



# FOREST SANGHA

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## Beyond Worldly Aims and Values

*Ajahn Candasiri : from a talk given at Cittaviweka,  
28th September 1997*

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASA – Homage to the blessed, noble and perfectly enlightened One. I always find these words paying homage to the Buddha very helpful as a way of recollecting that which is a place of Refuge. From this place of Refuge we can notice the Siren-songs, the voices of the world that lure us into things that are not safe, while having this sense of refuge. Often there are things that are much less obvious that we have to deal with and then it is very easy to be pulled into all kinds of compulsions – those very powerful thoughts in the mind about what we should or we shouldn't do, things we should or shouldn't be concerned about.

There is a sutta that we recite sometimes that I find most helpful as an anchor; it's about the ten things that samanas, those who have gone forth, should recollect frequently. The first of these ten reflections is 'I am no longer living according to worldly aims and values.' It is talking about the fact that when one becomes a monk or a nun one gives up worldly titles. You can't actually tell which of us are princesses or princes, titled people, we all become just samanas.

There is a very sweet story from the time of the Buddha. After the Buddha was enlightened, his cousins, who were all princes with noble positions,

decided to go forth, to leave their family situations, their situations of power, and go and be his disciples. They set off with Upali who was their barber; their intention was to send him back to the palace, but he wanted to go on with them, to also be a disciple of the Buddha. When it came to the time for them to go forth the Sakyan princes made sure that Upali was the first, and hence their senior. In this way they gave up their princely status. In the same way we bow to one

another in order of seniority depending on how long we've been in the Order.

Another way that I like to think of it is that we're operating more in terms of Dhamma rather than looking to be very powerful or successful. In Sangha life we can get very

good at certain things; we have very skilled crafts people in the community, we have people who are good at giving talks, we have people who are very good at sewing or very good administrators or very good artists; but in terms of practice these things aren't really that important. It doesn't really matter how successful we are in worldly terms. Certainly it's nice when a community runs smoothly, when things are well taken care of and when people can construct buildings that don't fall down and sew their robes straight. These kind of things are good things to do but really our gift,

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our offering, is in terms of our Dhamma practice.

This is a useful thing for everybody to consider, whether living as a monk or nun or whether living a household life having to go out and earn a living, look after a family or whatever. Because these Sirens, these voices of the world are very powerful, very convincing and can lead us into a lot of trouble. Since no matter how successful we are, how wonderfully we do, the moments of great triumph

where we really hit the heights in terms of fame or prestige or do the very, very best, are only moments – they don't last. They bring a kind of pleasure and satisfaction, but if they're the thing that we make the most important in our life our

life is going to be a series of ups and downs. We'll have moments of great success, they'll pass, and then what will we do? We can look for another moment of success or remember that great moment, that peak, and take it out from time-to-time and fondle it.

Having this practice gives us a chance to find something that is beyond the world and that will endure in a way that worldly success and failure don't endure; something that will be a real refuge to us when everything else is falling apart. So when we are old or sick, when we are no longer able to succeed, there is something that we can turn to as a safe abiding place.

I find this very helpful because, while there are some days in our community where everything seems to go very well – and we can certainly enjoy these – there are also days when things don't work out so well.

Sometimes everybody else is feeling fine but I'm having a bad day, I'm upset, things don't work out, the computer doesn't do what I want it to, the fax machine breaks down. If I don't keep remembering that I'm not living according to worldly aims and values, that it actually doesn't matter if things go wrong, but that what is important is how I respond to these things then I can suffer. I can either suffer, or I can understand that this is

just how it is right now. It's not my fault, it's not anybody else's fault, it's just how things have come together. I don't have to blame anybody, I don't have to blame myself, I don't have to fight or struggle or try to manipulate things so that they're different, all I have

to do is make peace with things as they are.

Sometimes people say, 'Gosh, Buddhists are awfully passive just making peace with things as they are. What good are you doing for the world?' But the alternative, when we're not mindful and things are going wrong, is we tend to tense up. A reactivity happens in the mind and there's a closing down. It's like having blinkers on so we can only see in one direction. We hold everything very, very tight to try and keep things the way we think they 'should be'; there's a wilfulness there. We can create a mood of tension that everybody picks up on. This certainly brings suffering.

When we cultivate an attitude of letting go, of being present with things as they are and making peace, then the mind is more sensitive, more responsive, more intuitive; it is much more aware. Then one's response

*continued on page 4*

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*...you might think you are getting nowhere...  
but give yourself a year or a couple of years  
or a decade or two, and you'll find little-by-little  
things change...  
There is a little more compassion, a little bit more  
space in the heart.*

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E Q U



A N I M



I T Y

## EDITORIAL

### *Thanks for the Sharing*

Putting together a Newsletter is not a recommended feature of a meditation retreat: having expended effort and time in deconstructing the activities and programs of the mind, I note a reluctance, even a wariness about firing them up again. It even feels vaguely criminal, like a betrayal of the Cause. Memories come back of many retreats of yesteryear, where people would be sternly enjoined to keep the Noble Silence, and refrain from reading – and during which I would catch sight of miscreants slyly sidling off to the library during walking meditation periods, or hear furtive whispered conversations going on in the woodshed. The sense of guilt on one hand, and moral superiority on the other, was always far more destabilising than the amount of disturbance that such events ever created externally. Eventually, it became clear that this scenario was part of the practice. It certainly caused me to reflect on the Dhamma of a shared context. In this context a quality of heart that begins with tolerance (and is still a little patronising) and matures with kindness (he's not harming anyone, may he be well) can sharpen with some inquiry: 'Who is this "me" that stands back and says how things should be?' So, over time, the heart begins to take responsibility for its direct experience – which, of course, is the 'cause', the true aim of meditation.

In meditation, it becomes clear that 'I' arise at the shared face of an interdependent experience. But 'I' would rather hold, reject or file perceptions away than share. So sharing itself is a major practice. It deepens and informs life. It doesn't mean that I have to agree with everything everyone else is doing, or expose every inner mood to public scrutiny. It means that without trying to evoke any particular response or attitude, acknowledging that, 'I' arises as a momentary response within a shared context. And if there's a denial of that, or an attempt to fake a response, then all that stuff thickens and solidifies into an 'I am' that has long passed its sell-by date. The simple line of the teaching is to be aware of the response, check any accompanying impulse and see it as an object, rather than let it ride out as a subject. The 'I am' softens, and the complexities fuse into a dispassionate awareness that determines action (or inaction).

In that light, it even seems that the point of

community practice is to bring up the self-views and disengage the compulsion to act on them, to believe in them, or to despise them. And of course, they can occur and be unchecked in apparent solitude. So with writing this, the silence has to share the space with the feeling, the thinking, and an 'I' function, and not get cranky and obnoxious about all that. Marvellously, this reluctant realisation eases up the sphere of the mind, and when the mind is at ease, less unwholesome thoughts come up. In fact one begins to enjoy the ease and without effort, stop thinking altogether...

But wait... I suppose what I meant to say when I started this was: 'Thanks for everything!'

Although I have experienced much deep reluctance in being

part of anything, still the sharing has always been there.

The alms keep flowing in, the

teaching flows out and

the effects of the practice flow both ways. A heart of sharing and letting go has been behind the whole process from the start; one appreciates it in others, one finds that's one's actions are going that way (whatever the personal image of inadequacy may say) and eventually one trusts that above all. But if I had to be guided by an *idea* of sharing, there would always be the doubt: 'Well, what do I have, what do they want, it's probably not worth while...' Real human presence (even just being with myself) reminds me that: 'Sharing is already happening, "I" am the result of that, now why don't I let something good happen through me? Why don't I get out of the way of a clear response?'

So a new year, and the 'beginning again' of a Winter's retreat allows for that simple and happy acknowledgement of Sangha and community. It's good to see a fellow ('sister?') journal appearing, in Britain at least, called 'Community' and put together by a team of lay people. This is great. As 'Community' successively fattens and embellishes itself, this monastic offering grows leaner and more modest – as becomes a samana. Yet we may arrive, not at the imagined conclusion of dying out altogether, but at something more grateful: a quarterly acknowledgement that the Dhamma has been well-expounded by the Blessed One. Indeed it is good, indeed may we be glad!

*Ajahn Sucitto*



*continued from page 2...* can be in accordance with Dhamma; there is a sense of harmony rather than of tightness from holding with fear or desire.

The Dhamma is one of our Refuges, a place of security. We're finding peace in what is unpeaceful, finding security in what is insecure: just coming for Refuge in the present moment, asking, 'how is it right now?' and resting in the present like that. When there is a sense of ease we're in tune and we can respond in a way that is suitable, rather than a way that's wilful and that will perpetuate agitation. Otherwise what happens is something goes wrong and there's a rebound: we react, we say something and then somebody else gets upset with us, and there's a general feeling of disharmony.

There was a wonderful scene at tea-time today down at the 'peaceful little cottage where the nuns live.' I had an idea about how the evening was going to go; I was expecting my first cousin once removed and another very good friend and I was going to prepare tea and go off and talk quietly with them. As I was preparing the tea another very good friend showed up – that was very nice, I welcomed her and she helped. Then a Tibetan nun dropped by with a friend – that was a bit of a surprise and they joined us. Then someone else came. We have a young friend who is going through a fairly major breakdown right now, and she came wandering through doing strange things. Then a couple of sisters who are on retreat in the forest came in expecting to find the place empty and quiet and there was our small kitchen full of people drinking tea. I was very grateful for this practice. It meant just keeping my feet on the ground and realising that 'this is how it is right now, it's not that there's anything wrong.' It's not exactly what I had in mind for the evening but it was perfectly all right, I felt we had a very nice time with just a whole series of different things happening. I was grateful that I was not living according to worldly aims and values. A worldly value would be 'Well it's supposed to be like this and we're supposed to do this. Things have gone wrong, they haven't worked out and I've got to make things all right'. When we let go whatever happens is fine, things don't have to go according to plan – this is a great security.

I realise that before I started this way of practice I was always concerned about things working out. I always had to have an idea about how things were going to go. I had to make proper preparation and if things didn't go right then there was tension.

When I first came into the community I went on retreat with Ajahn Viradhammo. I remember him talking about taking refuge in Dhamma and I began to have a sense of what this really meant 'to take refuge in Dhamma' – it felt awesome. I was so used to taking refuge in my mind, my clever mind that would work things out, that would have a plan, that would be able to

judge and assess things according to what I thought was right and proper. I realised just how much I used my intellect to hold my world together and I began to see that actually taking refuge in Dhamma meant letting go of this intellect, letting go of these structures that I'd used to determine how I lived my life. It felt like a leap of faith, being willing to let go of what I'd grown up to depend upon, to allow myself not to have a clue, allow myself to take refuge in the moment. To know the moment rather than hold on to a fixed view or a fixed plan.

When we talk about this turning aside from worldly aims and values, we talk about taking refuge in Dhamma, this doesn't actually mean to give up our intellect, it means to stop allowing it to be the master. We can still plan things, we can still make intelligent use of the brain that we have, but we do it from a place of Dhamma rather than a place of fear and desire. We let them go. It does take time; we can't just do it straight away.

Living in community, living in society, of course we have to make plans. Those of you who have jobs of course have to turn up for work; you have to earn your livelihood. Living in the monastery we have different duties that we do our best to perform, we try to live as well as we can in accordance with our training. And our training is set up to allow us to understand all our drives, to see clearly the Sirens, that are pulling us away from our real potential, our real possibility of being free.

I remember a number of years ago when the nuns' community was still in quite a tender, fragile state, we had a visit from Meichee Patomwan, who at that stage had been a nun in Thailand for thirty-six years. She was aware that I was concerned because there was anxiety about the nuns, whether we had enough respect and whether things were all right for us. And she said to me, 'Don't worry about it. Don't worry about looking good or any of that, just concentrate on your own practice, just look after your own heart, keep your own heart peaceful. If you do that everything will be all right, the respect will come, things will work out.' Just hearing that was such a relief because anything else felt so tense. I realised it was a worldly aim, a worldly value, trying to look good, trying to get respect; it was getting it the wrong way round, rather than just looking at one's heart, practising with that. We can notice, 'Is there suffering? Is there not suffering?' and if there is suffering then, 'Why is there suffering? There's suffering because I want to be respected, or because I want to look good.' Okay that can be looked at; 'is that really important? Does it really matter?'

I've been contemplating the question 'How are you?' and have realised that it's a question we should ask ourselves. 'How are you today?' And I'm beginning to

learn how to do this. I had a quiet day this week. I was quite tired so I thought I'd better have a rest, so I lay down but my mind was going berserk. I thought 'Well, how are you?' And I could see that I was thinking about all the things I had to do – 'I've got to do this and I've got to do that and I've got to think about this and I've got to plan this and I've got to write to so-and-so and I've got to talk to so-and-so, and...' I thought 'Is resting really going to help?' And I could see 'No.' It wasn't that I needed to rest, what I needed to do was to help the mind to settle. 'Okay, so what's the remedy for this?' So I realised that what I had to do was to sit quietly. It was as though the mind was just filled with Sirens all demanding attention. And I could see 'No! You don't have to listen to those voices of the world, it's time to pay attention to your heart. Just

stay still, stay quiet, stay with nature.' So I spent the rest of the day just listening to these voices but staying with the body, staying with the breath, watching the light, watching the trees, touching the earth. By the end of the day, when I asked myself 'How are you?' the answer was 'All right.' There was a feeling of wholeness rather than of agitation, of being pulled all over the place by the very insistent demands of the world.

So just consider 'what are worldly aims and values?' And, 'what are the aims and values towards which we aspire?' We can bring Dhamma into our lives, we can bring Dhamma into the world, through our humble willingness to bear with the voices of the ego, to bear with the insistent demands of the world and not be bullied by them. Say 'OK I hear you.' And then from a place of calm we respond. We can do an enormous amount of good from this place of stillness, this place of quiet.

After his enlightenment the Buddha didn't spend the next 45 years just sitting in a state of bliss. If you look into the Vinaya teachings, the teachings about how the monastic orders were set up and how the different rules came into being, or if you look into the Suttas, you see that he was extremely active in a very compassionate, wise and skilful way. He dealt with people who were in the extremes of human anguish and despair. He was able to present a teaching that responded to their need in the moment. He was also able to respond to the people who tried to catch him out in debates. He met all kinds of people. To be like the Buddha is perhaps asking too much but just to try, moment-to-moment, to distinguish between the voices of the world and to, for a moment, interrupt the compulsions of the mind that pull us around, just to be with one breath. To be with the

feeling of the body sitting on the mat, to be with the feeling of the feet touching the ground as we walk from place-to-place, to relax the shoulders when we're finding ourselves getting tense in a difficult situation, to relax the face when we find that we are thinking an awful lot in our meditation; just letting the thoughts go their own way and using little things in our daily life as ways of helping to anchor us in what is a secure refuge. In moments of extreme anguish, at the moment of death, at moments of complete confusion, when everything around us is falling apart, when things just aren't the

way they 'should be', we can turn to these signs, these anchors in the present moment.

Being peaceful with one breath is obviously not a worldly value. It's obviously not something that is going to get us an enormous amount of

praise. Fortunately we have a situation where we're encouraged to do this because it takes us to another system of values that goes beyond the changing world. There isn't very much we can rely on in terms of our bodies, in terms of one another, in terms of worldly success, in terms of prestige and fame, in terms of our intellect. All of these things are changing.

But we have this opportunity to develop the practice of being present. Sometimes it's difficult, sometimes it doesn't really seem like it's anything very much but little-by-little it adds up. There's a verse in the *Dhammapada* that gives a valuable simile of this: if there's water just dripping into a bucket, just one drip and another drip and another drip, sooner or later the bucket fills up – it can be hard to notice it filling. Similarly you might think you are getting nowhere, the moments of mindfulness don't seem to be adding up to very much but give yourself a year or a couple of years or a decade or two, and you'll find little-by-little things change. You'll notice that there is more of a sense of ease, there is more of an ability to respond rather than to get uptight and agitated, there is a little more compassion, a little bit more space in the heart. This is how it works. You might have a sudden insight, like my insight into what taking Refuge in Dhamma really meant, but it does take time and a humble step-by-step application, in order to bring about the gradual transformation of each of us.

I'd like to end this teaching, offering it as an encouragement for each of you to work at developing this very humble moment-by-moment mindfulness practice. And my wish for each one of you is that you will gradually find more peace, freedom and happiness in your lives. ❖

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*When we talk about this turning aside from worldly aims and values, ...this doesn't actually mean to give up our intellect*

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# The Monastic Millennium: WAT PAH NANACHAT

*This is the second part of the review of monasteries in this community, featuring the first of the “Western” monasteries of Ajahn Chah, which was founded 25 years ago and is still going strong.*

The north-east of Thailand is flat – the once thick forests are long gone – and when one drives along the long straight roads one passes through mile after mile of flat, scrubby land given over to cultivation, mainly of rice. There are trees, but just here and there in the open spaces, occasionally providing a bit of shade, but there’s no hint of the majestic and almost impenetrable forest that once dominated the north-eastern region.

Driving along the main Sisaket Road out of Warin, the first distant sight one has of Wat Pah Nanachat is a long, high white wall behind which is...a forest. The trees are tall and the growth is thick – a noticeable contrast to the surrounding terrain. Arriving at the Wat on a hot afternoon one’s first impression upon being put down at the gate is of being about to enter a different world. The view up the drive is like looking up a tunnel – a tunnel of trees. Upon venturing up the drive one immediately feels the cool of the shade – the forest canopy is thick, and the sun can only glint through the trees, finding an opening here and there down which to pour a pool of fierce light. The wide, swept concrete drive opens out after a hundred metres or so into a circle as one comes to a long low building on the right, the kitchen, and further on the large unadorned Sāla.

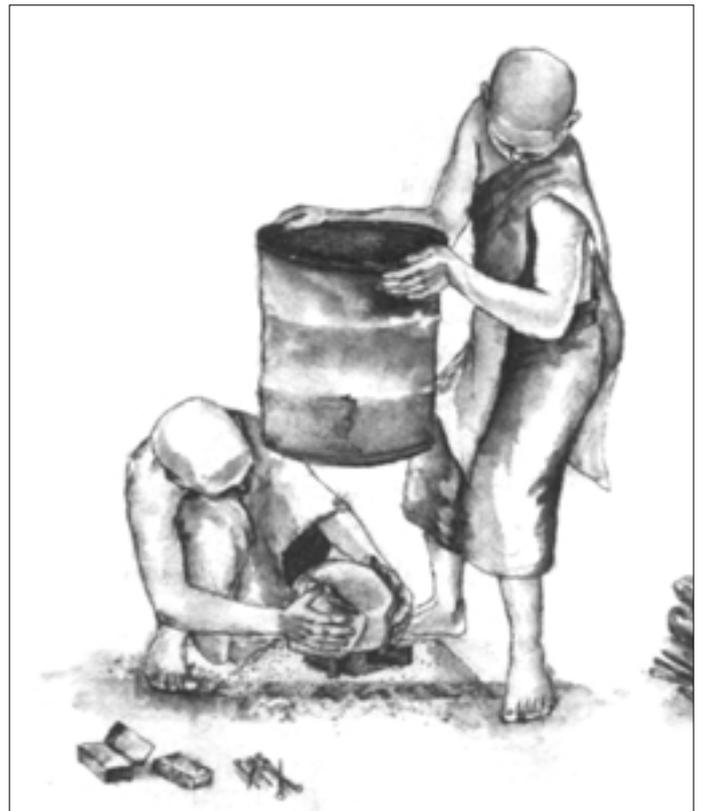
The Wat came into being twenty-five years ago in a rather unlikely way. Ajahn Sumedho, who had already been training with Luang Por Chah at Wat Nong Pah Pong for many years, together with a group of Western monks, were wanting to fire some alms-bowls. This is a process whereby a rust-proof coating is baked onto an iron bowl, and it requires that the bowls be heated in an intense fire for several hours. In the forest at Wat Nong Pah Pong it was actually difficult to come across sufficient quantities of firewood – there were so many monks, and firewood was needed all the time for dyeing and washing robes. Hence it was recommended to Ajahn Sumedho that he and the monks go to the forest at the nearby village of Bung Wai, where there were plentiful supplies of fallen branches and dry bamboo.

So this group of monks came to the forest, put up their glots (large umbrellas) and mosquito nets and began their work. This soon attracted the attention of the local villagers, however, who were impressed that these *farang* monks had the courage to pitch their umbrellas and camp out there, for this was their cremation forest – a place haunted by ghosts and spirits, and a place so feared

by the locals that it was left unused.

As often happens on such occasions, when the monks were ready to move on the local villagers begged them to stay. And it just so happened that Luang Por Chah had already decided that it would be a good to start a branch of Wat Nong Pah Pong specifically for the *farangs*. Ajahn Sumedho, who had been with Luang Por Chah for eight years, would be the teacher and the *farangs* could train in their own language. So, as has happened so many times in Thailand, the simple act of a monk hanging his umbrella from a tree was the seed that sprouted and grew into a flourishing monastery.

These days the monastic community comprises about twenty monks and novices of about twelve nationalities. The number of monks who began here and who still live in Thailand is considerably greater. At any one time there will be four or five junior monks placed at some of the Wat Nong Pah Pong branch monasteries, having been sent there to learn the ropes of living with a Thai community, and to learn to speak the language. Having



Firing an almsbowl

spent his first five years training under the guidance of Wat Pah Nanachat, the monk is then usually 'freed from dependence' and from then on it is up to him. Some monks go off walking on tudong, visiting other teachers and regions. Some settle in other places and some go abroad, but people still keep in touch and usually regard WPN as some kind of 'home base' coming back to 'check in' once in a while. This means at certain times of the year there is a lot of coming and going – in fact the population of the monastery can sometimes fluctuate from week to week. Thai monks also happen by – usually on tudong, and more often than not when it really comes down to it they are interested in learning English. This is not enough of a reason to stay beyond three nights, says the Abbot, and off they go. There are usually two or three Thai monks here – but they already speak English and have some prior Dhamma connection with Ajahn Jayasaro or the community – for instance, one Thai monk here at the moment was working as a doctor in America when he met Ajahn Jayasaro and his faith arose there, upon hearing the Ajahn teach.

The monastery serves several different and quite distinct groups of people, and for the abbot this is quite a balancing act. There are the many guests from all over the world who, for many different reasons, spend time here developing their understanding and practice of Buddhism through experience of monastic life. Long-term and loyal support, of course, has come from the local Bung Wai villagers, about a dozen of whom come every day to cook and help out, and many regular supporters come to the monastery from the local towns of Warin and Ubon. There is a sizeable following of Bangkok people who come and stay when they can – one group of air hostesses even arrange their schedules so that they can fly up to Ubon on the evening flight, spend all of Wan Phra night meditating and then fly back down to Bangkok on the morning flight. In fact, on the weekly Wan Phra observance days it is common for there to be approaching 100 people observing the eight precepts and staying to practice and hear the Dhamma in the monastery until the following dawn. On these observance days the abbot and the second monk divide their attention between the various groups – talks being given simultaneously in Thai and English in different locations.

The steady stream of non-Thai visitors come and stay for varying lengths of time. Usually the initial period is limited to three days, but in most cases this can be extended, depending upon the availability of accommodation. The monastery's requirement is that people write beforehand and will only take those who turn up unannounced if there is space. Demands upon accommodation are getting tighter these days, so quite often people are asked to come back at a later date. It is through coming to stay at the monastery that interest in monastic life can be sparked off. Men are asked to wear

white and shave their heads after three days while women wear a white blouse and black skirt but keep their hair, and these gestures give them a chance to feel like they are part of the monastic community for the time being – they are indeed perceived as such by the local people. For many, the level of renunciation required is quite demanding – living according to the eight precepts, eating just one meal a day, following a routine which requires one to get up at 3am, and having many hours of the day with no form or structure. All of this can be quite a challenge.

Community members and as far as is possible lay-guests are assigned kutis – simple wooden huts on stilts spread around in the forest (which is about 300 rai or 150 acres) and there are about 30 of these. Accommodation is basic – there is no electricity in any but a few kutis, and a trip to the toilet can mean a walk through the forest. At night it is not uncommon to encounter snakes and other creepy-crawlies – life at Wat Nanachat was once described to me as being 'total insect attack' which, while it is an exaggeration, does convey something of the flavour of the experience. From time to time people are forced to evacuate as ants or termites invade their living space – which they have usually had to reckon upon sharing with geckos (lizards – about 20cm long which punctuate the stillness of the night with a loud 'gekk-kko' call) bats, spiders and sometimes the odd snake which decides to coil itself around the rafters. Rats also compete for the space and help themselves to anything which can be eaten.

The daily routine varies according to the season – usually there is a period of morning chanting and meditation (at 3.30 a.m.) in a large open sāla on the edge of the forest, followed by a leaf-sweeping period for the lay-guests while the monks go out at dawn on their alms-round. The meal is taken at 8am and is followed by a period of cleaning chores. From then until mid-afternoon there is free time – and besides spending that time in meditation people will make use of the well-equipped library to read and study. At 4.30 p.m. the community gathers for tea – an informal affair where questions can be raised and things discussed in a good humoured spirit. A couple of days a week are kept as silent days – one when all formal meetings are cancelled and the other on which the community follows a structured practice routine together. On these evenings a formal talk is given.

The atmosphere of the monastery also varies according to the season. During the three months of the Rains Retreat (*Vassa* in Pali, *Pansah* in Thai) the community is quite stable, since the Sangha members are not allowed to travel away for more than six days during this period. This is a time of focused practice and study – in particular the study of the monastic discipline is undertaken during these three months. At the end of *Vassa* comes the Kathina season – the ceremonial

presentation of cloth by the laity which is collectively sewn into a robe by members of the monks community who spent the *Vassa* together. This is one of the biggest festivals of the year, and draws the community together before monks move on to other monasteries or return from other places to live here. There is also a tradition amongst the branch monasteries of Wat Nong Pah Pong to attend one another's Kathina ceremonies, and so it is a month of travelling here and there, listening to all-night talks and trying to stay awake and centred amidst the swirling changes going on around one. For new monks who are just starting to find their feet in their first *Vassa* this time can be quite disorienting.

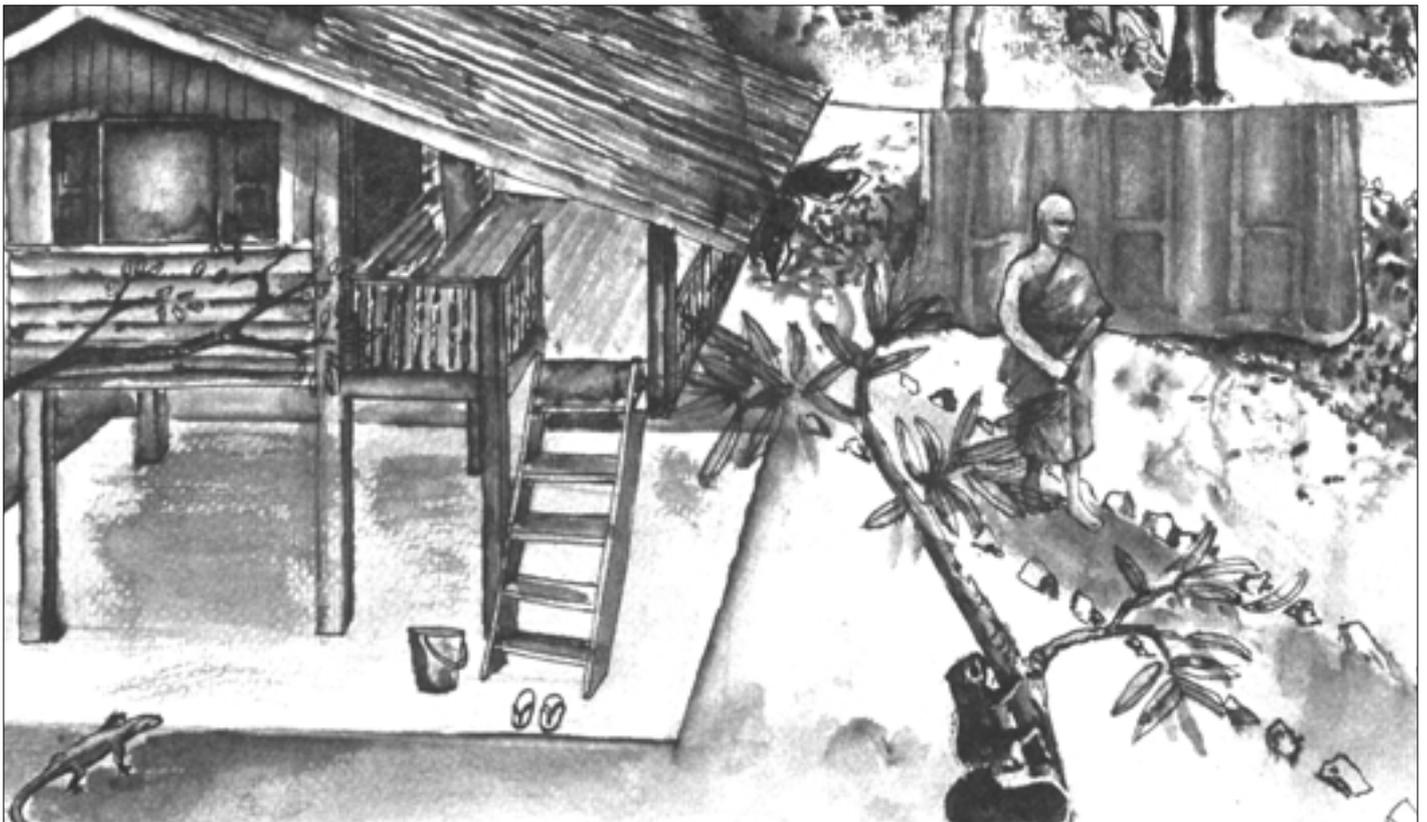
When the wind swings around to blow from the north the local people say that this marks the beginning of the cold season. As the rain stops and the weather turns cooler people fly kites in the almost continuous breeze, flying them high over the rice fields. They attach a device to them which plays a low, melancholy kind of tune over and over, and this characterises the atmosphere of the cold season. This is really the most pleasant time of the year here and it is common for senior monks from England to come visiting during this period from late October until February.

The cold season is also a time when frequent trips are made out to the nearest of our small hermitages. 'Poo Jorm Gorm' – which means 'little pointed hill' – is situated on the Laotian border about 150km from here and is set in a large area of national parkland. Four or five monks stay there most of the time and live spread out over an area of about two square miles – some in

caves, others in simple thatched kutis. Some of these dwellings look out over the great Mekong river that forms the border between Thailand and Laos, and which flows south from China, touching Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia before reaching the sea in Southern Vietnam.

At the end of February almost the entire community travels across the country to our other hermitage Dtao Dam on the Burmese border in Saiyok National Park, beyond Kanchanaburi. This leaves just a skeleton crew minding the monastery and so things quieten down as the hot season begins. Wat Pah Nanachat remains quiet for two months until the Sangha returns at the beginning of May. During the following months leading up to the *Pansah* there are more comings and goings, people returning to Wat Pah Nanachat to spend *Pansah* here, and young monks being sent off to Thai branch monasteries to spend a year away. By the time of Luang Por Chah's birthday celebrations at Wat Nong Pah Pong on June 17th it is usually clear who is going to be where for the next four months or so and the monastery starts to take on much more settled and stable atmosphere.

One factor that has brought an increased sense of stability to Wat Pah Nanachat is the decision by Tan Ajahn Jayasaro to stay put here for five years as abbot. In the past Ajahn Jayasaro and Ajahn Pasanno would take it in turns to administer the monastery for a year at a time, which allowed each of them to have a period of retreat every other year. Looking back however, I think that Ajahn Jayasaro wonders how good this was for the community. An additional thing that has made being



abbot more workable is the new abbot's kuti. The previous one was virtually open on all sides, like living on a platform, and only a stone's throw from the sāla, which meant that visitors could seek the abbot out at any time of the day or night. No wonder it was stressful – the abbot had very little privacy there. I thought it a healthy sign, then, when I saw that Ajahn Jayasaro was having a new abbot's kuti built – quite a distance from the sāla in a less conspicuous location – and with a much greater feeling of privacy to it. 'That's significant,' I remember thinking. 'If the abbot knows how to look after himself, can take space and find some recuperative solitude here, he won't feel the need to escape to get some time on his own – seems like a healthy direction.'

These days, Ajahn Jayasaro has commented, there is a more harmonious atmosphere here than he can ever remember, and whereas monks in the old days used to look forward to getting past the five *pansah* mark so that

they could go off on their own, there is less of this kind of talk, and monks who have grown up here in the last five years seem to regard Wat Pah Nanachat as 'home'. When the community is harmonious, the abbot is better supported and he is more effective at what he does. So it becomes a more attractive prospect to stay.

Here then are just a few fleeting impressions of this mysterious multi-faceted place. One of the things I've heard Ajahn Jayasaro comment upon more than once is how he feels when people talk about what Wat Pah Nanachat is that they end up grinding out the same old stale impressions year after year based on how it was when they were there, when in fact it has long since changed. Well, if the Abbot himself declares that he doesn't really know what Wat Pah Nanachat is like, then who are the rest of us to presume to say?

*Ajahn Vipassi*

## Golden Buddha Centre

### A Buddhist centre to retire to

As mentioned in a recent editorial of Forest Sangha Newsletter, a charity has been formed to raise funds to build a centre for Buddhists to retire to. Its patrons include Ajahn Sumedho, Jisu Sunim, and Geshe Tashi Tsering.

The idea is a simple one: to have a living/working Buddhist centre which also cares for elderly Buddhists. Run on Buddhist and ecological principles, the centre will offer the possibility for employment in right livelihood businesses, enabling people of all ages to live there or nearby.

### Open to everyone

The centre will be open to all who accept its principles and charitable objects. This will be a place for all age groups and traditions, where Buddhists can help each other put the Buddha's teaching into practice; a place where we can visit, live in, or retire to. It will also offer care for the elderly, should the need arise. And the aim will be to cultivate a sense of going home rather than going into a home.

### Together we can make it happen

The idea has generated a lot of interest and encouragement, and so far over twenty thousand pounds has been raised. Large and small donations are needed for this substantial project. If you like the idea, please give what you can, maybe as a monthly standing order, but it all helps. As the Buddha said, Even a large pot is filled drop by drop. Together we can make it happen.

*To receive a brochure and donation form, please get in touch.*  
Richard St Ruth, Golden Buddha,  
c/o BPG, Sharpham Coach Yard, Ashprington, Totnes, TQ9  
7UT, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)1803 732082  
Email: [info@goldenbuddha.org](mailto:info@goldenbuddha.org)  
Web site: [www.goldenbuddha.org](http://www.goldenbuddha.org)

## LEAF POEM

The green  
miracle, feeding

The bark with light  
from the darling buds

The sap descending  
to the veins of root

Through you we give  
the name of rowan

Maple, we give  
& we are given

O sacred  
photosynthesis

O incredible  
leaf, the wings

Of the seed  
returning simply

By the turning  
of the ordinary world

*Samanera Issaramuni*



**CITTAVIVEKA DHAMMA HALL**



**Dhamma Hall Day – Sunday  
July 16<sup>th</sup>**

Due to many generous donations, and a careful co-operative effort from the Project Manager, architect and builder, the next stage of Cittaviveka's Dhamma Hall is well underway. By July we expect that most of the work on erecting the walls will have been completed. The project, which has been planned for years, began in earnest last year and the foundations work was consecrated by a Maha-Sangha gathering on July 11th. This year Asalha Puja, falling on July 16th, neatly co-incides with the passage of one year since the Foundation Stone was laid. Please come and join us for a celebration on the day, to find out more about the project, contribute ideas, or rejoice in the wholesome kamma. For details contact: *David on 01273 723378*

**Benefit Concert**

There will be a Guitar Recital of classically based music at Petersfield Library Hall on 28th June 2000 to raise funds for the Chithurst Dhamma Hall Project. If you would like to attend (there are a limited number of seats at £10 per person, including light refreshments after the performance) or if you wish to make a donation; contact *Rocanā on 01483 761398* or write to her at, *143 York Road, Woking. GU22 7XS*, enclosing SAE if you require tickets, making any cheques payable to The English Sangha Trust.

**GENERAL NOTICES**

Forest Sangha Newsletter is available on the internet at [www.fsnews.cjb.net](http://www.fsnews.cjb.net) as well as many other Buddhist sites like [www.BuddhaMind.cjb.net](http://www.BuddhaMind.cjb.net)

**Buddhist Fair, July 30<sup>th</sup>**

The annual Buddhist Fair, in Stedham near Chithurst is a family occasion of stalls and exhibitions held to bring Buddhists together. A portion of all proceeds is donated to support monasteries. If you would like to participate with a stall, or are interested in coming along for the day, please contact: *Mudita c/o Hamilton Arms, School Lane, Stedham, W.Sussex GU29 0NZ* for details.

**One-Day retreats in Brighton**

Ajahn Sucitto will be leading three one day retreats in Brighton this year: April 1st, July 8th and September 2nd. For details contact: *Nimmala on 01273 723378*

**CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES**

**Lay Forums**

This season's Lay Forums at Cittaviveka are:

**April 9th:** The Fifth Precept

**May 14th:** Spirituality and Psychotherapy

**June 25th:** Church and Sangha: their practical purpose

These are discussions led by two brief keynote addresses; they occur between 2pm and 4pm in the monastery's Reception Room

**Luang Por Chah's Birthday –**

**June 17<sup>th</sup>**

This day will be dedicated to Ven Ajahn Chah with a reading, a talk and a circumambulation around the Bodhinyana Stupa.

**Lay Events at Amaravati in 2000**

One day and weekend lay events provide an opportunity to spend time together with others, in silence as well as exploring themes relevant to dhamma and daily life and include a variety of workshops. All are welcome.

**Day events** (no booking required)

**April 22nd** – Enjoyment

**May 27th** – Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair

**July 1st** – What does it mean to be a buddhist?

**Nov. 18th** – Open day – details to be advised

**Weekend events** (please send SAE to the AUA at Amaravati, for booking form)

**Sept. 29th – Oct. 1st** – Greed, Hatred & delusion

for more information contact:

*Nick Carroll, 0181 740 9748* or

*Chris Ward, 01442 890034*

**A Buddhist Novel**

The Pilgrim Kamanita is a lyrical and legendary Buddhist romance set in India during the time of the Buddha. It contains famous and favourite incidents from the Buddhist scriptures, all woven together and spun into a cloth of beautiful hue and texture. It was written in 1906 by Danish author Karl Gjellerup. This new version has just been re-edited by Ajahn Amaro. Copies for free distribution are now available at Amaravati and Chithurst. Postage would be about £2.80.

**LAY RESIDENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES AT AMARAVATI**

THERE ARE a number of lay people resident at Amaravati fulfilling supportive roles; with responsibilities in the office, maintenance, retreat centre, kitchen, library and grounds. Opportunities to fill these positions occasionally come up.

Opportunities to fill these positions occasionally come up. We may currently be looking for one or two people, particularly if you have skills in maintenance or the library. Please write to the Secretary for up to date information.

We try to bring out the Newsletter quarterly, depending upon funds and written material. In the spirit of our relationship with lay people, we naturally depend upon donations: any contributions towards printing/distribution costs can be made to: 'The English Sangha Trust', Amaravati. In that same spirit, we ask you to let us know if you wish to be put on (or removed from) the mailing list, or if you have moved. Write to Newsletter, Amaravati. The newsletter is also available on the internet from: <http://www.fsnews.cjb.net>

**Data Protection Act:** The mailing list used for Forest Sangha Newsletter is maintained on computer. If you object to your record being kept on our computer file, please write to Newsletter, Amaravati, and we will remove it.

This Newsletter is printed by: *Ashford Printers, Harrow. Telephone – (020) 8 427-5097*

## Teaching and Practice Venues

| <b>MEDITATION GROUPS</b>  |  |
|---|--|
| <i>These are visited regularly by Sangha members.</i>   |  |
| <b>BATH</b><br>Catherine Hewitt,<br>(01225) 405-235   | <b>LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY</b><br>58 Eccleston Square, SW1<br>(Victoria)<br>(020) 7 834 5858<br><b>Meditation Sundays:</b> led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.<br><b>Thursday classes – 6.00pm</b> |
| <b>BERKSHIRE</b><br>Penny Henrion<br>(01189) 662-646  |  |
| <b>BRISTOL</b><br>Lyn Goswell (Nirodha),<br>(0117) 968-4089   | <b>LEEDS AREA</b><br>Daniella Loeb,<br>(0113) 2791-375<br><br>Anne Voist,<br>(01274) 670-865   |
| <b>SOUTH DORSET</b><br>Barbara Cohen-Walters<br>(Sati sati), (01305) 786-821                        |  |
| <b>EDINBURGH</b><br>Muriel Nevin,<br>(0131) 337-0901  | <b>SOUTHAMPTON</b><br>Ros Dean (01703) 422430  |
| <b>GLASGOW</b><br>James Scott,<br>(0141) 637-9731   |  |
| <b>HAMPSTEAD</b><br>Caroline Randall,<br>(020) 8 348-0537   | <b>SURREY/WOKING</b><br>Rocana, (01483) 761-398  |
| <b>MEDITATION GROUPS</b>  |  |
| <i>These meet regularly &amp; receive occasional visits from Sangha.</i>                            |  |
| <b>BEDFORD</b><br>David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892   | <b>LEIGH-ON-SEA</b><br>Gool Deboo, (01702) 553-211   |
| <b>BELFAST</b><br>Paddy Boyle, (01232) 427-720  | <b>MAIDSTONE</b><br>Tony Millett, (01634) 375-728  |
| <b>BRIGHTON</b><br>Nimmala, (01273) 723-378   | <b>MIDHURST</b><br>Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479  |
| <b>CAMBRIDGE</b><br>Gillian Wills, (01954) 780-551  | <b>NEWCASTLE ON TYNE</b><br>Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726   |
| <b>CANTERBURY</b><br>Charles Watters, (01227) 463342  | <b>NORWICH</b><br>Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717  |
| <b>DUBLIN</b><br>Eugene Kelly, (1) 285-4076<br>or (1) 284-9019                                      | <b>PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES</b><br>Peter and Barbara (Subhdra)<br>Jackson, (01239) 820-790   |
| <b>ESSEX</b><br>(Billericay) Rob Howell,<br>(01702) 482-134 or (Harlow)<br>Pamutto, (01279) 724-330 | <b>PORTSMOUTH</b><br>Dave Beal, (01705) 732-280  |
| <b>HEMEL HEMPSTEAD</b><br>Bodhinyana Group<br>Chris Ward (01442) 890-034                            | <b>REDRUTH</b><br>Daniel Davide (01736) 753-175  |
| <b>LONDON / NOTTING HILL</b><br>Jeffrey Craig, (020) 7 221-9330                                     | <b>STEYNING / SUSSEX</b><br>Jayanti (01903) 812-130  |
| <b>LIVERPOOL</b><br>Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427 6668   | <b>STROUD</b><br>John Groves, 0796 7777-742  |
|   | <b>TAUNTON</b><br>Martin Sinclair, (01823) 321-059   |

### AMARAVATI CASSETTES

Cassette tapes of Dhamma talks given by Ajahn Sumedho and other Sangha members, plus tapes of chanting and meditation instruction are available for sale at cost price. For catalogue and information send SAE to:

Amaravati Cassettes, Ty'r Ysgol Maenan,  
Llanrwst, Gwynedd, LL26 OYD U.K.

## Amaravati

### Retreats:

## 2000



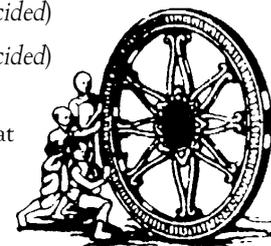
|       |             |         |  |
|-------|-------------|---------|--|
| April | 21 – 23     | Weekend | (to be decided)  |
| April | 28 – May 12 | 14 Day  | Ajahn Sumedho — (Experienced)<br>– <b>FULLY BOOKED</b> |
| May   | 19 – 21     | Weekend | (to be decided)  |
| June  | 2 – 11      | 10 Day  | Ajahn Sucitto — (Experienced)<br>– <b>FULLY BOOKED</b> |
| June  | 16 – 21     | 5 Day   | Ajahn Ariyasilo  |
| Aug.  | 11 – 18     | 7 Day   | Ajahn Sumedho — (in Thai)                              |
| Sept. | 1 – 3       | Weekend | (to be decided)  |
| Sept. | 8 – 17      | 14 Day  | Ajahn Sumedho<br>– <b>FULLY BOOKED</b>                 |
| Oct.  | 6 – 8       | Weekend | (to be decided)  |
| Oct.  | 13 – 22     | 10 Day  | Ajahn Ariyasilo  |
| Nov.  | 10 – 19     | 10 Day  | Ajahn Candasiri  |
| Nov.  | 24 – 26     | Weekend | (to be decided)  |
| Dec.  | 27 – Jan. 1 | 5 Day   | (to be decided)  |

To take part in the retreats marked 'experienced', you need to have done at least one 10-day retreat at Amaravati.

All weekend retreats are suitable for complete beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing any of the 5 or 10 day retreats.

Please note that bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form and booking fee. The fee is refundable on request, up to one month before the retreat starts. To obtain a booking form, please write to the Retreat Centre, stating which retreat you would like to do.

**Retreat Centre Work Weekends 2000**  
March 31 – April 2 : June 23 – 25 : Sept. 22 – 24



### INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION—AMARAVATI

*Saturday Afternoon Classes 1.30 – 3.30 pm*

Meditation instruction for beginners;  
with an opportunity for questions  
to be answered.

Classes are in the Bodhinyana Meditation Hall.

*Feel free to come along – no booking is necessary.*

# V I H A R A S

**BRITAIN**  
 ♦ Amaravati Monastery  
 Great Gaddesden,  
 Hemel Hempstead,  
 Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ  
 Tel: (01442) 84-2455 (Office)  
 84-3411 (Guest Info.)  
 84-3239 (Retreat Info.)  
 Fax: (01442) 84-3721  
*Stewards: English Sangha Trust,  
 Amaravati.*

♦ Aruna Ratanagiri  
 Harnham Buddhist Monastery  
 Harnham, Belsay,  
 Northumberland  
 NE20 0HF  
 Tel: (01661) 88-1612  
 Fax: (01661) 88-1019  
 web site: www.ratanagiri.org.uk  
 e-mail: harnham@mailcity.com  
*Stewards: Magga Bhavaka  
 Trust.*

♦ Cittaviveka: Chithurst  
 Buddhist Monastery  
 Chithurst, Petersfield,  
 Hampshire GU31 5EU  
 Tel: (01730) 81-4986  
 Fax: (01730) 81-7334  
*Stewards: English Sangha Trust,  
 Cittaviveka.*

♦ Hartridge Buddhist  
 Monastery,  
 Upottery, Honiton,  
 Devon EX14 9QE  
 Tel: (01404) 89-1251  
 Fax: (01404) 89-0023  
*Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust.*

**THAILAND**  
 ♦ Wat Pah Nanachat  
 Bahn Bung Wai,  
 Amper Warin,  
 Ubun Rajathani 34310

**AUSTRALIA**  
 ♦ Bodhinyana Monastery  
 Lot 1, Kingsbury Drive,  
 Serpentine 6125 WA  
 Tel: (08) 952-52420  
 Fax: (08) 952-53420

♦ Dhammaloka Buddhist  
 Centre (Perth)  
 18-20 Nanson Way,  
 Nollamara 6061 WA  
 Tel: (08) 934-51711  
 Fax: (08) 934-44220  
*Stewards: Buddhist Society of  
 Western Australia.*

**ITALY**  
 ♦ Santacittarama  
 Via Delle Prata 22  
 Località Brulla  
 02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)  
 Italy  
 Tel/Fax: (0765) 87 21 86  
*Stewards:  
 Santacittarama No 20163/38.*

**SWITZERLAND**  
 ♦ Dhammapala  
 Buddhistisches Kloster  
 Am Waldrand,  
 CH 3718 Kandersteg  
 Tel: 033 / 675 21 00  
 Fax: 033 / 6752 241  
*Stewards:  
 Dhammapala 31921-201-5.*

**NORTH AMERICA**  
 ♦ Abhayagiri Monastery,  
 16201 Tomki Road,  
 Redwood Valley,  
 CA 95470  
 Tel: (707) 485-1630  
 Fax: (707) 485-7948  
 (Sangha literature and West  
 Coast newsletters are  
 distributed from here.)  
 Web site: www.abhayagiri.org  
*Stewards:  
 Sanghapala Foundation.*

♦ Boston Area:  
 Dorothea Bowen, Boston,  
 Mass. Tel.(617)332-2931  
 Mailing for E. Coast USA  
 & Thailand: to be placed on  
 the mailing list, please write  
 directly to Amaravati.

**NEW ZEALAND**  
 ♦ Bodhinyanarama  
 17 Rakau Grove,  
 Stokes Valley,  
 Wellington 6008  
 Tel: (+ + 64) 4 563-7193  
 Fax: (+ + 64) 4 563-5125  
 e-mail: sangha@actrix.gen.nz  
*Stewards:  
 Wellington Theravada Buddhist  
 Association.*

♦ Auckland Buddhist Vihara  
 29 Harris Road,  
 Mount Wellington,  
 Auckland  
 Tel: (+ + 64) 9 579-55443

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**Closing date for submission to the next issue is 15th May 2000**

• W E S A K •

Celebrations of the Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana will be held at the following monasteries.

❖ Amaravati May 14th  
 ❖ Aruna Ratanagiri May 21st  
 ❖ Cittaviveka May 21st  
 ❖ Hartridge May 21st

*All are welcome to attend.  
 Please contact your local monastery for details  
 of the day's events.*

**OBSERVANCE DAYS**

On these days the community devotes itself to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome to join in the evening meditation vigils, and on the Full and New moon, there is an opportunity to determine the eight precepts for the night.

| Moon Phase | ● NEW      | ◐ HALF    | ○ FULL    | ◑ HALF     |
|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| APRIL      | 3 (Mon)    | 11 (Tues) | 18 (Tues) | 26 (Wed)   |
| MAY        | 2 (Tues)   | 10 (Wed)  | ☉17(Wed)  | 25 (Thurs) |
| JUNE       | 1 (Thurs)  | 9 (Fri)   | 16 (Fri)  | 24 (Sat)   |
| JULY       | 1st & 31st | 9 (Sun)   | ☽16 (Sun) | 24 (Mon)   |

☉ Wesakha Puja      ☽ Asalha Puja (vassa begins next day)

If undelivered, please return to: AMARAVATI MONASTERY  
 Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead  
 Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ, England



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HEMEL HEMPSTEAD  
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