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From the Darkness to the Light

The first part of a Dhamma talk given by Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo to the monks, novices and nuns after the ceremony of asking forgiveness at Wat Nong Pah Pong, Thailand, September 1996.

Translated by Venerable Kevali.

Since you have come to ask forgiveness, I don't want to speak about issues from the past as these are things that lie behind us. Actually there isn't much to settle between us in this ceremony of asking forgiveness anyway. Still, a ceremony like this is useful on the level of your personal practice. It affects the attitudes you maintain and carry along throughout the training of your mind as the years go by. A ritual like this helps to strengthen the virtues of a contemplative. If you steadily cultivate respect for these as the basis for practising the Buddha's teachings, you will establish a conduct that is not heedless or sloppy. Though the circumstances of practice may change, a feeling of constant coolness and ease will build up in you. If you develop interest and sincere willingness, then peacefulness will automatically arise. The putting forth of effort to improve one's conduct goes hand in hand with the maturing of a person. One of the key teachings the Buddha used to encourage us, as we practise Dhamma, is: '*Viriya dukkhamaccanti*' (*dukkha – unsatisfactoriness and suffering can be overcome by effort.*) This applies to each and every one of us, not only to a small elite.

In our practice we constantly have to remind ourselves that all of us have to begin like children. We can't be like adults right from the start. At first we are not yet purified and fall into states of dirtiness. We live in the mud and mire like a lotus that hasn't yet bloomed and still depends on the dirt for nourishment. We are

the same: – when we are born in the world we are not yet fully mature, ready and complete, but come with a burden of having to fight obstacles of all kinds. There is happiness and suffering, good and bad, right and wrong. To experience this is normal for an unenlightened person who still has dust in their eyes. That someone who has dust in their eyes could experience the brightness and clarity of being unburdened with suffering and drawbacks cannot be. In the beginning there are always hardships; there always has to be

suffering – this is just normal.

It is like we live in the dark. Living in the dark is not as pleasant as one might wish. There is always a certain feeling of discomfort and uneasiness. In this

state we are still not free from dependence. We are not yet wholly accomplished. We still experience bits of happiness and bits of suffering, some satisfaction and some dissatisfaction from time to time. We haven't yet transcended the world of conditions and are not yet in a safe place. We are going back and forth in *samsāra*, the round of birth and death. Sometimes the situations that arise are good, sometimes bad. Until we reach the aim of our practice this is just the natural way things are.

Everybody has goodness, everybody has perfection and purity right inside themselves. Surely every one of us possesses some personality traits which could be brought to consciousness in a way that is useful for us. Make these complete, and perfect them. It is like the flames of a fire; in the places where the flame kindles

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there wasn't any fire before, but once they are ignited the flames appear out of the darkness. The fire is burning right there. With us it is the same as with the flames; everyone of us has to come from dark places, come from being a child, being someone who has no strength, is not yet ready. Naturally, this brings disorientation. That a state at this level could give rise to full confidence and clarity just can't be.

People get drunk on the illusion that the body doesn't have illnesses, afflictions, pains and fevers threatening it. They think they won't die, won't degenerate and wear out.

They don't consider the possibility, but it happens. In reality our material body is a conditioned phenomenon, it will always follow the nature of its material constituents. Nevertheless we like to see the body as permanently powerful, tough and strong and not afflicted by disease and pain. We want to see it from this perspective, the way we are used to, just as if the body was fit for all circumstances. But the Buddha said if there is light, there will be darkness. If there is hot, there will be cold. It has to be like this. So in this way any state of strength, agility or ease may degenerate in just a day or just a single moment into a state of decline and ruin, following its nature. But if we cultivate an attitude of seeing the disintegration as natural we won't be upset by the decline. We won't take the body as something important, or keep holding on to it, or attach feelings of self to it.

The Buddha called the illusion we create around the body *sakkāyaditṭhi* – the view that the body is self, that we and other people are our bodies, that the body is our possession. The Buddha reminds us to keep recollecting that whatever there may be it is not ours, not our self. Nothing really belongs to us. Through thinking like this we won't start holding on to things. Attachment (*upādāna*) is the root of all self-importance.

The more we take ourselves as important, the more we are prone to drifting away towards unwholesome feelings, towards suffering, until we eventually follow a path into the realms of darkness. In this way we flow through the rounds of birth and becoming. The Buddha saw this as the source of all suffering. States of anger,

greed or delusion come to be; desire, aversion, ignorance arise; all of these states of being entail suffering and unhappiness.

Analysing and observing our personality we see that it consists of mental phenomena. Mental phenomena too, are not ours, not self. Personality is not 'we' or 'they', but simply consists of certain states out of all the possible mental states (*dhammāramaṇā*). Don't see it as 'this is me' or 'this is mine'. See it in the light of *dhammāramaṇā* which arise naturally on their own and cease on their own. Just as the darkness comes to be naturally, it goes naturally as well. As brightness is born in its own natural way, it likewise ceases. These states arise and vanish.

Mental states arise and cease whether they are states of happiness or suffering, agreeable or disagreeable states. We call these *lokadhammā* (worldly *dhammas*), attributes that dominate the hearts and minds of beings living in the world. Seeing the *lokadhammā* simply as elements of Dhamma, we won't make the assumption that 'we' are happy whenever 'we' feel happiness or that 'we' are suffering whenever 'we' feel suffering. There is nothing like 'our' goodness or 'our' badness either. We see these attributes, but they are just aspects of Dhamma. Each one is just one of all the possible states of Dhamma. There is nothing



special about it.

Feelings are just feelings, happiness is just happiness, suffering is just suffering. Only that. Having arisen, it all ceases. We don't have happiness and suffering, we don't take interest in them. They are just attributes of the mental objects that come up – just that much. The *lokadhammā* appear and vanish according to their own logic. Finally, if we don't show interest in them, don't support and give importance to them, they lose their existence.

The fantasies our mind spins, the *sañkhāras*, can be seen in a similar way. *Sañkhāras* are states of proliferation. They come and disturb us all of the time because by giving importance to them we keep feeding them. So of course they continue to provoke and challenge us. Naturally then, we are constantly subject to feelings going up and down, and states *continued on page 4*

EDITORIAL

Cultivating the Heart

'Even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, one who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. You should train in this way: 'Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no harsh words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading them with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with them we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will.'

The Simile of the Saw: Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 21.

The constant refrain of the Buddha was that he taught only one thing, the Four Noble Truths: *dukkha* (suffering), its cause, its cessation and the Path. The teachings he gave, with their various skilful means, are simply different ways of awakening to this fundamental paradigm. The primary movement of the Noble Truths is to know the way things are, of a direct awareness of *dhammas* (things) in the present moment. The heart quality of *mettā* (loving-kindness) facilitates this. It is one of the qualities that needs to be cultivated in order for this process to be a real possibility for us; we can't know things if we're not willing or able to allow them to touch our awareness. So wisdom and love must be conjoined: *sati-sampajañña* (mindfulness and clear comprehension) and the *brahmavihāra* (the sublime abidings of the heart) are not separate cultivations. When these are developed, the freedom that the Buddha embodied is realised in the here and now; abiding in this undefended immediacy is the way of awakening hearts.

These two seemingly different cultivations converge as we train to allay our usual reactions to *dukkha* – in not wanting unpleasant things to be present, we attempt to destroy them or grab hold of something to hide behind; we duck and we weave, or we simply close our eyes and go to sleep. All this can be seen under the broad umbrella of ill-will or aversion, for which the Buddha repeatedly gave *mettā* as the antidote: *'No other thing do I know on account of which unarisen ill-will does not arise and arisen ill-will is abandoned so much as on account of this: the liberation of the mind through loving-kindness.'* Essentially our dilemma is, how do we be present with things, how do we know suffering, if all the unwholesome currents in the mind are sweeping us away? This cultivation is what it enables us to have the necessary strength of heart; it enables us to rest in what is presently arising and feel peace with all of it. And it is

the wisdom faculty that protects the heart's sensitivity; through understanding causality we can know how to hold things skilfully in awareness. Imagine what it would be like if the heart was strong and well enough so that whatever came could be welcomed, where the natural response to affliction was of an empathetic understanding. When the currents of the world are of wanting and not wanting, of loving and hating, this is radical.

In his challenging **Simile of the Saw**, the Buddha points to this radical possibility. And, if we stop and contemplate it, to the freedom it gives. If we have fully understood the Teaching, and cultivated its skills in the ways that the Buddha indicates, then our minds are free, even in the face of painful feeling. Even if others are *'sawing us limb by limb,'* we are free to keep our hearts unconstricted. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is one living embodiment of this. Most of us – I would wish – have not and will not face such extreme pain and aggression, but, if it is also taken as a metaphor for what happens in our hearts, we do experience fierce attacks by Mara's hosts, by mind states that hurt and oppress. What is our response to our own anger and not wanting, or to our own mortality? In its extremity the simile is not judging negative states so much as saying, 'You've missed the truth of *kamma*. There are results of actions and situations, but in **each moment** you are free to respond with wholesome-ness.' The Noble Truth of *dukkha* is about the suffering of the heart; in this simile the Buddha is pointing to the fact that we do not have to compound painful feeling – whether it arises from something someone says or does or within our own mind – with unwholesomeness. Suffering is an activity that we do, so it is something if we have sufficient clarity and fullness of heart we can refrain from.

When the mind is attending in terms of Dhamma to the presence or absence of things, then we bring forth qualities of welcome and kindness to whatever is arising – whether it is 'here' or 'there', or wherever it seems to be. As Luang Por Liem, Ajahns Amaro and Jayasāro point out, having *mettā* for things does not mean liking them – or agreeing with them. It implies a quality of being with them as they are; then the grasping, or the manipulating and controlling of conditions, these activities can fall away. We can come back to the sense of, 'It is like this: there is *dukkha*.' This direct knowing will bring a path with it, a path of profound peace, freedom and harmlessness.

Ajahn Thānīyā

continued from page 2... of confusion. We don't have freedom. We are not even a refuge to ourselves for a second, only because we give importance to these states of mind.

The Buddha teaches us to be aware that *saṅkhāras* are states that aren't permanent or enduring. We shouldn't build up the perception that they will last forever. It is their characteristic that having arisen, they cease. Also concerning material form, see conditioned phenomena just as changing states of the elements, nothing but nature in the end.

In our practice we aspire to be accomplished in our understanding of Dhamma. But right now we need to train to be fully up to feeling what we feel. This means to develop *sati* (mindfulness and clear awareness). Usually in our behaviour we start off with our emotions, letting them lead us, just like the people out in the world who think their moods are what count. But emotions and moods are illusions that swindle. They are tricky. Sometimes they take us on a good path, sometimes on an evil one. Following our moods easily turns to our disadvantage. We should take superior states of mind rather than moods and emotions as our guide. Why not let being the one who is called 'Awakened' and 'Blessed' lead us? Let 'Buddha' walk in front of us. Let 'Buddha' be the essence that takes us along. Let the 'Buddha' be our guide. Whatever we come to do, there will always be moods, but our practice is to let 'the One Who Knows,' qualities of awakening and knowing, lead us. In this way eventually there is no danger. There are no drawbacks with these mind states. We are on the watch.

Let the various moods and emotions that come up simply be as they are. In this way we train really to be with ourselves. We train this very self to sit and really be there, to stand and really be there, to walk and really be there, until always, in whatever changing posture, we can be called fully awake. We are fully there through our peace. It's different from being on top of our experience through getting carried away with pleasure and having fun. Instead, being fully up to life comes from peace of heart. If there is peace, we are in a state where we can adjust to anything that comes up, so we are always in the appropriate mode. We see things correctly and have right understanding because the mental impulses (*saṅkhāra*) are quiet. There are no proliferations. We feel the *saṅkhāra* at peace. With all the kinds of opinions that can come, we won't start arguing.

When we relate to the world, those people who are intelligent, with understanding and a feeling of peacefulness, they will praise us. But should they praise us, we don't get happy because of it. We don't get infatuated with it. Ultimately, the praise of someone is just a product of the delusion of the one who expresses it. Just that much. We don't have feelings of like and dislike. Praise is just what it is. We don't feel that we need to foolishly run after it. We don't want to get on to a path of being enslaved. If we maintain peace, there isn't

anything that can harm us. Even if others should blame, criticise or condemn us, making us subject to suspicion out of enmity, we nevertheless have peace. We have peace towards the mental states we don't wish to have, which don't go according to our likes. Even they can't cause us harm and be disadvantageous. Should someone criticise us, it's just that much. Eventually it all dissolves by itself. It flows away in its own specific way. The *lokadhammā* can't dominate us since we have nothing but peace in our hearts.

When standing, when walking, when sitting, when sleeping and getting up, this is it. If we deal with society and things in the world around us, we can relate in a way that is of benefit to all. We don't go astray and drift away. We behave like one who can let things be. We behave like *samaṇas* (Gone Forth Ones) and *anaḅārikas* (Homeless Ones), those who are not bound up. This is the way we train. Training ourselves like this is really peaceful. We make peace arise all the time. Whenever we are in society we will always have smoothness and tranquillity.

Seeing it like this gives us an understanding of the way to let things be Dhamma – it gives us a sense for the state where we are Dhamma. If we truly are Dhamma, external things – the realm of forms and conditions, objects around us, and our living in society – they are no problem, they won't make us struggle. There is no confusion, no happiness, no suffering, no delight, and no sorrow. There is nothing that can give rise to feelings of opposition or aversion. Everything flows naturally following the force this state of peace has. Everything dissolves through the power of peacefulness. Nothing really matters. There is nothing to gain. We don't find all those things that we were interested in when we were children attractive anymore. There is nothing about the world that can overwhelm us, there is nothing that can make us go wrong. This is indeed something we could rightly accept praise for – but there is no one to praise. It just praises itself, just like the name and the qualities of the Lord Buddha that we recite together in the chant on the qualities of the Buddha. The praise is intrinsically there through itself.

People who have no problems, who don't have *dukkha* can be said to be free from having *kilesa* (defilements of mind), but actually they live together with them, only that there is nothing to them. The attention one gives to the *kilesa* comes from delusion. If one isn't deluded, one couldn't care less about the *kilesa*. *Kilesa* are just what they are. This doesn't mean that one doesn't have to relate to the world or use language in order to have to speak. One still has to relate to others. But one doesn't let dangers and drawbacks arise, since one's whole attitude isn't one that would allow anger to come up.

There is no anger, the heart's just like water that doesn't have dirty particles in it. The water is free from dirty particles until we agitate it by mixing something in

it to make it muddy. Even though we may be challenged or provoked, we don't feel stirred up since the water of our heart is clear. There aren't any particles of dirt inside us which could be agitated. We keep the goodness of our heart. Praise can't provoke it and criticism can't. There is always a feeling of purity in it. That this purity exists we can only know individually by ourselves.

We sometimes wonder and ask ourselves where this purity actually comes from. Well, purity comes from impurity, this is exactly where it comes from; just like peacefulness comes from agitation, and happiness comes from suffering. If there is suffering there must also be happiness. Darkness can only come to be because there is brightness. Brightness arises because of darkness. This is the way we see it.

To see one's own mind, to protect one's own mind, will bring about knowledge and vision in accordance with reality. Knowing the mind, we see the mind. We see the mind in the mind. Just as in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* where the Buddha points out that the mind is just the mind. He directs us to always see the mind, 'with a feeling of being ardent, resolute and fully aware, having put away sense desire and grief for the world' (*ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam.*) Being mindful in this way we can't be ruled or rolled over by the *lokadhammā* worldly state. Living our lives mindfully, we feel we are always ready and prepared, possessing perfection and a place of purity, free from provocation. Unluckily for most of us, what can arise is the feeling that we are still at a stage where these qualities aren't yet established. Well, if they aren't habitual yet we can make them habitual! It's not that this is something difficult; it's not a great problem to get a foundation in order to get started.

In relating to social problems around us, for example, we build up an attitude where we are ready to be tolerant, or at least we maintain an attitude of relinquishment (*cāga*) and generosity (*dāna*). Maintaining generosity and tolerance supports our mindfulness. Then whatever discontent arises we think, 'well, living together has just got to be this way.' You can compare it to my tongue here; it's normal that my teeth sometimes hit it. We just recognise that when things are together they sometimes don't go hand in hand.

Of course life is a bit like this. But we know how to forgive, we know how to give up, and we know how to open up and invite constructive criticism (*pavāraṇā*) from others. When we live together in a community we have to find ways of expressing ourselves to others so that our living together leads to peacefulness. That it goes in the direction of harmony. *Pavāraṇā* is to give those with whom we live the chance to criticise us, granting them that freedom of speech. This helps us cultivate the ability to open ourselves up. It also involves the ability to listen in an open way, to accept the feelings and opinions of others. Whether their views are right or

wrong we can always see them as something to learn from. If we can, we contribute this openness of *pavāraṇā* to our living together. We don't have anything anymore that stimulates self-importance or holding tightly to ourselves. When we have these qualities it is possible to go one's own way and still create a community feeling of peace and happiness.

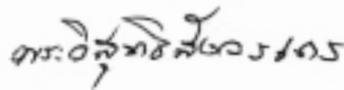
When we live in society, with the things of the world around us, of course there is unevenness. There is unevenness but we can still live together in harmony. This unevenness means that we have to live with the attitude of not taking anything for sure. We live in accordance with the underlying principles of reality. We live with uncertainty but we create a feeling of certainty. There is change (*anicca*), but there is also stability. There is suffering (*dukkha*), but there is also non-suffering there as well. We have a feeling of self, but right in there we have a feeling of not-self (*anattā*). The deathless (*amata*) – the Dhamma that doesn't die – lies right there as well. When we see impermanence, and live with a feeling of being prepared for it, we see permanence coming up as a reality. It is like death having deathlessness inside it.

Seeing in this way the feeling of peacefulness will arise. There will be stillness, total peace in all aspects, peace from all mind states – peace from sensual pleasures, peace from wanting, peace from praise, peace from blame, peace from happiness and suffering. ❖

Dear friends in Dhamma, in the western branch monasteries of Wat Nong Pah Pong,

I would like to express my anumodanā, my deepest respects and appreciation of your effort to publish an English translation of my Dhamma talk, 'From the Darkness to the Light.' May this publication inspire many readers to put forth effort in the practice of Dhamma. And may it be of help to keep up a sense of harmony in the practice between our western branch monasteries, Amarāvati and Wat Pah Cittaviveka for example, and Wat Nong Pah Pong and Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand.

With the best wishes in the Dhamma,



*Phra Visuddhisamvara Thera
(Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo)*



The Great Escape

A talk given by Ajahn Jayasāro at Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand,

10th May 2000.

When I was young I had a favourite cartoon. Cartoons can often capture succinctly something that would take some time to explain in words – though this one did have a caption to it. It was a drawing of a huge hangar closed in on all sides but with a few small skylights. At one end of this huge hangar was a door, and above the door were the words ‘Pork Factory’. In front of the door was a long, very orderly line of pigs, some of them overweight, standing around in the queue to go in through the door into the pork factory. They were reading newspapers and chatting. Up in the top of the cartoon there were these two little piglets who were very heroically climbing up to try and get out through the skylights. One of the middle-aged pigs – somebody probably about my age – looks up from his Wall Street Journal and sees these little piglets and says, ‘That’s the trouble with the younger generation these days, all they ever think about is running away from reality.’ He saw completely irresponsible little piglets getting out through the skylights. But what can seem irresponsible from one perspective can look quite rational and intelligent from another. Of course, if you know what pork is, then you’re unlikely to queue up in such an orderly fashion, but most of the people in the world – if you’d like to continue the simile – are pigs that don’t know they’re pork, and don’t know where they’re going.

The Buddhist attitude is always one of trying to open up and include all the facts, everything that bears on a situation. It’s not a teaching that consists of a number of dogmas that one has to either accept or reject. The encouragement is to look, to *re-cognise* our situation, our existence as human beings. Ajahn Chah said, ‘Time is slipping away. What are you doing right now? How are you living your life?’

What is a good life? We can look at various material

things and say, ‘Oh, that’s a good car; that’s a good machine; that’s a good work of art.’ We have a sense of their quality. But what’s a quality life? What does it mean? The Buddha pointed to *avijjā* (ignorance) as the primary condition for the lack of quality in our lives. Ignorance does not mean lacking knowledge of mathematics or physics or chartered accountancy, it means lacking knowledge of the way things are, what our

human life is really all about. *Vijjā* (knowledge) means taking a deep interest in our human condition, developing an inquiring mind, really inquiring into this life. What is this body? What is this mind? What are feelings? What are perceptions? What are thoughts? What are emotions? What is sense-consciousness? Where is our individuality?

One of the things that assist us in taking an interest in life, rather than just drifting along blindly, is to examine our mortality. There are certain very obvious facts that are irrefutable whether or not we’re Buddhists, Christians, Shamanists or Druids. Having been born we get older every day; we’ll experience old age – if we don’t die before it – and then we’ll die. The Zen teacher Suzuki Roshi said, ‘Life is like a ship; it sails out into

the middle of the ocean and sinks.’ This, I would say, is irrefutable. Human life progresses from birth through the ageing process to old age, sickness and death. But the fact is that we very rarely reflect on this unless we’re someone very intent on the spiritual path.

The fact that we don’t reflect on these things affects our values, affects our choices, affects the things that we take an interest in and what we give value to. The things that we love and hate are conditioned by our lack of recognition of mortality. People who know Carlos Castaneda will remember Don Juan telling Castaneda that he acts as if he’s going to live for a thousand years.



“That’s the trouble with the younger generation these days, all they ever think about is running away from reality.”

He forgets that he's mortal. And it's through remembering that you've got death over your left shoulder that you become a warrior, whose every single action has meaning and dignity. Because your life could end any day, any moment, life has meaning. It's not that life's meaning is taken away through mortality. If we lived for hundreds of years or thousands of years, then where will the urgency come from to remedy anything that goes wrong, to sort out our arguments and alienation from each other? But if we're aware of how short, fragile and precious our human life is, we see that we don't have the time to indulge in petty moods and emotions, silly little jealousies and aversions. When we forget our mortality, forget our imminent death, we allow these things to completely envelop our minds until our whole sense of what is and what is not important is completely distorted.

There's a nice story from the Indian commentarial tradition from two thousand years ago, the time of King Asoka. Many of you may know that King Asoka was a great warrior king, very cruel and very successful. Eventually he began to see the terribly bad *kamma* that he was making and turned over a new leaf. He became a great Buddhist Emperor whose rule was truly a noble one that hasn't been emulated since. His social welfare programmes both for human beings and animals were quite remarkable; he set up places for travellers to stay along the roads and also animal hospitals. So King Asoka was an enlightened ruler (in the common sense), and his wise edicts were recorded on Asoka Pillars, some of the remains of which can still be seen today.

In the story (and just to what extent it's true, I'm not sure), his younger brother was jealous of his elder brother's great power. He dreamed that one day he might have the power of King Asoka, who ruled over a vast empire. He dreamed that he might become the emperor. His dreams multiplied to the extent that he started to think of engineering some kind of coup. He'd go past the throne-room sometimes and he'd find himself being drawn into it like a magnet. He'd look around from side to side and sneak in to sit on the throne and just imagine how it would be if he, rather than his brother, was the emperor of all India. Well, as you know, in palaces walls have ears. Everywhere there are spies behind curtains, so that kind of behaviour was not going to stay unreported for long. Emperor Asoka soon found out about what was going on. He had his brother arrested and escorted in for an audience. 'All your plans have all been discovered and you're to be executed in seven days.' His brother's legs went all weak and jelly-like, and he begged for mercy. King Asoka said, 'Because you are my brother, and because I am a compassionate emperor, I'm going to let you have your

wishes for the last seven days of your life. You're not going to have to languish in a rat-infested dungeon and eat chapatis and water, but you can spend the last seven days before your execution as the emperor. I'm going to go on retreat to meditate and have a bit of a rest. You can take over. You can be the emperor for seven days. You can't leave this central area though. There are going to be guards situated at all the doors and entrances but within the realms of the palace it's all yours. The dancing girls are waiting outside and the tambourines, the food is being prepared; everything that you desire is waiting for you. It's yours for seven days.'

So King Asoka went off and did a retreat for seven days. He came back and his brother was brought into his presence again. 'Well, how did it go? Was it as good as you thought it would be? Did you enjoy it?' His

brother looked thin, white and haggard: 'No.... No....'

'What's wrong? Are the dancing girls not beautiful? The food not delicious? The wine not sparkling? The power not intoxicating?'

'No....'

'So what was wrong?'

He said, 'Every time I'd just start to enjoy it I'd look up and see one of the stern soldiers with his pike and sword standing at the door or at the window. Then I'd remember, 'Only five more days... Four more days... and I'll have to leave all this and have my head chopped off.' The king said, 'Brother, you've learned your lesson and the execution is called off. You're reprieved.'

The point of the story is obvious, that the remembrance of death casts a totally new light on indulgence and mindlessness. Things which had seemed so alluring, so real and so desirable before, in the light of impending death, suddenly lost their colour and were not desirable.

Although Emperor Asoka's brother was reprieved from his death sentence, he did not get a reprieve from death. His situation was exactly the same. He could have died easily anyway that same day from something else. There're so many ways that we can fall ill, so many ways that we can die. This is a very fragile body that we're carrying around, and it's a very precious one. Far from denigrating human existence, the Buddha and his disciples stressed the value of this human life in that our capacity for pleasure and pain is just on the right level for insight, understanding and wisdom to arise. If we were born in a heaven realm then it would just be like staying at a five-star resort by the side of the sea somewhere – but even five-star resorts start to get boring after a few days. Living in a heaven realm would continually be like the first day of being at a marvellous resort with people running around doing things for you all the time. You can imagine it as like a record with a scratch in it, you just keep coming back to the same

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to re-cognise our situation, our existence
as human beings.*

beautiful friends again and again and again and again. You have no memory. It's a bit like that. You'd find it very hard to sit and bear with the discomforts of the cross-legged posture, or maintain any inquiry into letting go of your attachments and unwholesome desires. Similarly in a heaven realm, it's just too pleasant. You wouldn't know how long had gone past until suddenly you'd notice that the flowers around your neck were starting to wither, and that the other *devas* were starting to keep their distance. They'd know what was going on. Your body would start to smell; you'd no longer be one of the beautiful people anymore. Next thing you'd know, you'd lost it and you would be somewhere far less pleasant. A heaven realm is just a *sukha-vedanā*, and the pleasure is just too intense to be wise about it. In a hell realm the pain is just too intense to develop peace of mind and wisdom. But the human realm is a smorgasbord of emotions, all of which can teach us the Dhamma, teach us the truth of impermanence, instability, insecurity, not-self. We have the capacity as a human being to stop, to look, to learn from our experience, and to realise the Truth. This human life is very valuable; we can use it to transcend all suffering and the whole cycle of rebirth. We can respond to its preciousness by giving great care and attention to our actions; to how we act towards the physical world, to how we act in the social universe that we inhabit, how we use our minds and how we use our wisdom faculty.

In the Buddha's teachings we have a threefold training of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* – the training of conduct, the training for the mind, the training of wisdom. This is an education of our whole life, something we carry on right to our very last breath. We constantly endeavour to speak and act in ways that express goodness, wisdom and compassion, and to develop these noble qualities in our heart.

The four cardinal qualities that the Buddha taught to be developed within our hearts we call the *brahma-viharas*. Firstly there is *mettā*, the sense of kindness and wishing all beings well. *Mettā* doesn't mean that we have to love everybody. Even if we took that as an ideal, I think you'd find that it would be extremely difficult to do, to have this emotional feeling of love equally for everyone. But the sense of goodwill, wishing others to be happy, that's something that can be developed. To be able to hold dislike, for instance, and not to grasp on to it, but to accept it as just one more thing to express goodwill towards. Goodwill is resisting the wish to smash and destroy and get rid of, having a sense of solicitude for all that lives. This is an ennobling quality of the heart.

The more we understand suffering, the more we're able to look at it, and to open up to the pervasive nature of suffering, the more that *karuṇā* (compassion) arises. Compassion isn't wanting there to be no suffering. Compassion doesn't find suffering threatening or frightening. And it's not a condescending kind of pity. Compassion arises naturally from a penetration of the

pervasiveness of suffering in life.

Muditā is the ability to rejoice in the goodness and success of others. It's opposite is feeling oppressed by, threatened by, affronted by this goodness. How does it feel when you see the things that you aspire to in your life expressed by others more perfectly and more beautifully than in yourself? It can be quite natural to feel jealous of that. In the untrained heart that's very often the case. But it doesn't have to be. We can cleanse that kind of reaction and meanness of heart through this quality of *muditā*; we can have joy in how wonderful it is that someone should be so kind and should be so wise and should be so intelligent and should be so articulate and should be.... We can use that as a meditation, and see that the good qualities and accomplishments of others enrich every one of us. They do not diminish us, we're enriched. When you can see that then all the mean pettiness and jealousy can just dissolve.

Upekkhā in this context is an evenness of mind. We can compare it to the neutral gear in a car – before you can shift into a positive gear you go into neutral first. We may have a sincere wish to make others happy or to reduce or to eliminate their suffering but find ourselves unable to do so for some reason. It may be that the situation is not right, or the person doesn't respect us enough to take our advice, we might express ourselves poorly or be clumsy in our efforts to help by not choosing the right time and place – for some reason it doesn't work out. When someone shows ingratitude or contempt when we try to help them, it can be very hurtful. In those cases we can dwell in equanimity – which is the recognition that we are all the owners of our actions and born of our actions; that we can't take anyone's *kamma* away from them but we can remain ready. Whenever the situation does change, whenever we are in a position where we can do something positive, we will. But in the situation where action would only make things worse we can rest at peace with ourselves in equanimity. It's not a dull indifference, saying, 'OK, if that's the way you think, you just go your way and I'll go mine.' It's a humble recognition that right now we can't do anything. But there is an alertness and a willingness, a basic generosity of heart, which is prepared to make the sacrifice and do what needs to be done when it can be done well, for the benefit and happiness of all involved.

Sometimes Buddhists are accused of being overly passive: 'They're in the midst of incredibly unjust situations with suffering all around them and all they do is just sit, close their eyes and think, "May everyone be happy.' They think that's it, that they've done what needs to be done." I feel that this is unfair for a number of reasons. Firstly, I certainly would not negate the power of the kind of activity which that view denigrates. There is an incredible influence created by wholesome intention and that kind of meditation. I was told that in California now, in certain insurance companies, they will actually reduce health insurance premiums if you can prove that someone will pray for you when you get ill.

There are prestigious institutions that have proved that it actually does have an effect, even if you don't know that someone is praying for you.

Apart from the very tangible and now increasingly accepted power of the concentrated mind, the criticism is also ill-founded because it's based upon a rather superficial study of the Buddha's teachings. They are very often misrepresented because they're taken out of context, and his teachings were always in context.

There is another group of *dharmas* that correlate with these four inner qualities, and these are the ways in which those inner qualities are expressed in the world. The first is the quality of *dāna* (giving) – giving material goods, sharing one's wealth or whatever one may have.

As a layperson one perhaps has money and possessions that one can share with those suffering and less well off.

As monks we don't have

very much that we can share, but within our community when we do have things offered to us, we share them between us. The intention to give and to share is

important. There's also the giving of forgiveness

for those who have harmed us, intentionally or unintentionally, to our face or behind our backs; being willing to give up any sense of grudge or negativity we feel. And when we forgive them, then they'll forgive us. I think it's a really deep truth that we can experience.

We also give knowledge, skills that we've acquired, things we've studied and learnt that will be of benefit to others. We don't just keep it for ourselves. 'I know all these things that others don't know. I've been a monk for twenty years. I'm not going to teach anyone else so I can maintain my position at the top of the heap.' If I were to think like that, I would be a pretty shameful figure, wouldn't I? But the Buddha himself said, 'I have no closed hand, no closed fist. I share everything that I know will be of benefit to you.' The highest giving is the giving of Dhamma, the giving of understanding of ways to overcome defilements and develop wholesome qualities for the realisation of Truth. So this is the first quality, the quality of *dāna*.

The second quality is *piyavācā* (loveable speech): speech which is a pleasure to listen to, which is a treasure, goes to the heart, is gentle, kind, timely, truthful and wise, words that people cherish and remember. It's a wonderful thing if someone comes up to you and says, 'Do you remember when you said that to me three years ago? I've never forgotten what you said that day. It meant so much to me.' Maybe you have had an experience like that. That's *piyavācā*, speech from the heart to the heart, timely and considered, full of loving-kindness with the wish that the person who hears it will benefit.

Atthacariyā is social service: acts of benevolence,

expressing goodwill in terms of a community, doing things without needing to be asked. So seeing something that needs to be done and very quietly doing it without the need for anybody else to know. Not seeking praise, not seeking recognition, but just taking joy in doing something which is of benefit to the group, of benefit to the community, to one's family, to the monastery or whatever. It doesn't have to be anything heroic; it can be very small, very thoughtful, considerate actions. These are the drops, the 'drop by drop' in which this jar of wholesome qualities, goodness and kindness builds up, just through moment-by-moment seeking to do what is wholesome, kind and useful, this is how the mind becomes cleansed.

The last of these qualities is *sāmaññatā* – behaving in the correct and appropriate manner in any community.

The things that are the obstacles to this are this sense of conceit

(*atimāna*) which is thinking you know everything – 'I've forgotten more about this than you'll ever know.' You think you're superior. You think

you're right and they're wrong, you know it all and they know nothing. This is an obstacle to harmony, social cohesion and to a wholesome atmosphere in a community. Then there's the ordinary conceit (*māna*) – 'I'm as good as you are. Who are you to tell me what to do? We're all equal!' Attaching to that sense. Or there's, 'I can't do anything. Everyone's better than me. I daren't do anything that anybody else might see because they'll just make fun. I'm so hopeless.' This is another kind of conceit. So there's superiority, equality, inferiority conceits, which prevent us from conducting ourselves as full and complete members of our society. We let go of these ideas of who we are, of being anything in particular, of 'I'm this,' and 'I'm that.' We see that they're based on a mistaken way of looking. Can you really point to any particular quality, any particular character-trait and say, 'That's who I really am?' When we stop and investigate we see that, 'I really am hopeless,' 'I really am great,' 'This is who I really am in my essence,' 'I'm this,' 'I'm that,' that all these are just conventions.

In Buddhism we practise to bring the inner and the outer being into harmony. The inner is the development of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. These are then expressed externally as acts of benevolence and kindness, in loveable speech, through social service and by an evenness of expression and an appropriateness in our conduct according to who we're with and in what particular situation. We are guided by sensitivity to what is appropriate and right and true, rather than reacting to conditions and false ideas of who we are and how we should be perceived. ❖

*... just through moment-by-moment
seeking to do what is wholesome, kind and useful,
this is how the mind becomes cleansed.*

Radical Acceptance

An extract from a talk given by Ajahn Amaro, the co-abbot of Abhayagiri Monastery, during a visit to Cittaviveka Monastery in April of 2003.

The one theme that seems guaranteed to bring up irritation in people is *mettā* – loving-kindness. It's an almost sure-fire trigger for aversion to arise to start telling everyone to love everything. I find frequently when teaching a ten-day retreat, people say, 'It was fine until day eight when you did that guided *mettā* meditation. That really set me off.' It's strange how common an experience that is.

Sometimes *mettā* practice is taught as a Walt Disney, 'wouldn't it be nice if everything was nice' approach. It seems to be trying to sugar everything over; to turn the world into a place where the butterflies flutter around, the lion lies down with the lamb, and children pick blackberries from the same bush as grizzly bears. Something in us gets nauseated by that Walt Disneyesque image and revolts against it. Immediately we can't wait for the grizzly to swipe the head off the little three year-old, we want to torch the butterflies, and so on and so forth. We are annoyed because everything is just too sweet, too false in that kind of approach.

I have experienced that same kind of irritation I confess, and I've found it's because of starting from an *idea* of loving-kindness. We approach it in a verbal or conceptual way with a system of words or phrases that we repeat. This can be done with all sincerity, and some



people do find this helpful and get a lot out of it, but for the majority of people it can be irritating or seem superficial. We can spread loving-kindness in a geographical way, like starting from this place and then spreading out from here, around the world and then to the whole universe, or start out with the people that we know and love, then the people that we are

indifferent to, the people that we dislike or dislike us, and outward to all the different levels of beings. This can get to feel like a laundry list of beings, or a kind of geography lesson. We find we're repeating phrases or trying to conjure up images but our heart's not really with it.

What I've found in contemplating this is that it's more important to get a feeling for establishing a genuine sense of *mettā*, of that true fundamental benevolence and acceptance, to make the priority establishing that emotional quality. I see *mettā* is about bringing our attention within ourselves, within one's own body and mind, within one's own being; to cultivate first a sense of friendliness and benevolence towards one's own body. Oftentimes we do this by focusing attention on the breath, especially at the heart area. We work with that until we can cultivate a genuine, heart-felt sense of friendliness and well-wishing towards our own body.

Most of us can do that without any sense of falsity or superficiality. It can be very solid and genuine. We wait and work with that until we can cultivate the genuine presence of an attitude of kindness and acceptance.

One of the things, which if not understood also contributes to the Walt Disney effect of the other approach, a point that Ajahn Sumedho would stress regularly, is that loving things is not the same as liking them. Having *mettā* for ourselves or for other beings is not the same as liking everything. We often come a cropper by trying to make ourselves like everything. This is a completely wrong approach. When we taste something that's bitter and try to force ourselves to believe it's sweet this is just falsity, it's just sugaring things over. It doesn't work. It just makes the bitter even worse. It makes it nauseating as well as horrible to taste.

I have a very painful memory of trying to help out a fellow novice friend of mine in Thailand many years ago. He was French and didn't have a very good grasp of English and he had an even weaker grasp of the nature of herbs. When we'd received a care-package from America with all sorts of different herb teas, he had selected some wormwood and made this into the afternoon tea for the Sangha. I dropped by the kitchen where he was brewing this up. He had an extremely agitated and anxious look on his face. So I said, 'What's the problem? You look really upset.' And he said, 'Oh, it is terrible. The tea I make for everyone, it is wormwood. I don't know what it is, but it is horrible! It is like disgusting medicine.' Then I replied, 'Yes, that's right. It is disgusting medicine. It's not a tea that you're supposed to make for everyone as a refreshment.' Being convinced of my own genius, confident that I was the ultimate tea maker I said, 'Leave it to me. Don't worry. You go back to your *kuṭi* and recover. I'll take over.' So I took over the tea making. I tried putting sugar in. I tried putting some salt in. I tried putting some chili powder in. I tried everything I could think

of to fix it. There was no electricity in those days so I couldn't just chuck it away and start again – just getting the water hot took ages on those little charcoal fires. Finally I thought, 'Okay, publish and be damned.' I just took the kettle and

decided to serve it up as it was to the whole Sangha. I had this feeling that it wasn't me who really made it. My poor friend, Jinavaro, who was literally shaking, had gone off to his *kuṭi* to recover. So I thought, 'Alright, I'll take the rap. I haven't really fixed it but at least he won't get the blame.' I thought I was being very noble.

*We're not trying to like everything, rather we're
recognising that everything belongs.*

Islander

My plans are vague
my wanderings meagre
along the tidal edge
where things become meanings
and praise is just the intent
to keep moving out from harbour.

Here there's no anchorage.
Attention yaws, then turns
on the swell that runs, streaming
to each moment's landfall:
on an intimate archipelago
dangling in the ocean's gape.

And the marvel is a mooring
where all things break over,
and I let the whorl of space know me.
In the brine-tang and up-heave
of this inconclusive ferrying,
life-dreams bathe in presence.

It was the hot season so we were all sitting outside under the trees. I offered the kettle to the monks and they started pouring it out. There was a cascade of exploding and cursing as the Ajahn and the other senior monks each took a mouthful. They spluttered the concoction over the forest floor. I heard my name called out with great vigor by Ajahn Pabhākarō, who was the abbot at the time. 'What is this?!' 'It's called wormwood, Ajahn.'

There was a great grumbling. I thought that monastics were supposed to be grateful for whatever they received. Anyway, this was also the occasion when I began to believe in divine intervention. Just as there was general disgust and dismay at this revolting drink a little pick-up truck pulled up and people got out whom we had never

seen before. They opened the back of their truck and got out two crates of Fanta and Pepsi and a big bucket of ice, which they offered to us. They then got back into their truck and drove off. I thought, ‘Whoever is in charge of this, *great*, you just saved my neck.’

The taste of that extremely bitter, foul drink, laden with so much sugar that you could stand a spoon up in it, has stuck with me ever since. It was the epitome of a nauseating mixture. This is what it’s like when we try to practice *mettā* by liking everything. But what is really meant by *mettā* is the heart that can accept everything, that does not dwell in aversion towards things. So what I find is far more important, rather than going through lists of beings or going through a geographical pattern, is to discover the heart which can genuinely and completely accept the way things are. We’re not trying to like everything, rather we’re recognising that

everything belongs. Everything is part of nature: the bitter as well as the sweet, the beautiful as well as the ugly, the cruel as well as the kindly. The heart that recognises that fundamentally everything belongs is what I would describe as being the heart of *mettā*, the essence of *mettā*. If we get that really clear within us, and begin to train ourselves to recognise it, we realise that we can cultivate this quality of radical acceptance. Even though *mettā* is described as a brightness or radiance in the *brahmavihāras*, there’s also this quality of receptivity that it has. There’s receptivity and acceptance; a readiness to open the heart to the way things are.

So I don’t like to teach *mettā* as a practice on its own but more as an attitude which needs to underlie every single aspect of the practice; whether it’s *samādhi* or *samatha* (concentration or tranquillity), or whether it’s *vipassanā* (insight practice). Unless there is this radical acceptance, a basic attitude that everything belongs, any attempt we make to establish concentration or insight will go awry because there’ll be an element of disharmony in it. If I’m trying to concentrate and I consider the mind focusing on the breath as good, and noises around me in the room or random thoughts arising as bad, then there’ll be dualism in the mind. It will set up a conflict between what belongs and what doesn’t belong – the breath belongs and the noises don’t belong. We may be able to force ourselves to concentrate through an act of will for a certain length of time but it creates the mind as a battle zone. It becomes this purified place that I have to protect. I have to keep the intruders at bay. I’ve got to wipe out evil. I’ve got to destroy or keep at bay the intrusions of noise, thoughts, emotions, physical discomforts and so forth. They become the enemy. What happens is that you live in a war zone. You may find that you can protect your space – your homeland can be secure (to use a painfully familiar phrase from where I am living these days) – but you end up in a realm of paranoia where the enemy is everywhere. You live in a state of fear and tension.

So this attitude of everything belonging is really seeing that everything is Dhamma, everything is part of nature. Everything has its place. It all belongs. Then, from that basis of recognising fundamental belonging, seeing that confusion belongs and clarity belongs, that pain belongs and comfort belongs, then we can make choices. We can discriminate, but it’s not a discrimination that’s deluded or divisive. It’s recognising that if I follow *this* particular track then concentration or clarity is likely to follow. If I follow *this* track then confusion and difficulty is likely to follow. So it’s rather like at Chithurst if you want to go to Petersfield, when you get to the junction of the A272, you turn right, you don’t turn left. It’s not that left is bad or wrong in some fundamental way. It’s just it’s not the way to go if you



Sunday Afternoon Talks at Amaravati

Sunday afternoon Dhamma talks this year,
as follows:

20th July: **Love in a world full of hate**

27th July: **Good friend – great blessing**

– Sister Candasiri

3rd August: **When all else fails – Ajahn Ariyasilo**

10th August: **Death and Immortality**

17th August: **Stress – a different understanding**

24th August: **Being Honest – listening to the lies**

31st August: **Forgiving the enemy**

7th September: **No talk scheduled**

14th September: **No talk scheduled**

21st September: **Believing in the unbelievable**

28th September: **Boundaries – Ajahn Ariyasilo**

5th October: **Gratitude (Gratitude to Parents’ Day)**

Ajahn Sumedho will offer the talk unless otherwise
specified.

All talks begin at 2.00pm

and are followed by tea and discussion

All are welcome

want to go to Petersfield. Similarly, we don't reject thoughts or random emotions or physical discomfort as being evil or somehow fundamentally wrong. It's just that's not the direction we want to go. So there's discrimination but it's based upon a fundamental quality of attunement where the heart accepts everything as part of the whole pattern of nature.

Now it can be difficult for us to do this. We can get very fixated on ideas of what equals progress and what equals degeneration, of what is good and what is bad. We can get mixed up between a conventional judgment of what is good and something that is absolute. We might think progress is good, development is good, and growth is good. And that degeneration, things falling apart or breaking up is bad. We don't want that. But it's really crucial for us to examine these assumptions. Growth is not always a good thing. We can use the power of reflection to consider how much we assume that things improving and succeeding is good. 'That's a good thing. That's great!' If we see through the eyes of Dhamma we recognise that it is all relative, it's all dependent. We shouldn't assume just because something is developing that that is an absolute good. It all depends on how we handle it or what we make of it.

I was recalling today about when Ajahn Sumedho first went back to visit Luang Por Chah after having been over here for a couple of years. Luang Por Chah asked how things were going and he said, 'It's amazing! There is a really good group of monks. We have novices. Four nuns have been ordained. Everyone is really harmonious and committed to the practice. They keep the Vinaya strictly. They get on so well together and everyone is so helpful....' He was waxing lyrically in this kind of way. Finally he paused for breath to give Luang Por a chance to respond. Luang Por waited for a moment and went, 'Uuurgh! Well you won't develop very much wisdom living with that bunch.' He was totally unimpressed. He was always of the mind that it is the friction that teaches you. Don't be glad when there is no abrasion. If everything is running smoothly we just fall asleep. He was genuinely unimpressed, he wasn't just putting on a show for Ajahn Sumedho. 'Well, perhaps I'll send you over a few to liven things up a bit.'

We can have an assumption that everything running well and everyone getting on is how it should be. If it's not like that we feel, 'Oh dear, there's this difficult person. Oh dear, we've run out of money....' It is so important that we contemplate these things, that we don't make assumptions. If you are dependent on success and development, what happens when it all falls apart? What happens when suddenly loss is there, when death is there? Does that mean that everything has gone wrong? How do we work with it? What does it teach us? Luang Por was always stressing that wisdom will mean



Heron Island, Hammer Pond

Here where fish jump through trees
Scattering them in waves of leaves
The ripplingness is beautiful

we learn from everything. Right attitude to the practice is to cultivate a readiness to learn from everything. If we establish that heart of acceptance, of true loving-kindness, then our heart is open to everything. Then whether we call it success – we do a retreat and find our mind easily settles down and we are brimming with insights – or failure: we're just writhing in agony, chewing over ancient resentments, with back pain and anxieties about the future all mixed together with a brimming irritation at the teacher – everything will teach us if we let it. If we are wise everything will teach us: success will teach us, failure will teach us; gain will teach us, loss will teach us; pleasure will teach us, pain will teach us.

In one sutta the Buddha says, '*suffering can ripen in two ways; in further suffering or in search.*' When we meet a bitter experience, we can either compound it – getting lost in fearing that experience, running away from it or fighting against it – or it can ripen in search. Which means that there is a quality of wisdom present that recognises, 'Oh, I know what this is. There must be a cause for this. How do I handle this? What can I learn from this?' This is one way of understanding the Buddha's encouragement towards search. We are reflecting upon our experience. So, much of spiritual training is based on the capacity we have for this quality of acceptance, and the readiness to learn from *dukkha*, from the unwanted, from suffering. ❖



AMARAVATI NOTICES

Community work weekend

Amaravati Saturday 26th - Sunday 27th July. Can you join us to help with gardening and cleaning on the above dates? If you would like to come for either a day or the whole weekend, *please write enclosing s.a.e or telephone: the work nun/monk at Amaravati.*

Annual Gratitude to Parents' Day

to be held on Sunday 5th October at Amaravati. All welcome. 11.00am arrival for 11.30 meal offering. *For further details contact Amaravati on 01442 842 455 or Mr. Chandhi Perera 0208 977 7642 (after 6pm).*

Odd Job Person

We are looking for someone who would like to practise within a monastic community setting for at least a year and who would be willing and able to help out with a wide variety of basic maintenance tasks around the site. *For further details please contact the monastery.*

Amaravati Lay Events – 2003

These events provide an opportunity to practise together and explore themes relevant to practice and lay life. They include silent and guided meditation, sutta study groups, yoga, discussion groups and other workshops. All groups are optional so you can participate in silence if you wish. All are welcome.

Days of Practice – No need to book (please bring food to share) 9.45am for 10am-5pm.

Retreats – Advance booking essential
Fri 5.30pm - 4.00pm on last day.

July 18 – 20	Weekend Retreat - Karma
Sept. 12 – 14	Weekend Retreat - Creativity
Oct. 4	Day of Practice - Buddhist Cosmology
Nov. 8	Day of Practice - A Simple Life?
Dec. 6	Day of Practice - Monastic and lay life

For more information please contact:

Nick Carroll, 020 8740 9748 or
Chris Ward, 01442 890034
Please write to AUA for booking form (see address below)

Organised by the Amaravati Upāsaka/Upāsika Association (AUA), Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP1 3BZ

CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

Lay Forums: The venue of these discussions is the monastery's Reception Room, commencing at 2:00pm.

Sunday, September 7th

Sunday, October 12th

Sunday, December 7th

Garden Days: Meet at the monastery at 1.30pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation write to the guest monk/nun.

Saturday, August 16th

Sunday, October 5th

Forest Days: These afternoons will be spent helping the Sangha in ongoing work in Hammer Wood. Meet at the monastery at 1.00pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation write to the guest monk/nun.

Sunday, July 20th

Sunday, September 14th

Sunday, November 2nd

These afternoons will be spent helping the Sangha in ongoing work in Hammer Wood. Meet at the monastery at 1.00pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation write to the guest monk/nun.

Chithurst Forest Work Month will be from 20th October until the 10th of November. Any men who would like to join the group of monastics doing conservation work in the forest – for all or part of the time – should contact Sāmaṇera Nārado at Cittaviveka. Please include a brief description of any relevant experience you have and also your previous contact with the Sangha.

HARNHAM NOTICES

The **Harnham Kathina** will be on Sunday the 12th October 2003. All are welcome to come for the day which will start at around 10 am onwards.

We are currently looking for long-term or short-term volunteers to help with our Retreat House building project. We are interested in having an overall project manager, and in people with plumbing,

carpentry, plastering or general building skills. *Please contact Sāmaṇera Jotiko on 01661 881612 or email jotiko@ratanagiri.org.uk*

HARTRIDGE NOTICES

The Sangha is pleased to announce that Ajahn Suriyo will be taking up residence at the monastery early in August. He will be accompanied by Ajahn Gandhasilo and Anagārika Jaroslav.

For the time being, the end of month meditation workshops will continue. *For more information about visiting or about other events, please contact the monastery (after mid-August).*

RETREATS OUTSIDE THE UK

Retreats in German

21st - 24th of August. Retreat at Buddha Haus in Bavaria/Germany led by Ajahn Khemasiri. *Contact e-mail: info@buddha-haus.de*

6th - 21st of September. Retreat at Dhammapāla led by Ajahn Akiñcano. *Contact: Dhammapāla*

26th of December - 3rd of January 2004. Retreat at Dhammapāla led by Ajahn Khemasiri. *Contact: Dhammapāla.*

GENERAL NOTICES

26th July 'In the world and not of it' – talk and meditation led by Ajahn Candasiri. Friends Meeting House, Wellington St, Northampton. 12.30pm – 5pm. *For more details contact Bill Neeson 01604 411 581.*

Ajahn Amaro's book 'Small Boat, Great Mountain' – Theravādan reflections on 'The Natural Great Perfection' is now published for free distribution. It is available by contacting Abhayagiri Monastery, or it can be downloaded easily from the Abhayagiri website.

Forest Sangha Newsletter Back Issues
Many previous issues of the Forest Sangha Newsletter are now available to view or download from the internet at: <http://www.fsnews.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. Back issues of the newsletter are available on the internet from: <http://www.fsnews.cjb.net> We are working on improving the site and hope to be able to post latest issues in the near future.

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) 8427-5097

Teaching and Practice Venues

Amaravati Retreats



MEDITATION GROUPS	
These are visited regularly by Sangha members.	
BATH Catherine Hewitt, (01225) 405-235	HAMPSTEAD Caroline Randall, (020) 8348-0537
EDINBURGH Neil Howell, 0131-226 5044	LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY 58 Eccleston Square, SW1 (Victoria) Tel: (020) 7834 5858 Meditation Sundays: led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday classes – 6.00pm
GLASGOW James Scott, (0141) 637-9731	
LEEDS AREA Daniela Loeb, (0113) 2791-375 Anne Grimshaw, (01274) 691-447	SOUTHAMPTON Ros Dean, (02380) 422430
MEDITATION GROUPS	
These meet regularly & receive occasional visits from Sangha.	
BEDFORD David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892	MACHYNLLETH/MID. WALES Angela Llewellyn, (01650) 511-350
BELFAST Paddy Boyle, (02890) 427-720	MIDDLESBOROUGH Colin Walker, (01642) 643-071
BERKSHIRE Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646	MIDHURST Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479
BRIGHTON Nimmala, (01273) 723-378	NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726
CAMBRIDGE Dan Jones, (01223) 246 257	NEWENT, GLOUCS John Teire (01531) 821-902 john.teire@virgin.net
CANTERBURY Charles Watters, (01227) 463342	NORWICH Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717
CO. CLARE, IRELAND Stan de Freitas, (061) 367-073	PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES Peter and Barbara (Subhāra) Jackson, (01239) 820-790
DUBLIN Rupert Westrup, (01) 280-2832 (Dial: 00441 - from the UK)	PERTH Neil Abbot, (07765) 667-499
ESSEX (Billericay) Rob Howell, (01702) 482-134 or (Harlow) Pamutto, (01279) 724-330	PORTSMOUTH Dave Beal, (02392) 732-280
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD Bodhinyāna Group Chris Ward (01442) 890-034	REDRUTH Daniel Davide, (01736) 753-175
KENDAL Fellside Centre, Low Fellside Jayasili, (01539) 740-996	SHEFFIELD Greg Bradshaw, (0114) 262-0265
LIVERPOOL Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427 6668	SOUTH DORSET Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati), (01305) 786-821
LONDON/NOTTING HILL Jeffery Craig, (0207) 221 9330	STEYNING / SUSSEX Jayanti (01903) 812-130
LEIGH-ON-SEA Gool Deboo, (01702) 553-211	STROUD John Groves, (07967) 777-742
	SURREY/WOKING Rocanā, (01483) 761-398
	TOTNES Jerry, (01803) 840-199

2003 – Retreats

Aug.	1 – 10	★ 10 day, Ajahn Candasiri
Sept.	5 – 7	★ Weekend, Ajahn Vajiro
Sept.	26 – 30	5 day, Ajahn Ñāṇarato
Oct.	17 – 19	Weekend, Sister Ānandabodhi
Oct.	31 – Nov 2	Weekend, Ajahn Natthiko
Nov.	14 – 23	# 10 day, Ajahn Sucitto @
Dec.	12 – 14	Weekend, Ajahn Sundarā
Dec.	27 – Jan 1 2004	6 day, Ajahn Sundarā

★ Retreat full – Waiting list in operation.

Retreat full – Waiting list closed.

@ Experienced – Must have done at least one 10 day retreat.

Retreat Centre Work Weekends 2003

Aug 29 – 31 • Oct 10 – 12

All retreats & work weekends begin in the *evening of the first day*.

All weekend retreats are suitable for 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 deposit of £5 per day (i.e. weekends – £15, 10 days – £50, etc). Bookings are not accepted by phone or e-mail. To obtain a booking form, either write to the Retreat Centre or download from the website

www.amaravati.org

N.B. Availability of places and retreat schedules are also shown on the website.

Applicants requiring **confirmation** – either that they have been given a place on the retreat or that they are on the waiting list – are requested to supply either an **e-mail address** or a **stamped addressed envelope**.

The retreat programme for 2004 will be published in the next Forest Sangha Newsletter and will also be posted on our website www.amaravati.org from October 2003.

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.

INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION—AMARAVATI Saturday Afternoon Classes 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm

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

Classes are in the Bodhinyāna 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)
84-3239 (Retreat Info.)
Fax: (01442) 84-3721
Web site: www.amaravati.org
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: community@ratanagiri.org.uk
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
Mailing for Thailand: to be
placed on newsletter
mailing list please write 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
Web site: www.bswa.org.au
Stewards: Buddhist Society of
Western Australia.

ITALY

◆ Santacittarama
Località Brulla,
02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)
Tel: (+ + 39) 0765 872 186
Fax: (+ + 39) 06 233 238 629
Website: www.santacittarama.org
Stewards: Santacittarama Association.

SWITZERLAND

◆ Dhammapala
Buddhistisches Kloster
Am Waldrand,
CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 675-2100
Fax: 033 / 675-2241
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 all
USA newsletters are
distributed from here.)
Web site: www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: Sanghapala Foundation.

◆ Boston Area:
Buddhaparisa, Boston,
Mass. Tel: (781) 861-6837

AUSTRALIA

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

◆ Bodhivana Monastery
780 Woods Point Road
East Warburton
Victoria 3799
Tel: +61 (0) 3 5966 5999
Fax: +61 (0) 3 5966 5998

◆ Dhammaloka Buddhist
Centre (Perth)
18-20 Nanson Way,
Nollamara 6061 WA
Tel: (08) 934-51711
Fax: (08) 934-44220

KATHINA & ALMSGIVING CEREMONIES

All welcome – for further information please contact the monasteries;

Aruna Ratanagiri (Harnham),
Sunday 12th October
Contact: Khun Mac, Tel: (0191) 386 2020

Dhammapala (Switzerland),
Sunday 12th October
Contact: Dhammapala

Santacittarama (Italy), Sunday 26th October
Contact: Santacittarama

Cittaviveka (Chithurst), Sunday 19th October
Contact: Mr Tann Nam, Tel: (020) 8672 5298

Amaravati, Sunday 26th October
Contact: Anne Jameson (To offer help on the day)
Tel: 01525 229172 or by email a.jameson@btinternet.com,
for details of programme, requisites etc. see: www.amaravati.org

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

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	☾ HALF	☉ FULL	☽ HALF	● NEW
JULY	6 th (Sun)	☼ 13 th (Sun)	21 th (Mon)	28 th (Mon)
AUGUST	5 th (Tues)	12 th (Tues)	20 th (Wed)	26 th (Tues)
SEPTEMBER	3 rd (Wed)	10 th (Wed)	18 th (Thurs)	25 th (Thurs)
OCTOBER	3 rd (Fri)	☽ 10 th (Fri)	18 th (Sat)	24 th (Fri)
☼ Āsāḷha Pūjā (vassa begins next day) ☽ Pavāraṇā Day (Vassa ends)				

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

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Closing date for submission to the next issue is 20th August 2003