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Bringing the Teachings Alive

A talk given by Ajahn Viradhammo at Cittaviveka July 1st 1989

For me, monastic life is a model that the Buddha has offered of how we can all practise.

Sometimes lay people ask: 'But how do I do it as a lay person?...' Lay life is so varied; life situations vary so much, some people have families, some don't. There are all kinds of lifestyles, so it's hard to set up any specific model. Certain general suggestions are given for lay practice: to keep the precepts, to live a moral life, to practise generosity; Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood are offered, but lay practice has to be creative in using life itself as a vehicle for freedom – and that's very individual. Monastic life has a more uniform quality because we live together according to rules; as lay practitioners you can contemplate how this model works for reflection and contemplation.

Now the basic and fundamental prerequisite of monastic life is surrender, a giving up to a certain form and discipline. We take the precepts and accept this lifestyle: that's the choice we make. But then it becomes a situation where we no longer have that many choices. We live in a hierarchy, we have a prescribed way of relating between men and women. We have rules about taking care of our robes and the equipment of the monastery; we have rules that govern the sharing of things. We have various ways of admonishment and of ordination, legal processes. As a monastic order we give up to this training and form.

Some people think that rules are an

infringement on freedom, but actually what this surrender or commitment does is to give us the opportunity to watch – rather than a freedom to always do what we want. Before I became a bhikkhu I lived in India for some time, and had tremendous physical freedom. I managed to live on about ten dollars a month; I didn't have the constraints of my old culture, so there was tremendous freedom. But I became very confused. I got confused because at that time I still believed that if I did what I wanted, I'd reach some kind of fulfilment; but instead I found that doing what I wanted to do just made me more and more

frustrated, because it did not put an end to wanting. It did not put an end to that fundamental restlessness which I kept trying to overcome by obtaining an experience: travel, a relationship or whatever. That kind of freedom actually was

fun for a while, but it led to despair – the more I went out into the world of situations and events, the more I realised that this was not working. Then, through some stroke of good fortune I managed to become a bhikkhu.

I didn't find it easy, but of course that's not the point. The first year of monastic life was terribly frustrating, the second year was terribly frustrating, the third year was terribly frustrating! I couldn't shuffle the pieces of the chessboard around. I couldn't go to the monastery I wanted to go to. I'd go to Ajahn Chah, and I'd say: 'Luang

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Por, I'd like to go to such and such a monastery.' He'd say: 'What's wrong with this one? Don't you like me?' Ajahn Chah's way was very much one of frustrating desire – and he was fearless in that. He didn't mind if his disciples hated his guts! That's the kind of compassion he could exhibit: the compassion to frustrate. That takes a lot of courage, doesn't it? But I had decided that if I was going to get anywhere near the Truth that the Buddha was trying to point out, I just had to stop and look. I couldn't just keep rearranging things; I had already given that a good go and I knew it didn't work. The reason I took up this model, this vehicle, was not just to have fun; nor was it because I wanted to get something out of it – it was because I wanted to be able to observe.

So this fundamental commitment to a structure allows for the freedom to watch. Can you translate that into your own life? For example, your family, your job, your social structure: these can be a vehicle for spiritual understanding if you begin to accept that within them there will be frustrations, rather than always trying to rearrange situations to fulfil personal desires and needs. Obviously, if the situation is harmful in some way, then you have to make a change; but the usual humdrum, boring, annoying stuff of life is actually the stuff of Enlightenment, if we are willing to observe how it is. So commitment is very important; and this is what the robe is – it's a symbol of commitment.

Responsibility can be used as commitment, or it can be seen as a burden. I can take on the responsibility of being the senior monk and have kind of a martyr syndrome about it: 'Oh, poor me, I have to be the senior monk...' or I can feel great about it: 'Wow! Look at me, I'm the senior monk...' or I can just see it as a convention: 'I'm senior monk. I'd prefer to be a fly on the wall actually, but there I am: senior monk.' Then I watch what it does to me – whether there's like or dislike, or feeling that I'm doing it well or that I'm hopeless – beginning to observe how the mind functions within that situation, rather than changing or rearranging it according to some personal opinion.

So, applying this to your situation, ask: 'What happens to me at work?' 'What happens to me at home?' Work is just not always going to be fulfilling, it can be boring, interesting or annoying, but we can make use of this commitment. If we're always shifting according to personal desire, we can never really understand how it operates in the mind. So commitment is fundamental to understanding our human mind. Now within commitment there are three themes that I find very

helpful in my own practice:– discovery, training and purification.

Discovery (sometimes called *vipassana*) is fundamental, because the Buddhist way is the way of awakening. It's not the way of getting rid of, or attaining to something in the future; these are bound up with ego, aren't they, with what we call 'self-view.' Awakening is always something immediate: we awaken... What do we awaken to? To things we haven't seen before; we discover things we haven't seen before. So the Buddha's teaching is pointing out things which are always there, but which perhaps we have not seen before.

Now this is how

Buddhist concepts can help us; they can awaken us to certain things about human experience which we need to understand in order to be free. They are not just ideas that we put away until our next exam in Buddhism, they are principles and concepts through which we look at life – like lenses. So you can take a conceptual structure, like the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*) – how do you apply that to your life?

For example, *anatta*, 'not-self': the teaching that this mind and body are not self... But if I'm not this body and I'm not this mind, then who am I?... The mind begins to question. The question directs the mind, it starts to awaken us. The beauty of the Buddha's teaching is that it allows for and uses doubt in a way to liberate the mind. Or take a teaching like *anicca*: 'That which has a nature to arise has a nature to cease' – begin to look at life through that. Life's experiences are varied, so if I'm always involved in experiences it's very confusing but if I use this teaching as a lens to look through, I see that that which has the nature to arise also has the nature to cease, and is not personal. So I begin to discover the nature of my conscious experience, because I'm no longer attached to it – I begin to discover things about experience that I've never noticed before. An angry thought is not mine, it's a condition of nature; it arises and ceases. Perhaps I can then begin to let go of guilt, anger and things like that, seeing them as not personal – not-self. I have discovered something.

Then *dukkha*: often we talk about *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness, in terms of conflict. We all have conflict in our lives, but before I came across this teaching I was always just trying to get rid of conflict: trying to be a nice guy if I was angry; trying to get rid of greed if I was obsessed with greed; trying to distract my mind if I got bored, so there was this random attempt to get around it somehow. But when I heard the teaching

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EDITORIAL

The Holy Life

There are certain principles of Dhamma-Vinaya (Teaching and Training) that are the Buddha's legacy to us and which endure, regardless of the great variety of human circumstances and the sometimes quite dramatic changes in the forms of communities and in the lives of individuals comprising them. We can recognise these principles as the means whereby the heart can remain unshaken amid such change – not shaken, even although the hoards of Mara can seem to be bent on producing some sort of a reaction. The Buddha would always emphasise the insubstantiality of 'ME' and 'MY WORLD VIEW', and the tremendous suffering that can be caused by these; therefore, in a sense, it can be helpful when the assumptions we make of a happy permanence are challenged and seen through – even although it can sometimes feel like more than we can bear. Every human life is touched by such challenges, and they don't necessarily come according to our expectations or wishes.

Some weeks ago we received news of the passing away of Godwin Samaratane, a dear friend and mentor of several Sangha members and friends. Then on 13th May, 'Ajahn Attapemo', after much heart searching, became 'Ajahn John'. Although the community and many friends were well aware of his struggle and relief at having reached a decision, the sense of grieving that we all shared as he underwent the disrobing procedure in Amaravati's Temple on that sunny morning was palpable. His contribution to the life of our community has been significant, both in terms of the personal qualities that he brought – his integrity, kindness and willingness to come forward to help – and the major part he played in organising the Temple construction and its grand opening ceremony last year. So we wish him well as he continues on the Path, albeit with a different name, different appearance and somewhat different lifestyle.

There has also been a need to review the position of the nuns' community at Hartridge. The Holy Life demands a stepping beyond what is safe, secure; we make some provision, but there can be no guarantee that it will be enough to see us through. In this case it has become obvious that, in fact, we have stretched ourselves too thin. With several of the more experienced sisters taking sabbatical leave, there are not enough of us for the community to continue there in its present form. Currently we are considering what might be suitable alternatives for maintaining a Sangha presence at Hartridge, but in the meantime there is the experience of uncertainty, and perhaps loss – not least for the lay community that supports and is supported by the Hartridge Sangha.

Our personal reaction to all of these events may be one of agitation, sorrow or dismay: 'Why does it have to be like this?...' An enlightened response might be: 'All

worldly conditions, even including the conventional form of Sangha which comprises human beings on a religious path, are subject to change – regardless of our wish, longing or need for that not to be the case. But we can rely on our own aspiration towards Truth; we can receive encouragement through the examples of enlightened disciples and of those who continue to engage wholeheartedly in the struggle towards such realisation.

Yes, it is a struggle for each of us – whether lay or ordained. The hoards of Mara are always ready to find our points of vulnerability, to undermine our efforts towards wholeness and freedom, but this needn't deter us. We can always access resources that will help us, such as compassion and wise reflection, humility, patience and forgiveness – these can transform the confusion and sorrow of our lives, bringing insight and a, sometimes surprising, sense of calm: 'Ah, this is how it is; how could it be otherwise?...' So we find the strength and courage to continue this Journey. There'll be times of ease and times of great difficulty, but we can know that it is our sincerity and the persistence with which we apply ourselves to 'following the good, avoiding what is evil and purifying the heart' (in spite of, or perhaps because of, our mistakes and our willingness to learn from them) that will bring us, sooner or later, to the Goal.

Ajahn Candasiri



Sunday Afternoon Talks at Amaravati

Ajahn Sumedho will offer a season of
Sunday afternoon Dhamma talks this year,
as follows;

- 30th July – **Oceans of good actions**
- 6th August – **How to keep your head when all about
are losing theirs, and blaming it on you**
- 20th August – **Embracing the lovely**
- 27th August – **Embracing the unlovely**
- 3rd September – **Everything falls apart**
- 24th September – **Life is like this**
- 1st October – **Gratitude to Parents**

All talks begin at 2.00pm and will take place in the Sala

All are welcome

continued from page 2... that says conflict has a cause I began to question, and to discover the cause of suffering.

Now the delusion of our life is that we tend to get fascinated by particular types of experience. If I get angry at the bus being late, I think it's the bus driver's problem, or it's my problem. I'm always looking outside to figure out what the problem is, but I'm not looking at the anger. The teaching that we use is one of being more objective: 'OK, this is an experience of anger, but that is something which arises and ceases. What's causing the suffering here?...' So we're detaching now from the seeming urgency and complexity and fascination of our experiences. In this process, it doesn't matter what we're angry at, what matters is that we look more deeply into these basic mental patterns in order to understand.

If we are willing to look into our conflicts, to open our minds to conflict, then we can discover something, can't we? Whereas if we make a judgement that we should be someone who never has fear or anger – should always be bright and beautiful and charming – then, when the opposite comes, we tend to try to push it away. There is no reflection, there is just some kind of idea or expectation that we attach to, and then frustration when this can't be met. But if we look at it differently we see that experience is just a process, and in that process there is something that we have to discover, something we have to look at. We have to understand what is the cause of conflict.

So it's not the experience that is the problem: lust is not the problem; fear is not the problem; boredom is not the problem. The problem is the attachment to these. What does this word 'attachment' mean? What is attachment? This moment is the way it is now. Why do I make it a problem, why does there have to be conflict?

This isn't a judgement; it's not saying I shouldn't have conflict, it's saying awaken to the cause. When there is a welcoming attitude to the predicament we're in, we begin to see what attachment and letting go is. Attachment is always bound up with a sense of 'I'; letting go is an open acceptance of this moment the way it is. This is something that we have to discover, we have to see it quite clearly. This is the path of insight.

Training (*bhavana* in Pali): we have to make effort. Sometimes this teaching of letting go can sound like a sort of complacent acceptance. I might get angry and punch someone in the nose and say: 'It's all right, just let go. No problem!' Then get angry again and punch you in the eye, and say: 'I'm an angry person. That's just the way it is!' – but that's not it, is it?... There is training to be done.

The two things that I find very helpful in training are: 1) to see cause and effect, and 2) intention. We can always reflect upon cause and effect, asking for example: 'What is the result of my practice? How long have I been practising and what's the result? Am I more at ease with life than I was ten years ago? Or, a year ago? Or am I more up-tight?' If I'm more up-tight, then I need to consider my practice! If I'm more at ease, then also I should consider my practice. So we look at cause and effect asking: 'What is the result of my life, the way I live my life?' Quite simply. Not as a judgement, saying: 'There I go, getting angry again.' – that kind of attitude is not reflective. Instead notice: The way I speak – what's the result of that?' 'The way I consume the objects of the sense-world, whether it's ideas in books or ham sandwiches: What is the result of that?' 'What is the result of my sitting meditation? What's the effect on my mind and body, on the society around me?' These are things we can contemplate. It's simple, but very important – to see what works and what doesn't work.

It's because we don't understand that we make mistakes, so the trick is to make as few mistakes as possible – and not to make the same mistakes again and again. Yet sometimes we have this blindness, and we don't see why we have suffering in our lives. Ignorance blinds us. So then what can we do?... Wherever there is suffering, or confusion we can begin to look at that pattern of our lives. If we look at this whole pattern, we can discover the causes of suffering, and begin to make intentions to not allow those causes to come up all the time.

Let's say I'm a person who is always making wisecracks at people. I watch them cringe, I begin to notice that no one likes me, and I hate myself. So I reflect: 'This kind of speech brings me remorse and regret, and brings other people

suffering. And I see: 'Ah, that's the result.' So then what can I do?... Now this is when it's important to know the difference between remorse and guilt. Remorse is a healthy response to inappropriate action or speech, or thought; it's a healthy response, because it's telling me: 'This is painful.' But most of us probably make that into guilt: there is remorse, but also an inappropriate amount of self-flagellation; this is the unhealthy activity of guilt.

For me, it seems that guilt is a kind of cover-up of the pain; I numb the pain, covering it over with these thoughts of guilt: 'Yes. You are rotten to the core, Viradhammo!...' But this is self-view. What does it feel like when we just go to the pain?... If I say something which is unkind to someone, and then see them get hurt, I think: 'Oh, I did it again!' – and there's the jab.

This is why meditation is so important, because when

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we sit we get the results of our life. Sometimes it's difficult to sit when there is suffering, because we want to get away from that suffering. If we actually sit and feel the pain, without judgement – really feel the physical and emotional feeling of that – we can contemplate: 'This is the result of that; with this, there is that.' We see dependent origination: that the origin of this feeling depends on a certain activity. If we really feel the pain, that registers in our minds in a way that is intuitive, in a way that is quite fundamental. We understand that when we do certain things we are going to suffer. We realise cause and effect.

So then what can we do? Well, we can use skilful thinking rather than guilt thinking. We can say: 'From now on, I'm going to try not to speak in those ways.' We can make that intention; and that intention makes us more mindful. So, five days later when I say the same thing again, instead of thinking: 'There you go again. You're no good, you're rotten to the core!...' I can go back and examine: 'What's the result?'... 'It hurts, it *really* hurts!' I feel it. That pain can teach me: 'With the arising of this condition you get that condition, but when this condition isn't there you won't get that.' If I go through that process again and again and again, with those habitual patterns of suffering, eventually I begin to see the arising of that unwholesome condition. Mindfulness is now established. Mindfulness is very powerful, it's like recollection or remembering. It sees: 'Ah, there it is...- but I'm not going to react to that, I'm not going to follow that one.' I button my lip, I don't say it. Then there's the joy: 'I didn't do it! I didn't get sucked in.' The heart is freed from that particular habit.

Now in all of that there has been no hatred; there has been intention but it hasn't been bound up with self-view, there has been no activity of desire. I'm not trying to become a person who doesn't do that. There is no activity of aversion. There is mindfulness, awakeness. That's training, always working from awakeness and intention: I'm going to be awake – not *become* anything, just be awake and aware of the way things are.

Purification, the third consideration that I find helpful, is probably one of the most difficult parts, because it's so boring. Of course, I can only speak for monastic life because I never really developed the training as a lay-person. I know that monastic life is not fun, it's not meant to be. Though I love the brotherhood and find the monks inspiring, there are times when I don't like the people, or feel annoyed or intimidated or fed up. But I have the freedom to watch that, and this is the purification.

This is where we have to have tremendous patience.

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The line is: 'Infinite patience, boundless compassion.' This is the practice. When it all begins to surface – when you start to feel annoyed at the apartment and the marriage, or fed up with the kids – desire manifests as frustration. But then if we can bear with the frustration, not judge it, we go through a purification. So we have to allow this stuff to surface into the mind, we have to allow the rubbish to become conscious.

This is why the teaching of *anatta* and *anicca*, non-personality and change, is so important – because if we didn't have that teaching, we would take it personally. But the more we contemplate this teaching and discover that it's true, the more courage we have to allow these things to come up into consciousness. The more courage we have to let them up into consciousness – the more patience we have to bear with them – the more we realise the underlying peace of the mind.

That peace is not something we get by becoming anything but by letting go, allowing things to cease. That's why we talk so much about cessation. Say, when I'm feeling grumpy, I remember the teaching: 'That's going to change. Don't make it a problem.' So I allow myself to be grumpy, which isn't an indulgence in being grumpy or laying that mood onto the other monks but neither is it a denial of that grumpiness. It's just recognising that that which has a nature to arise has a nature to cease; I can awaken to that – and then it does cease. I realise that more and more, it becomes a path of courage and confidence. There is the confidence to allow these things to be there, to make them fully conscious – to allow fear, anger or whatever to be fully conscious.

The tendency of repression is powerful. We are panicked by conditions and then they can become a threat; we try to push them away, but they come back. So if we find that conditions keep coming up in our lives, then we have to consider: 'Am I really allowing them to be conscious, or am I pushing them away?...' This balance between indulgence and repression is hard to find, although actually it's very simple – it's just awakening to the way it is right now.

It's a very moment to moment practice, so when the question comes up: 'Am I repressing or am I indulging?' see that as doubt, just a condition in the mind: 'This is the way it is *now*,' 'I feel this way *now*' – awakening, making things conscious. Notice that there is no desire in that, no aversion, it's not bound up with the desire to become anything or to get rid of anything, or sensual desire. There is no movement away from this moment towards another moment. It's timeless. It's immediate. It's awakening here and now. ❖

Monastic Millennium: Growing up at Chithurst

Cittaviveka is 21 years old this year. Among the group of Ajahn Chah's monasteries that are currently in existence in Britain, this was the first to be established. It had the first ordination precinct (sima), the first ordinations, and is the only monastery that has a sizeable area of forest (120 acres) attached to it.

In 1979 it was the gift of the Hammer Wood that drew the Sangha here, and occasioned the purchase of the nearby Chithurst House (where the male community live) and subsequently Hammer Cottage (now Aloka Vihara for nuns).

Ajahn Sucitto, the third and current abbot, reports on the state of affairs in year 2000.

It used to be referred to as Chithurst Work Camp in the early years when we were slogging away at making the House liveable. Then it was Chithurst Boot Camp when training conventions had to be laid down although we were not clear as to what would work. It's not always the case that everything goes right at first go, and with such a fledgling Sangha in a non-Buddhist culture, there was a shortage of role models. It has always been 'try this and see' with the requirement to learn from mistakes. When the precedents for monastic life were found in the remote provinces of Thailand, the know-how was bound to be slender and the need for faith, resilience and openness of mind high. Those three qualities established Cittaviveka, have kept it going and will I hope long continue to be its guiding lights. Even when, as now, things feel settled and the land is vibrant with life, it seems to be Chithurst Summer Camp.

The living is comparatively easy now compared with 1979. Now it's not the rawness of the elements that we are protecting ourselves from, but the administrative complexities that can turn a home into an institution. Yes, the heating system is still a little rickety; the 'hot' tap is on the cold shower; the morning gruel is mercilessly plain; the nuns' cottage damp; and the forest kutis require a hole to be dug and for the occupant to obey the calls of nature au naturel; but basically Cittaviveka is a comfortable place for samanans and the guests who can handle the mix of communal endeavour and periods of solitude. And we are supported for no other reason than to do what the Buddha always wanted us to do: to live a life of purity. In this day and age, that is a staggering reflection.

There's a lot more silence now since major work on the House stopped: individual retreats for samanans happen all year round, and there are adequate facilities in the Wood for solitary practice. But as facilities develop, the work of maintaining them continues and entails understanding and the need to accord with local and national regulations. The balance between keeping it simple and making it work hinges on the question of who is going to sort out the fine details of forest management, plumbing systems, vehicle maintenance

and databases. Those samanans who seek a forest dwelling are not always skilled or inclined in these areas, so a juggling between acquiring know-how, getting help from skilled lay people and accepting inefficiency is the order of the day. In the winter of 1993 the heating system

collapsed; the replacement followed suit in winter 1999, and the nuns' boiler blew out in sympathy: so it was a case as always of personal initiative, endurance, good friends and a touch of the miraculous. After that it was the sewage system... So life still offers us its opportunities to access resilience, faith and an openness to respond to what comes up.

The resident community has been pegged since its inception to comprise no more than thirty people, to hold no public retreats, lectures or seminars that might attract large numbers of people, and to hold no more than five large public events per year. These were the stipulations made by the local council, and since other monasteries have been established, and Amaravati taken on the responsibility of providing

teaching and devotional facilities for lay people, this has not been difficult. Right now, about twenty-two residents seems a maximum to allow room for lay guests and also one or two samanans from other monasteries to avail themselves of an extended retreat. Actually with a larger community it would be difficult to maintain the kind of 'family' closeness that I find helpful to blend in the restraint and discipline that one newly Gone Forth has to take on. My own feel for guiding others is to be human and available (and fallible). It all helps to give the ideals of the Holy Life some mortal flesh that a person can relate to.

What new developments? All the forest kutis that we are allowed have been built; the House and Cottage are full. Currently there seem to be two main areas that merit long-term attention. The first is the requirements of the laity, who, despite council restrictions, still doggedly turn up for meditation, teaching and festivals. So the big project for this and the next few years is building a Dhamma Hall. As anyone who has been stuffed into the Shrine Room in the House will agree, adequate space is a pressing requirement. The Hall



Photograph: Tim Page

should seat at least 150 people, more with extensions. We ripped down the Coach House in 1998, and had foundations laid in 1999. This year funds have accumulated to the extent that we can hire builders to erect the walls, using the old stone from the Coach House. As a roofless meditation hall will tax the endurance of most people for ten months of the year, a small group of lay supporters is hoping, and even asking, for funds for the next stage, that of a roof with internal oak beams to support it. The generosity of response in terms of offering funds and work so far has been remarkable, but projects like this do tend to bring up agitation: people can feel pressurised into supporting it and miss out on the joy; or become impatient and not give themselves time to appreciate what goodness is manifesting; or get disheartened by how much things cost and feel that their small donation is of no use. So the theme of support requires careful investigation. Basically the Hall can help to build everyone who feels that their good heart is enshrined in it. It can also help to build the sense of community. The more people feel connected to it by putting a little of what they have or know into the project, the broader the spiritual foundation gets. It seems so fitting for Cittaviveka that the bricks and mortar of the Dhamma should come from a mix of Asian alms-giving with English car-boot sales, sponsored knitting and musical benefits. Connection can be giving a couple of hours now and then to helping to organise an event. There is no deadline to complete the building, and small can indeed be beautiful.

Otherwise, the facilities for women need upgrading. Aloka was always understood to be a smallish residence with a maximum of six samanās located in and around the tiny Cottage, but still life gets quite bunched up. A

few local female practitioners like to drop in now and then to talk with the nuns or join in their evening pujas. At the moment three becomes a crowd. The garage has been converted into a guest room, but the need for accommodation where a couple of lay guests at a time can stay in reasonable comfort is keenly felt. And it's good if the nuns can have their privacy too. Currently, the old pig-sty is caringly being rebuilt as a nun's kuti by two of the monks, but as the Nuns' Sangha grows, it would be good if we could find a little more land and build a kuti where a guest nun could do a long retreat. Such are the dreams of the present. It feels good to keep them in mind: like most of our monasteries, Cittaviveka only happened because people dared to dream. The fact that I can have such dreams indicates that despite the efforts and even stress that being abbot of this place has entailed, I am getting on top of it rather than vice versa. I look back on the work of Ajahn Sumedho, Anando, Viradhammo, Munindo, Kittisaro and Vajiro with great gratitude. This monastery was the first to offer the Going Forth for women: the pioneering 'group of four' (Sisters Rocanā, Sundarā, Candāsiri and Thānissarā) who took that first huge step into the unknown, did so with the blessing of this community, 17 years ago. Then again, the fabric of the monastery reminds me of so much voluntary help: Jim Power (of 'Power's Showers'), Bruce Miles, Walter Stengl, 'Kip', Mike and Gillian Holmes... For me all this is immensely good kamma to be associated with. Gradually the leadership role has changed and there is a lot of mutual support in the monastery; even for the Abbot, the Sangha is a Refuge. It wasn't what I was looking for when I first went forth, but a benevolent network of samanās and lay friends is rare and invaluable thing in anyone's world. Like the monastery itself, I seem to be growing up. ❖



Farewell

Ajahn Attapemo returned to lay life on 13th May. In this letter, he shares some reflections:

Dear Friends,

You may find it a bit of a surprise to learn that I have decided to leave monastic life and return to being a lay person. In my 19 years in robes, the past 13 have been spent at Amaravati, where I have truly enjoyed various roles and responsibilities, most notably helping to give birth to the new Temple, complete with the very grand and wonderful Opening Ceremony last year. These have been perhaps the happiest years of my life, although, throughout the last 3 years, thoughts of disrobing have been a constant companion. If you haven't noticed, my character tends to thrive on engaging with things and people to the point that I feel a bit out of step with the emphasis on the aloneness (the mono) of the monastic vocation. While I do find that silence and emptiness are great resources to draw from, my heart inclines more toward contact with people, and feels drawn toward further exploration and enquiry there.

From some traditional points of view this could be seen as barking up the wrong tree, yet my motivation and interest comes from experience in how good quality interaction can actually complement and support one's inquiry into conditions, and even help to focus on some of the core aspects of our suffering, which can lead to discovering how and where we are holding on. Ideally this goes hand in hand with silence, and is in support of a path leading to the ending of suffering. Whilst this may be a language more familiar to therapists, many of us in the monastic community find ourselves continually challenged by the frictions between one another, and discover much insight comes from focusing on what goes on in us on account of that contact. Sometimes it seems that contact with life and emptiness are in conflict with one another, yet perhaps it is their relationship to one another that is important. Where the basic way of a monastic may appear to be one where one's suffering is worked out in silence or in emptiness, and that certainly is what the monastic vinaya is streamlined to support, more and more within the monastic community we are finding much growth taking place in our capacity to be present, open and honest with one another, and these are skills that are developed interactively.

Exactly what I am going to do with my life remains uncertain; for the moment I'll stay in London, then visit family in the States, all the while contemplating prospects for employment.

I feel I am taking many good things with me: a love and appreciation for silence, a love for spiritual community, a love for service and hard work, and a great love for arousing the human spirit amidst the trials of life. I feel blessed with good fortune and good friendships from life together with the ordained sangha and with so many people in the lay community. I feel extremely well supported over the years in ways that are protecting, a bit like good mothering. Imagine, I haven't had occasions to cook or garden, drive or handle money

Activities around the Dhamma Hall at Chithurst



Dhamma Hall Day - July 16th. This is the day of Asalha Puja, and will be a chance to gather and celebrate the anniversary of Foundation Day and to affirm the existence of a holy place. We plan to build a temporary shrine during the day, containing any objects of personal significance you would like to bring - your own Buddha Rupas, photographs of loved ones, mementoes, or any objects of particular beauty or significance that you would like to be blessed. For information, or if you have any suggestions for further activities, contact David on 01273 723378 or the monastery.

Guitar Recital - July 28th. Respected guitarist Paul Anders Søgard has offered this concert, which will be held in Petersfield Library. The curtain will rise at 8.00pm, and there will be light refreshments available afterwards. Tickets are £10.00 each. Only a limited number of places are available, so book now by contacting Rocanā on 01483 761398, or write to her at 143 York Road, Woking, Surrey GU22 7XS. Please enclose a SAE for postal bookings, and make any cheques payable to The English Sangha Trust.

Sacred Spaces Pilgrimage - September/October. At the beginning of September, Ruth Ana Gaston will begin a sponsored cycle-ride of some 1,500 miles from the North of Scotland to the South of England. The journey will take the form of a pilgrimage, visiting the many sacred sites along the way, and is planned to end at Chithurst's Kathina ceremony on 16th October. Ruth hopes to be staying at Amaravati from mid-June until September, and will be happy to give you more information.

all this time. I am looking forward to see what of all 19 years in robes translates into life outside the monastery gates. My sense is that the essence of what I've gained is to do with the quality of attention and care given to moment impressions and feeling tones. Its now 9 days since I disrobed and just 4 days since I left the monastery, and I can say it is very interesting, many things are so fresh, even electric with excitement, like just sitting on a sofa with a woman - innocent enough in itself, but not having done that for 19 years, it makes quite a powerful impression!

And so with much gratitude for everything I feel I have received from Luang Por, the ordained sangha and the lay community I bid you adieu, or as T.S. Eliot says: it is not farewell, but fare forward.

John Stevens

Appreciation

Acharya Godwin Samararatne

In late March death snatched from our midst, too soon, one of Sri Lanka's most beloved Buddhist teachers, Godwin Samararatne. For close to twenty years, Godwin had been the resident meditation teacher at the Nilambe Meditation Centre near Kandy. He had also taught meditation within Kandy itself, at the Lewella and Visakha Meditation Centres (two affiliates of Nilambe), at the University of Peradeniya, at private homes, and at the Buddhist Publication Society. But Godwin did not belong to Sri Lanka alone. He belonged to the whole world, and he was loved and esteemed by people clear across the globe. Thousands of people from many lands came to Nilambe to practise meditation under his guidance, and they also invited him to their own countries to conduct meditation courses and retreats. Thus over the past two decades Godwin, in his own quiet way, had become an international Buddhist celebrity, constantly in demand in countries ranging from Europe to Hong Kong and Taiwan. He was also a regular visitor to South Africa, where he conducted his last meditation retreat earlier this year.

What was so impressive about Godwin, however, was not what he did but what he was. He was above all a truly selfless person, and it was this utter selflessness of the man that accounts for the impact he had on the lives of so many people.

I use the word 'selflessness' to describe him in two interrelated senses. First, he was selfless in the sense that he seemed to have almost no inner gravitational force of an 'I' around which his personal life revolved: no pride, no ambition, no personal projects aimed at self-aggrandisement. He was completely humble and non-assertive, not in an artificial self-demeaning way, but rather as if he had no awareness of a self to be effaced. Hence as a meditation teacher he could be utterly transparent, without any trips of his own to lay upon his students.

This inward 'emptiness' enabled Godwin to be selfless in the second sense: as one who always gave first consideration to the welfare of others. He was ready to empathise with others and share their concerns as vividly as if they were his own. In this respect, Godwin embodied the twin Buddhist virtues of loving-kindness and compassion, *maitri* and *karuna*. Even without many words, his dignified presence conveyed a quietude and calm that spoke eloquently for the power of inner goodness, for its capacity to reach out to others and heal their anxiety and distress. It was this deep quietude and almost tangible kindness that drew thousands of people

to Godwin and encouraged them to welcome him into their lives. The trust they placed in him was well deposited, for in an age when so many popular 'gurus' have gained notoriety for their unscrupulous behaviour, he never exploited the confidence and good will of his pupils.

Though Godwin taught the practice of Buddhist meditation, particularly the way of mindfulness, he did not try to propagate 'Buddhism' as a doctrine or religious faith, much less as part of an exotic cultural package. His inspiration came from the Dhamma as primarily a path of inner transformation whose effectiveness stemmed from its ability to promote self-knowledge and self-purification. He saw the practice of meditation as a way to help people help themselves, to understand themselves more clearly and change themselves for the better. He emphasised that Buddhist meditation is not a way of withdrawing from everyday life, but of living everyday life mindfully, with awareness and clear comprehension, and he taught people how to apply the Dhamma to the knottiest problems of their mundane lives.

By not binding the practice of meditation to the traditional religious framework of Buddhism, Godwin was able to reach out and speak to people of the most diverse backgrounds. For him there were no essential, unbridgeable differences between human beings. He saw people everywhere as just human beings beset by suffering and searching for happiness, and he offered the Buddha's way of mindfulness as an experiential discipline leading to genuine peace of heart. Hence he could teach people from such different backgrounds – Western, Asian, and African; Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim; Sri-Lankan Theravadins and Chinese Mahayanists – and all could respond favourably to his guidance.

If it were not for a chronic liver condition that he had patiently endured for years, with hardly a word of complaint, Godwin might well have lived on to actively teach the way of mindfulness for at least another decade. But this was not to be, for in late February, almost immediately upon his return from a teaching engagement in South Africa, his illness flared up and a month later claimed his precious life. Those of us who have been touched by him will long bear in our hearts the memory of his calm, gentle personality, and of the impact his life had on our own. May he quickly attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbāna.

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi



AMARAVATI NOTICES

Buddhism for Schools

Amaravati is looking for lay volunteers who are interested in visiting schools to talk about Buddhism and possibly in hosting school parties at the monastery. We are also looking for people who might be interested in developing resources for teachers. *If you would like to help please write to Ven. Dhammanando (Schools Liaison) c/o ABM*

CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

Lay Forums

This season's Lay Forums at Cittaviveka are:

23rd July – Kalyanamitta – True Friendship

This will be the last lay forum until the autumn. The occasion will offer lay practitioners, new and old, the opportunity to exchange thoughts and suggestions concerning ways that we can support each other's practice.

Forest Work

17th October - 'Forest Work Month' begins – an opportunity for 4 men to spend about three weeks living and working in Hammer Wood, helping with woodland restoration. *For further details, please write (with SAE) to 'Forest Work', Chithurst Buddhist Monastery, Petersfield, Hants. GU31 5EU.*

Forest Work Days: 26th August, 23rd September, 29th October. All welcome at 1.00pm; meet at the main house with boots and suitable outdoor clothing.

GENERAL NOTICES

**Being in Practice Retreat
25th to 28th August 2000**

We will be holding the fifth annual retreat for psychotherapists, counsellors and others in the healing and caring professions from 25th to 28th August 2000. The theme for this year's retreat is **KALYANAMITTA**: associating with

that which is deeply and inherently healthy and wholesome in ourselves and each other as we gather together to create a supportive community for our practice. The retreat will be held this year at the Karuna Institute in the beautiful Dartmoor countryside in Devon. We hope to have a guest dhamma talk by a member of the monastic sangha.

Further details and booking information from:

Sylvia Mann, 28B Trafalgar Avenue, London SE15 6NR Tel: 020 7703 2599 or Judy Lown, Flat 1, 8 Preston Park Avenue, Brighton, Sussex BN1 6HJ Tel: 01273 500193

Buddhist Fair

Contrary to an earlier notice, there will NOT be a Buddhist Fair this year in Stedham, owing to building work. However, on 23rd September (11.00am – 5.00pm) there will be a Multicultural Fair at the Grange Centre in Midhurst. *Further Details from Rocanā (01483 761398) or Mudita (01730 812555)*

In October there will be a Sunday afternoon Poetry/Music Recital, to include tea, at the Kandy Tea Rooms, 4 Holland Street, London W8 to benefit the Chithurst Dhamma Hall Project. *For further information please telephone Rocanā on 01483 761398*

Family Events at Amaravati

The **Family Weekend** in July and the **Summer Camp** in August are fully booked with waiting lists, but for general enquiries contact *Kim Waller*, 16a Great Russell Mansions, 60 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3BE Tel: 0207 404 5057 or *Dan Jones*, 59 Cavendish Avenue, Cambridge CB1 7UR Phone: 01223 246257 Email: danjones@supanet.com

The **Young Persons' Retreat** will be from **3rd to 5th December**. This offers a taste of silent meditation to teenagers. *Contact Dan Jones, as above.*

Lay Events at Amaravati

The one day and weekend events provide an opportunity to spend time with others, in silence as well as in exploring themes relevant to practice and daily life. All are welcome.

Day events (no booking required)

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

Nov. 18th – A day of practice.

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*

KATHINA/ALMSGIVING CEREMONIES

All welcome to attend;

Cittaviveka, 15th October

*Contact: Barry Durrant
01730 821479*

Santacittarama (Italy), 15th October**Aruna Ratanagiri (Harnham), 22th October**

*Contact: Namtip Milligan
0191 240 3522*

Dhammapala (Switzerland), 29th October**Amaravati, 5th November**

Please use the contact person detailed if you would like to offer any help with any of the arrangements.

Forest Sangha Newsletter is available on the internet at

www.fsnews.cjb.net

as well as many other Buddhist sites like **www.BuddhaMind.cjb.net**

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

MEDITATION GROUPS	
<i>These are visited regularly by Sangha members.</i>	
BATH Catherine Hewitt, (01225) 405-235	LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY 58 Eccleston Square, SW1 (Victoria) (020) 7 834 5858 Meditation Sundays: led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday classes – 6.00pm
BERKSHIRE Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646	
BRISTOL Lyn Goswell (Nirodha), (0117) 968-4089	LEEDS AREA Daniella Loeb, (0113) 2791-375 Anne Voist, (01274) 670-865
SOUTH DORSET Barbara Cohen-Walters (Sati sati), (01305) 786-821	
EDINBURGH Muriel Nevin, (0131) 337-0901	SOUTHAMPTON Ros Dean (01703) 422430
GLASGOW James Scott, (0141) 637-9731	
HAMPSTEAD Caroline Randall, (020) 8 348-0537	SURREY/WOKING Rocana, (01483) 761-398

MEDITATION GROUPS	
<i>These meet regularly & receive occasional visits from Sangha.</i>	
BEDFORD David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892	LEIGH-ON-SEA Gool Deboo, (01702) 553-211
BELFAST Paddy Boyle, (01232) 427-720	MAIDSTONE Tony Millett, (01634) 375-728
BRIGHTON Nimmala, (01273) 723-378	MIDHURST Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479
CAMBRIDGE Gillian Wills, (01954) 780-551	NEWCASTLE ON TYNE Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726
CANTERBURY Charles Watters, (01227) 463342	NORWICH Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717
DUBLIN Eugene Kelly, (1) 285-4076 or (1) 284-9019	PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES Peter and Barbara (Subhdra) Jackson, (01239) 820-790
ESSEX (Billericay) Rob Howell, (01702) 482-134 or (Harlow) Pamutto, (01279) 724-330	PORTSMOUTH Dave Beal, (01705) 732-280
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD Bodhinyana Group Chris Ward (01442) 890-034	REDRUTH Daniel Davide (01736) 753-175
LONDON / NOTTING HILL Jeffrey Craig, (020) 7 221-9330	STEYNING / SUSSEX Jayanti (01903) 812-130
LIVERPOOL Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427 6668	STROUD John Groves, 0796 7777-742
	TAUNTON 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:

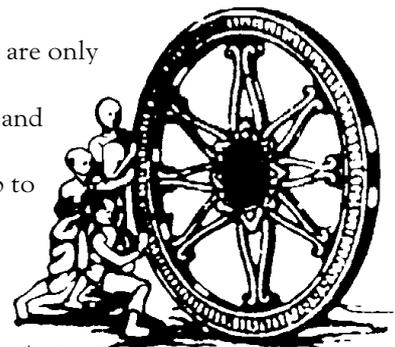
2000



Aug.	11 – 18	7 Day	Ajahn Sumedho — (in Thai)
Sept.	1 – 3	Weekend	Ajahn Candasiri
Sept.	8 – 17	10 Day	Ajahn Sumedho – FULLY BOOKED
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	Ajahn Karuniko
Dec.	27 – Jan. 1	5 Day	(to be decided)

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 Weekend 2000

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,
Ubon 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
Web site: www.santacittarama.org
(written in Italian)
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

“Where is the good person?

The good person lies within us.
If were good then wherever we go
the goodness stays with us.

People may praise us,
blame us or treat us with
contempt,
but whatever they say or do,
we're still good.”

Luang Por Chah

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
JULY	1st & 31st	9 (Sun)	☉ 16 (Sun)	24 (Mon)
AUGUST	8 (Tues)	15 (Tues)	23 (Wed)	29 (Tues)
SEPTEMBER	6 (Wed)	13 (Wed)	21 (Thurs)	28 (Thurs)
OCTOBER	6 (Fri)	☼ 13 (Fri)	21 (Sat)	27 (Fri)
☺ Asalha Puja (Vassa begins next day) ☼ Pavarana Day (Vassa ends)				

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Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ, England

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