it will be the right thing to do. So there is belief in the wanting, and the grasping upadana. From the grasping comes the sense of becoming; one gets involved in this whole process and is reborn into the new situation. From there emerges the sense of dissatisfaction, and you get lost in that: "Oh, here I go again!"

Notice how birth and death work. You are bored with meditation, your knees are hurting, you want to get up and do something interesting. Then we get a pleasant beautiful, creative idea that is really going to help the world. Rather than simply noticing this as a pleasant idea, craving develops to keep it going. We start to think, we grasp the craving and then we create something. This is where we seek rebirth; we go on from one to the next to another. It is important to notice this, because at that point we have a choice. If we can see craving clearly and not grasp it, we save ourselves a rebirth, and experience the silence of the mind. If, on the other hand we choose to be reborn then our next option will be a death. Death is when the dancing will not stop; it continues on and on in the mind. That is the decline the kamma of attachment; rather than face that decline into despair and boredom, we seek an alternative rebirth. That is why boredom and disillusionment are so very important. If we can simply bear to be with the ending of a cycle, that acceptance can take us beyond rebirth.

So we choose. Sometimes we will be able to notice that movement towards the pleasant, and we will say, "No, I don't really need that". At other times we will get caught up with the pleasure. Then we will experience its decline, and have to bear with that. Remember that if you are reborn, you will need to die again!

Nibbana, liberation, is that which is not born and does not die, it carries us beyond the cycle - not in terms of whether we will be a rabbit in the next life - but right now. If you get that principle right, it will always work for us in this way.



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The Wisdom of Samadhi

Ajahn Pannavaddho was one of the first bhikkhus to live and practise in the Hampstead Vihara with Kapilavaddho Bhikkhu in the 1960's. He has since taken up residence in Wat Pa Barntard, the forest monastery of Ajahn Maha Boowa of whom he is a close and respected disciple. In the following piece he illuminates the importance of samadhi as a basis for the deepening of wisdom.

In the training of the mind there is the need to develop wisdom. Unfortunately, this cannot be done directly, just by wanting wisdom. There may be some people with innate wisdom, but they will not be able to bring it out and use it properly, unless there is enough mindfulness to support and control it. Wisdom does not simply mean intellectual thought, it is of quite a different order and can only arise from an internal state of calm. Therefore, the first necessity of mental training is to attain a state of calm.

Samadhi, the state of calm attained by meditation practice, has many levels depending on the degree of absorption of the citta with the object of meditation. The word, citta, means the mind, heart or consciousness; it is the basis in a person which is 'central', whereas everything else, including the five khandas is peripheral. Practically everyone has to develop the practice of samadhi, if they want to attain wisdom and a state of happiness beyond what is normally possible in this world. Having attained samadhi, the way is then clear for the development of wisdom.

Developing samadhi can be put like this. Normally, the heart is hungry, it wants something, and it is searching around all the time. The only way it knows how to search is through the senses and in the world, because this is what it has learnt. It wants this, searches for that, looks for this, wants to hear that - and so on, all the time. It goes out continually, but what it gets from the world and what it gets by doing this never satisfies the hunger. In fact it tends to increase it if anything. The heart is still hungry after all the searching one has done.

Now the way to satisfy the heart is not by going out, but by going in the opposite direction. One must withdraw one's attention away from sense stimuli, memory and thoughts - both discursive and playful - and one must give the mind as little as possible to hold onto. One allows one's attention to remain only with the subject of meditation, such as the repetition of "Buddho", or watching one's breathing. The mind is given only this one thing to hold onto, one anchor.

At first it is very difficult for the mind still wanders and jumps about but, as one goes on, it becomes more used to it and interest starts to arise. When interest arises there is less tendency to run around. You have probably noticed this with work; how, when you had something which at first you did not want to do, when you got deeply into it the work started to become interesting. After that, it was no longer such a hard task. It was much easier and could be done without much hardship.

Atomic bombs don't let themselves off, they require

people to do so; bullets are not fired from guns without people behind them; and what is behind each person is his own kilesas all the time.

It's like that with meditation practice. At first it's hard work, but once you get into it then interest arises and, once that happens, the mind becomes more and more absorbed in the practice. When it becomes absorbed, the external things all start dropping away automatically. The mind goes right inward, and when it goes inward and stays there, it gets complete rest and the heart is fulfilled internally and feels quite satisfied. When it comes out of that state, it no longer wants to search around looking for things, because it is satisfied. It is prepared to remain just there - still.

Withdrawing from this state of absorption the mind is replete, satisfied, as though it has had a good meal. It is also wieldy and pliable; this state can be turned to good advantage by developing wisdom, because the main obstacles to its development are quelled for a time. Instead of being restless, fluctuating and wandering, the mind is in a suitable state which can be used for investigation, and it can go very, very deep. This is true wisdom and this wisdom brings results.

In the normal way of life, it is possible for one to have insight and gain a lot of understanding by using reason and discursive thought. Sometimes one may feel that such insights are deep and important, for they may reveal things about life and people which one had never realised before. Yet when one reviews that understanding, it does not really have much effect on oneself internally; it is, so to speak, on the surface. It may be quite true, but it does not alter one's outlook or nature.

To give an illustration: the type of understanding that does alter one's nature is like that of a young child who sees something hot, like a red hot coal, and he goes to pick it up. Once he touches it, he never does it again. He learns quickly and deeply - it penetrates, it is effective. That sort of wisdom is not easily lost. However, the wisdom which we must work for is of a much more subtle nature, and can only be attained when we have a basis of Samadhi. In Samadhi, the heart is still, it's open, and whatever is penetrated by wisdom will go straight into it.

Normally, the heart is covered over with all sorts of garbage as though it's wrapped up and nothing can get through, but when samadhi is developed the heart can be reached quite easily. It is quite open, and whatever wisdom is developed goes right in. That wisdom is then effective in giving results. It can be effective in quite extraordinary ways - it can even reverse long-standing habits of people quite easily.

Those obstructive qualities, which are like "sand in the gears", are called kilesas or defilements. They wrap around the heart and prevent the calm from penetrating. They are the things which we have to try and get rid of, and they are the things which we must come to know. Mainly, they consist of greed, hatred and delusion, but there are a whole heap of other



things which spring from these three. They have endless ramifications and endless tricks too, they trick us in all sorts of ways.

Let me give an example: when doing meditation practice and a thought arises - something not very good - one might catch it, and then think, "I've caught that one, the kilesas didn't get me there." So then one congratulates oneself, but while congratulating oneself one does not realise that this is also kilesa, and one has been caught in another direction!

These are the sort of tricks that they play all the time. One must learn their tricks and be up to them all the time with understanding. One must not think that these kilesas are little things, which are just tacked onto oneself somehow. They are extremely important and are very deep in the heart. It is just these kilesas that cause all the trouble in the world - nothing else. Atomic bombs don't let themselves off, they require people to do so; bullets are not fired from guns without people behind them; and what is behind each person is his own kilesas all the time.

So the whole trouble in the world springs from these kilesas, which are quite subtle, extremely resourceful and ever-present. They are resourceful because they dwell there in each person's own heart (or citta), which they usurp. They use its inherent cleverness to further their own ends.

The kilesas are there in the heart, and Dhamma is there also, all mixed up; it depends on circumstances which one dominates at any one time. These kilesas are there in the heart all the time, and so they are continually flowing out and displaying themselves in action, speech and thought. In fact, we could say that the average person is almost entirely the kilesas. It is not that sometimes they are there and sometimes they are not - they are there all the time, colouring our outlook, causing our understanding to be deluded. Our basic perceptions of the world, other people, ourselves, religion and endless other things are all distorted, because they all come under the baneful influence of kilesas.

For this reason, everything that we do in ordinary life is to some extent, false or wrong. There is nothing that we can do perfectly, until we get rid of the kilesas. However, we must not be too worried about this because, although everything we do is false, there are two ways in which we can go; there is one way that is wrong, and another that is right. What we must learn is how always to choose the right direction, even though it may be far from perfect and coloured by these kilesas.

If we go in the right direction, the kilesas steadily get thinner, and the understanding that undermines them gets stronger. However, if we go in the wrong direction, we become more deluded and more caught up until there is no hope in anything. You only need to look and see people who do bad things and see what they become. They become coarse and gross, and they don't understand anything subtle at all. This is because their kilesas are growing fast, because they are going in the wrong direction all the time. Those people who go in the right direction gain happiness, as if there was an aura of happiness around them all the time. They are not concerned about things, and they don't worry like other people do. The world to them is not an unpleasant place; all the problems in it do not really touch them, because they are good inside. This is because the troubles in the world are always troubles in oneself, while external troubles are mere occurrences which just take place. It is within one's own internal state that all troubles exist and, if one can only learn to cure oneself, all troubles and problems will recede into the background.

As to the details of what you should do, you know already what is meant by meditation practice, and you should try to maintain whichever technique you find works best. As far as wisdom is concerned, it is good to use wisdom in the sense of thinking about things, seeing how things work in the world and in one's life. Steadily this does have an effect, although it is

slow and takes a long time to penetrate deeply. In other words, thinking about the right kind of things in the ordinary way of thinking can develop wisdom but only very slowly, for it takes a long time to penetrate internally in depth. Generally speaking, there is little alternative to the development of Samadhi.



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Elements: The Funeral of Luang Por Jun

For those who appreciate Luang Por Jun's practical and down-to-earth approach to the practice, his funeral ceremony in January was a joyful reunion of Dhamma friends. Venerable Asabho describes the ceremony and contemplates his final teaching of impermanence.

Wat Beung Khao Luang lies in the midst of a jigsaw pattern of brownish paddyfields, a patch of wood and a couple of undeveloped but well-kept Isarn villages. The monastery has grounds of about 25 acres, mostly open and shrubby land with a corner of fine forest, a pond, and a community that usually numbers around three dozen monks and maechees [8-precept nuns].

A few scattered remains in the area, dating back to the time of the Dvaravati period more than 1300 years ago, show that the place has been used as a Buddhist sanctuary for a long time. More recently, in the earlier part of this century, Luang Por Sao, one of Ajahn Mun's teachers, used to stay and practise at this same spot. And some thirty years ago the youthful Krooba Jun, returning to his home village nearby, wandered through here and hung up his glot (umbrella and mosquito net) on the site of the dilapidated brick stupa, behind the remains of an old monastery. He liked the place and stayed on. The stupa is still here today: ancient, frail, yet still shapely, listing slightly to one side under the burden of years. Around it, though, most of the sleepy environment has changed. Under Luang Por Jun's guidance villagers, monks and maechees have built up a large monastery and today Wat Beung Khao Luang is once again a thriving monastic community.

Three days before the ceremony Wat Beung Khao Luang is bustling with activity. A whole eight months of preparations finally come to a head. During the past months, several of Ajahn Chah's many branch monasteries have sent monks to help: over a hundred and thirty bhikkhus and more than two dozen maechees currently live here. They have been working hard to bring a number of building projects to completion in time for the ceremonies. Pickup trucks full of food and other requisites have been sent by many branch monasteries to support the community here - which has now grown to five times its usual size. The major piece of work, and the focus of all the last months' building efforts, is the artificial island that has arisen in the monastery's large pond. It is cast in concrete, completely circular and some 30 meters in diameter. Two broad and stately bridges link it to either side of the pond. The centre of the island is formed as a slightly elevated platform of two concentric steps and it is this area that will serve as the actual cremation site. Later on, after the ceremony is over, it will be used as the base of Wat Beung Khao Luang's memorial stupa for Luang Por Jun.

Life is unpredictable, death is certain - my dying is inevitable.

Over the last few days people have arrived in large numbers at the monastery; the trickle of pickup trucks and minibuses full of people doesn't seem to stop. The Sangha at Wat Beung has done a great job preparing the place for the tide of visitors. All the open spaces in the

monastery have been covered with a thick layer of rice straw and people simply spread their mats on the ground. Many who come here to stay for the whole five days hang their glots and the monastery gradually fills with clusters of people. Life is very much in the open, and one corner after another gets gradually taken over by scenes of colourful camping life. This is clearly not an occasion for grieving: it is a big and joyous reunion of people who gather to pay their last tribute to Luang Por Jun, and who come to listen to many of Ajahn Chah's disciples expounding the Dhamma.

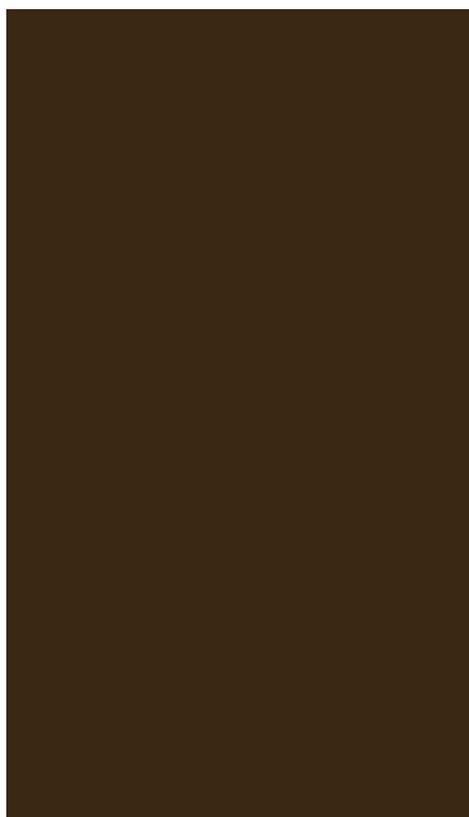
Rows of huts, their walls made of split bamboo sticks and carefully torn cement bags, provide shelter against the sun and serve as makeshift kitchens and free restaurants for the many thousands of visitors. A couple of shacks made of corrugated iron with water tubs serve as bathing places. Groups of people have come from all over the country having gathered food and resources to help with the catering: little pieces of cardboard show the names of the monastery they are associated with and the districts they are from.

The number of monks inches up too; after the third day there are a thousand of us: too many to simply walk for alms in the next village. Before dawn, we bundle, almsbowls strapped on, into cars and pickup trucks. Daily there is a fleet of local drivers, waiting to take us through the crisp morning air, to different towns and villages of the surrounding area for pindabat.

The Sala at Wat Beung is a large, T-shaped building, some 30 meters wide and a good 60 meters long: whitewashed stonewalls, large windows, and a grey asbestos roof with its red metal frame showing on the inside. Front centre, above the monks' platform, is a sizeable Buddha statue against the mural colourfully painted landscape. What really catches the eye, though, is the shrine just to the left of centre of the room: a beautifully painted portrait of Luang Por Jun amongst flowers, and the ornately carved red and gold coffin where his body lies in state, carefully covered in tea and tobacco leaves to prevent decomposition. Mounted on boards are several photographs of his quiet and peaceful features, taken shortly after he died. A caption in Pali reads: "Life is unpredictable, death is certain - my dying is inevitable". A few visitors come up, quietly pay their respects and, after a moment's sitting, leave again in silence.

A few days later, the same Sala is one whole sea of bodies - waves of bowing monks and nuns ceremonially take leave from Ajahn Jun and, one last time, ask for his forgiveness - which his unmistakable tape-recorded voice poignantly bestows upon us. The coffin is then raised from the shrine in the Sala, and sixteen shaven and white-clad men carry it to the pyre on the island. It is followed by the four-fold community, and the whole procession moves slowly on its way through the monastery, past thousands of people who wait in the open under the scorching sun, while an unruly breeze barges its way to the fore and stirs up clouds of dust and ruffles the flags posted along the path.

During the week there is a full schedule of meditation sessions through the day, along with the regular morning and evening chanting. After night-fall, everybody gathers under canvas roofs on the farther and slightly elevated side of the pond. The island with the pyre and the walkways are lit up by a maze of lanterns, which illuminate the night and reflect themselves upon the water. The Puja ends with the sound of squeaky



samanera voices hurrying through their daily recitations; then the nights are given to Dhamma talks. As the wind gathers momentum, monks wrap themselves in their outer robes and people sit huddled in blankets while all listen to the cicadas and the Dhamma desanas - some in Thai, many in Isahn dialect, none in English - far into the night.

The burning of the body takes place on full-moon night of February the 4th. During that afternoon, once the entire assembly has gathered and has settled itself in place, a few limousines pull up and a delegation of smartly uniformed, official-looking people processes to the base of the pyre, where one of them lights a small torch. A little further up from there, on top of two steps, lies the coffin in a small but colourful wooden and polystyrene structure (brazenly cheerful and looking remarkably like an oversized birdhouse). The people who have assembled around the pond try to follow the distant proceedings on the island. They listen to the announcements and bask in the ocean of goodwill that such grand gatherings of the Buddha's disciples engender. Between meditation and chanting folks disperse for a quick bath and a cup of tea or a Pepsi before the sun sets. Night falls rapidly, and after Luang Por Sumedho's talk the monks walk over to the island where a gigantic umbrella hangs suspended a few metres above the brightly lit bier. It sways in the evening breeze, its white cloth lining swelling and ballooning. Beneath it a few final, hasty preparations are going on. There is a sudden and unmistakable smell of diesel in the air and, shortly before ten o'clock, smoke begins to erupt from under the funeral canopy where the actual furnace is hidden. The pyre is burning. Minutes later, under scrupulous control, the decorated polystyrene awnings and the majestic umbrella have caught fire and have gone spec-tacularly up in flames. Meanwhile, the moon has risen and the Sangha is standing as close to the fire as heat and smoke will allow. The fire-element is at work with all its fury - and Ajahn Jun's body goes on its final journey.



My thoughts turn to some of the forms and the symbols around elements, stupas and cremation places. In Thai language, the expression for 'crematory' (mehn) is borrowed from Sanskrit. The same word, pronounced a little differently, is also the name for Meru - the mythical mountain which in Buddhist cosmology holds together the four great continents and forms the centre of the universe. It is this image of Mt Meru that is echoed by the shape of stupas throughout the Buddhist world. Some of the lower parts of a traditional stupa symbolise the four great elements of fire, water, earth and air; and the entire edifice can be seen as an image of the relationship between the conditioned and the unconditioned realm. The theme of the identity between Meru, the mythical mountain and the burning place - mirrored so clearly by Thai language - is often taken up by Buddhists in quite a literal way:

the burning place for Luang Por Jun's body is set up on the foundations of the stupa which will arise on this island in the middle of the pond. The allegory is thus.

Shortly after midnight I clamber up to the fire. The decorations and the finery have all burnt down. The row of intently gazing faces, of monks and tiny novices packed together around the open burning-chamber, are painted a fierce orange. The body lies there in the blaze: charred flesh and bones, but recognizable clearly enough as a human frame to drive home the knowledge that this is not just a world of metaphors.

On the next morning, the light of dawn bathes the empty patches of rice straw in pink hues. People are packing their bags and rolling up their mats. After a cup of hot chocolate, monks, a few maechees and layfolk gather on the island and cluster around what is now a naked steel brazier with ashes and still glowing charcoal. Three of the elder monks of Wat Pah Pong carefully sift the remains of the fire, pick out pieces of bone and place them on cloth-covered receptacles standing by the side. I am moved by the whole experience of these last few days. In contrast to the solemn and institutionalised efficiency of other funerals, Luang Por Jun is seen through all this by friends - they preserve his body, build him a crematory, arrange a memorable ceremony for all those whose lives have been affected by him, burn his body carefully through a whole night and finally sift through the ashes to collect his few remains. How much more can friends do?

A little further away, under the communal tent is the sight of empty rows of chairs. People bundle their belongings onto pickup trucks, and exchange goodbyes with hands folded in anjali. Cars full of smiling faces pull out of the monastery. A small boy walks by, clutching Luang Por Jun's biography. The island now stands empty, the base in the middle awaiting the stupa, the yet invisible descendant of Mt. Meru, which will enshrine Luang Por Jun's physical remains. But as I pack my bowl and roll up my mosquito net, I reflect that it is the Sangha and the thousands of laypeople slowly filing away that house his true remains the down-to-earth, humorous and practical approach to the Deathless with which he has inspired so many.



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Sutta Class No. 36:

The Buddha's Advice to Meghiya

This sutta [Ud. iv i, AN ix i 3], appearing twice in the Pali canon, tells of a young monk, the Venerable Meghiya, who was the Buddha's attendant. This bhikkhu, returning from alms round one morning, spotted a beautiful and delightful mango grove. He felt this would be the ideal place to practise meditation, so he asked the Buddha if he might go there for the day's meditation. The Buddha responded by asking him to wait until another monk came to carry out his duties as attendant. However, the Venerable Meghiya was eager to go and persisted in his request:

"The Lord has nothing further that should be done, and nothing to add to what has been done, but for me there is something further to be done and something to add to what has been done." After the third such request, the Buddha agreed:

"Do now, Meghiya, as you think fit." So Meghiya went to the mango grove and finding a suitable shady spot, sat down, his back erect and began his meditation. But for the whole time his mind was filled with unskillful thoughts - of sensuality, malevolence and cruelty. This was a source of surprise and consternation. He had gone forth, full of faith and aspiration; he had found for himself what seemed like the perfect situation for practice, and was making enormous effort - but it was all going wrong, it was not bringing the results he had anticipated or hoped for.

Practice motivated by selfishness - the desire to gain power, prestige, would bring, instead of release, a sense of being increasingly trapped in the world of one's own self seeking - samsara.

At the end of what must have been a very difficult afternoon, he returned to the Buddha to tell him of his troubles. It seems that the Buddha was not at all surprised when he heard what had happened. (In fact, the commentary suggests that the Buddha had refused permission for him to go, knowing that he was not yet ready to practise in this way.)

He then listed the five conditions that, when the heart's deliverance is not yet ripe, conduce to its ripening:

First: Good friends,

Second: Virtuous life,

Third: Profitable talk,

Fourth: Zealous exertion,

Fifth: Insight into impermanence, which leads to the ending of ill.

The Buddha concluded by outlining four meditation exercises which should also be developed:

1. Meditation on the unlovely (asubha = repulsive or loathsome).

For the abandonment of passion (lust or greed);

2. Kindliness

For the abandonment of ill will.

3. Mindfulness of in and out breathing anapanasati

For cutting off discursive thinking.

4. The contemplation of impermanence aniccasanna

To uproot the pride of egoism:

'For one who thinks on impermanence, the thought of not-self is established; thinking on there being no self, one wins to the state wherein the conceit "I am" has been uprooted, to the cool nibbana even in this life'

To begin, we can take a closer look at the five conditions that conduce to the heart's ripening.

Firstly, good friends - *kalyanamitta hoti kalyanasampavanko*:

This is usually taken to mean having a wise teacher or wise spiritual companions. This would certainly be appropriate in this context: the Buddha advising the young monk on the importance of being with people who can influence him in a wholesome way. However, the word hoti, means he is, so a more literal translation might be: *He is a friend, an intimate of what is good or wholesome.*

This points to the need for any type of spiritual endeavour to be motivated by a sense of what is right, a love of the good, and a yearning to manifest that in one's life. Whereas, practice motivated by selfishness - the desire to gain power, prestige, or to take advantage of others - would bring, instead of release, a sense of being increasingly trapped in the world of one's own self seeking - samsara.

The Buddha explains that having a wise advisor, good friends or simply a love of the good, is the natural basis for the arising of the other conditions.

Secondly: It may be expected of one who has wise companions that he will be virtuous - *silava hoti*

We learn by example. In Sangha life, although there is the formal training in vinaya, most of our learning and inspiration comes simply through watching how others do things: their manner of behaviour, what they say (or don't say), and when and how they say it. Associating with people following a similar precept form stimulates an interest in this training of body, speech and mind; we are further encouraged by the results it brings. So the full translation for the second condition: *a monk is virtuous, he abides restrained by the restraint of the obligations; he is perfect in the practice of right behaviour, sees danger in trifling faults and trains himself in the ways of training.*

Thirdly: Profitable talk.

The sutta states that such talk arises easily, and that there is a willingness to share one's understanding with others; it arises naturally, according to the way one is living the life. This talk is described as being that which is serious and suitable for opening up the heart, and conduces to a complete turning away from worldly values - nibbidaya; to dispassion, ending, calm, comprehension, to perfect insight, to Nibbana. That is to say, talk about wanting little; contentment; solitude; avoiding society; putting forth effort; virtue, concentration and wisdom; about release and the knowledge and insight of release.

The company of wise friends who are at ease in themselves dispels any sense of having to repress or deny inclinations that do not accord with these guidelines; to see that it is not a matter



of forcing oneself into a puritanical kind of 'holiness', but that these qualities arise naturally as the practice matures.

Fourthly - zealous exertion.

[One abides] resolute in energy for the abandoning of unprofitable things and for taking up what is profitable - stout and strong in effort, not giving up on what one has undertaken (not relinquishing the burden of righteousness).

Again, a wise teacher or good friend, can encourage us and guide our efforts towards what is wholesome. Inevitably, on a religious path there are times when the practice seems dull, lifeless, or totally unproductive. There may be an inclination to abandon the whole thing and to return to look for refuge in the world, in what is familiar and seems comfortable. A wise teacher and good friends remind us of our deeper aspiration and potential, and of the inherent danger or unsatisfactoriness of the world of the senses. This enables us to continue on towards our goal. Practising together we, in a sense, carry one another when there is faltering - just through doing the practice to the best of our ability.

Fifthly: a monk is possessed of insight, and understands the way of growth and decay, having Ariyan penetration concerning the way to the utter destruction of Ill.

We need to be reminded of where to look to find our freedom. It is not in the attainment of some special state in the future, although such states can be the basis for insight, but right in this moment itself. The late Ajahn Buddhadasa used to say: "Nothing whatsoever is to be clung to!" It's an insight that's so subtle that we can easily miss it. Our longing for security and the power of our conditioning are so strong that we can dismiss this key to the door of the Deathless; we are bound by ignorance, nescience - not seeing, not wanting to look, until it is too late. So we need every encouragement to keep looking, to keep remembering, in order to find that point of non-attachment - which is not a rejection of anything at all but, rather, a proper appreciation of our human predicament. Some pick it up quickly (according to the commentary, the Venerable Meghiya attained to stream entry just on hearing this teaching) for others, the lessons need much repetition. We are caught by some desire - a plan, an idea, a regret or a grudge - it hurts, and eventually we let go. This happens over and over again, until finally we learn not to pick things up, not to attach to anything at all. The beauty of Nature is in its transitoriness - not in anything lasting that one can claim as one's own. The Buddha, through his own efforts, awakened to this reality, which freed him from having to trudge and travel through this long round - samsara. This is the insight, as he explained to the Venerable Meghiya, that can free us all from the pain of attachment.

The Buddha concludes by outlining techniques of meditation which should be cultivated in response to specific conditions that may arise in the mind. This responsiveness itself is important to consider. We are not asked to simply work away at developing one particular type of meditation practice. The encouragement is to be aware of what is happening in the mind at any time, and to exercise intelligence in choosing the technique suitable to bring about and support a state of calm, in order that wisdom may arise.

So we have:

1. Meditation on the unlovely asubha for overcoming states of passion, lust or greed. Sometimes this is translated as meditation on loathsomeness or repulsiveness - which can indeed be the case with certain aspects of physicality. However, sometimes a more analytical approach can be effective in inducing a sense of disinterest, or neutrality, as opposed to actual aversion - which is actually just another form of desire. For example, there is the contemplation that monks and nuns are given at the time of Going Forth - hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin - which is a way of dismantling the illusion of physical beauty or attractiveness of another person. Contemplating objects in terms of the elements that comprise them: earth, water, fire and air can be helpful in cooling the passion or interest with things like food; looking at the form, colour or texture, rather than automatically absorbing

into the anticipation of something to be consumed, or delighting in the smell or taste of it.

2. For dealing with ill will or malevolence, the practice of kindness or well wishing metta is recommended.

This does not mean that we have to like everybody, but at least to avoid allowing the mind to linger in states of negativity or aversion towards them.

3. The third meditation is mindfulness of in and out breathing anapanasati.

The Buddha recommended this universally as a way of focussing the mind in the present; gathering attention onto the breath, rather than being whirled around, pulled to and fro by distracting thoughts.

4. The fourth contemplation is of impermanence.

One way to approach this is by careful attention to how we experience 'ourselves' and others in each moment. This pierces the illusion of a fixed and enduring personality that is in any way related to body or mind; there is simply awareness.

These four meditation exercises need to be developed continually in order for the deeply rooted habits, which have arisen because of our ignorance, to be transformed. But, as the Buddha pointed out to the Venerable Meghiya, the ripening of the heart's emancipation will arise quite naturally when the five conditions are there as a basis for our practice.

Sister Candasiri



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The Magic and the Muck

The following article outlines the history of Harnham Monastery and presents an update on its current legal difficulties as an appeal for funds toward a settlement. It has been prepared by trustees of the Magga Bhavaka Trust which was established fifteen years ago under Ajahn Sumedho's guidance to provide stewardship for the monastery.

Most people who know the Sangha in England know the story of Harnham Hill, Farmer John Wake and how the monastery in Northumberland came about. It has a magic to it and it's the kind of story that people take delight in re-telling.

There were three of us originally who were keen to find somewhere we could offer as a vihara. We had a lot of enthusiasm, but as two of us were students and the third a post lady, we had little money. Others joined us but they too had little money so we put an advert in the local paper for a "cottage to rent as a retreat house. Rural, any condition, we can undertake repairs", and we got two replies. One of them was withdrawn when the owner found out we were Buddhist, which left John Wake and the cottage on Harnham Hill.

It was an unbelievably beautiful position, on a small hill looking south over rolling farmland; it was only a ten minute walk from a main road with a bus route, and just seventeen miles from Newcastle. If we had sat down and worked out the ideal place (not that we knew then what we needed), this was it. John let us have it for ten pounds a week and we set about fixing it up. Ajahn Sumedho had told us that all the vihara needed was "a roof, a toilet and running water".

There were no modern amenities, not even a window in the toilet so that they had to brush the snow from the seat before using it.

We had everything but the toilet, but we had to put the plumbing and a new floor in first. We did that over six months, doing the work as two teams that came alternate weekends, each starting from either end of the house. It was our first lesson in working together: when the two floors met they were at different heights and one had the pipework set in concrete while the other had it left out!

Ajahn Sucitto, then only a monk of four years, moved in as our first Abbot. It was good to start with someone who could appreciate the austerity of the place - there were no modern amenities, not even a window in the toilet so that they had to brush the snow from the seat before using it. He was later followed by Ajahn Viradhammo, Ajahn Anando, Ajahn Thiradhammo, and then Ajahn Pabhakaro: Harnham seemed to be where monks were sent to practise being abbots.

During this time the relationship between John Wake and the Monastery grew. John often expressed his delight at "religion being on the hill" and was very supportive of the Sangha,

providing them with practical assistance in many ways. Wanting to see a secure future for them at Harnham, John offered the trust a fifty year lease on the cottage, saying this was effectively "for ever", with a covenant that it only be used as a Monastery.

Unfortunately, the seed of the present difficulties was sown in the negotiation of that first lease. For six months we had had no response from John's solicitor to our letters, and so John decided to not go through his solicitor. He refused to follow our advice that he instruct a different solicitor for just this transaction, even though we offered to pay his legal costs - we even tried the legal impossibility of ourselves instructing a separate solicitor to act on his behalf. The Trustees were faced with a dilemma. On the one hand we could have continued occupying the cottage without any formal lease, but that would have made impossible any long term commitment to building a Monastery there. On the other hand we could, which in fact we did, enter into a lease on very beneficial terms to us - signed without independent advice, by a man who was then over 80 years old; leaving ourselves open to subsequent accusations that we had pressured him into this.

By this time John had also offered us the cottage next door for visitors to stay in, this time with the proviso that one day he would like to retire there himself. Later we asked him if we could buy a derelict cottage further down the hill to renovate as an eventual replacement for this, but it was difficult to agree on a price. Instead, with his estate agent's advice, John put this cottage on the open market, offering to let us match the best offer. But, when a large offer came in from people from outside the area, he changed his mind and accepted that. A few days later John offered to sell us some other property on the hill. The Sangha suggested the barn next door as a Dhamma Hall, and one of the trustees asked for a derelict cottage, which could be renovated for nuns to live in. After some thought, John offered them to us at a very generous price and we agreed to leases with an option to purchase, to give us time to raise the money. For these leases again, John refused to go through his solicitor or land agent, but his solicitor did conduct the eventual sale, a year later.

The transformation of these properties into the elegant simplicity of the Harnham Dhamma Hall and the sturdy monastic accommodation adjoining it, took place because many people trusted a vision of what could happen at Harnham. That trust was to be severely tested by the events which followed.

It started when John said he wanted to make the field at the top of the hill into 'common land', so that the monks and laity would always be able to use it. Hence a meeting was arranged between ourselves, John, John's land agent and his new solicitor, his previous solicitor having recently died. It was clear at this meeting that neither the land agent nor the solicitor knew much about the long history of our dealings with John. The papers handed on from John's previous solicitor had not contained any record of these transactions, neither his client's copies of the conveyances nor his correspondence with our solicitor. The land agent particularly was understandably very angry at what he saw as suspicious



transactions which were to the financial disadvantage of his client. Needless to say, no progress was made on the original purpose of the meeting.

After a year of increasingly non-productive correspondence between solicitors, John's solicitors eventually started legal proceedings against us, claiming that all our transactions with John were the result of us applying 'undue influence' on John, and hence should be set aside. They demanded that we return all the property on the hill. That would have meant closing down the monastery and handing back properties on which we had by then spent a lot of lay supporters' money. The claims were unfounded, and, following the advice of the English Sangha Trust, we appointed an extremely good but very expensive firm of London solicitors to act on our behalf. They prevented the case going to court by having the writ thrown out by the presiding judge. Then just, over a year ago, John changed his solicitors and he is now in dispute with his previous solicitors about the costs charged by them for pursuing the litigation - which had resulted in great expense both to John and ourselves. Since then, the litigation has remained in abeyance, and an out-of-court settlement has been proposed.

Ajahn Munindo, Harnham's abbot during these four years of adversity, has consistently encouraged the rest of us to keep a perspective in all this, reminding us to remember John's past generosity rather than allowing ourselves to be swamped in reaction to the more recent events. This attitude is reflected in our agreement to the proposed settlement which we believe will resolve the grievances, while at the same time honour the purpose for which the Magga Bhavaka Trust holds the property. In outline: both parties would pay their own legal costs, and we would pay John fifteen thousand pounds; this sum being based on the difference between the prices we paid for the properties and what would have been their true market value. Furthermore, we agreed to implement a long-standing informal agreement with John that we would replace the joint sewage system which, as recent visitors to Harnham will know, is so inadequate that the Sangha has to clear it every week.

All of that comes to approximately UKL60,000. If we can raise more we will put it towards buying and developing other properties some of which we still lease and rent, to secure the monastery for the future.

Harnham hill is the most ideal spot for a monastery, everyone tells us that. There was something magical in the way the Sangha got to be there, but now we have to earn the right for them to stay. We need the wider community of supporters to help us achieve this. If you would like to send us something or want more information, the address is:-

Harnham Legal Appeal,
Ratanagiri Buddhist Monastery,
Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland,
NE20 0HF, England.

STOP PRESS

So far donations totalling UKL20,000 have been offered towards the above appeal. Since preparing this article Farmer Wake has reclaimed our guest cottage and there is yet another solicitor operating for him.



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EDITORIAL

Foundation of Sangha

Through the months of winter, the monastic community has followed the rhythm of nature, withdrawing to a place of stillness and silence. This helps to confirm and renew our commitment to a life which is guided by Dhamma, rather than by the increasing demands and complexity of modern society. It seems obvious that any activity or speech that arises from a quiet heart, free from 'self' concerns, is a great blessing to humanity: whereas, when they arise simply as reflex reactions to what is perceived to be happening at any one time, the forces of ignorance and confusion are perpetuated - Mara has won the day, yet again!

If we look at the example of our teacher, the Buddha, we see that there were two aspects to his life. Firstly, through contemplation he came to realise the Truth (Dhamma) that frees the heart from suffering; then he devoted himself to service - to helping others to realise that same Truth. Thus he was a vehicle for the manifestation of both wisdom and compassion. As disciples, one of the main challenges for us all is to bring these two qualities into balance.

One response to the pressing needs of our time is to feel a sense of total ineptitude and to close off, or run away; another is to allow our own sense of guilt, pain or confusion to propel us into action. However, neither of these approaches feel 'right'. Among the listed qualities of Dhamma we find, opanayiko, which can be translated as, 'leading inwards'. Instinctively, 'in' seems to be the way to go in order to find that point of discernment. There needs to be a close examination of the inner mechanisms that govern our lives; with increased awareness of them, there is the beginning of a choice: to be directed by them, or by Dhamma.

We are fortunate that the Buddha, while pointing always to Ultimate Truth, also gave us clear guidelines for dealing with the mundane. While there is every encouragement to practise for the realisation of this Ultimate Truth, it is also understood that this may take a bit of time, but that there are ways of living that can facilitate that process.

Approached simply on a social level, there is no workable way forward; we must look to the level of Dhamma to find solutions.

Magha Puja, the February (or March) full moon, is the time that we celebrate Sangha. Over the centuries generations of disciples have found freedom of heart through living according to established principles. They practised well, directly, insightfully and with integrity. Also emphasised is concord - getting along together and supporting one another, both materially and spiritually, and also emotionally. On one occasion, the Buddha listed six things which, taken together, enable us to have a sense of that balance of insight and responsiveness. He asked that his disciples practise friendliness through body, speech and thought towards one another - both openly and in private; that they share what they receive, not hoarding things up for themselves;

that they train diligently according to the established discipline, which supports concentration and helps to free the heart; and finally that they live together maintaining the insight that ends all suffering. These, he said, were ways of conduct to be remembered, cherished and held in great esteem, conducing to sympathy, unbroken and harmonious concord.

Our community, settling itself into western soil, having been transplanted there from an eastern culture, faces many contradictions. What is understood and accepted in one culture is quite alien and not readily accepted in another. Approached simply on a social level, there is no workable way forward; we must look to the level of Dhamma to find solutions, living in a way that will allow this remarkable inheritance to take root and to flourish. Only then can it become a refuge in this society, with its very different cultural norms and individual conditioning and expectations - both from where it first began 2500 years ago with the Lord Buddha, and more recently with Luang Por Chah and the forest masters of Thailand.

Saddha, or confidence, says, "Yes, this is definitely possible, and definitely worth doing." The voice of discernment recognises, "Yes, but it's not straightforward." Many factors need to be considered. It may take time, but if we try to by-pass these issues the whole ideal structure, having no firm foundation, may come toppling down. So we need to listen carefully to one another and to the voices of our own hearts. If we are willing to listen - even to that which is uncomfortable or inconvenient, painful or embarrassing - then the light of Dhamma can show us the way: "Yes, this feels right; this is the way we should go."

Sister Candasiri

