



FOREST SANGHA newsletter

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Serenity, an Open Heart

The Tenth Anniversary: Chithurst Buddhist Monastery

To celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of Chithurst Buddhist Monastery, the Sangha invite you to attend an Open Day on June 25th 1989.

In the spring of 1978, as the result of a chance meeting on Hampstead Heath, the Sangha were given Hammerwood, some 120 acres of commercially coppiced forest in West Sussex. It was a wonderful gift, and when George Sharp - Chairman of the English Sangha Trust - heard of a house for sale in the hamlet of Chithurst near to Hammerwood, he drove down to investigate....

It was a brief visit on a rainy day in December. The owner, Mr. Hadley, wouldn't let Mr. Sharp into the house: "Just assume its derelict" he said; but considering the ideal location and the needs of the Sangha, Mr. Sharp made an offer. They agreed, shook hands and through the rain a rainbow shone forth.

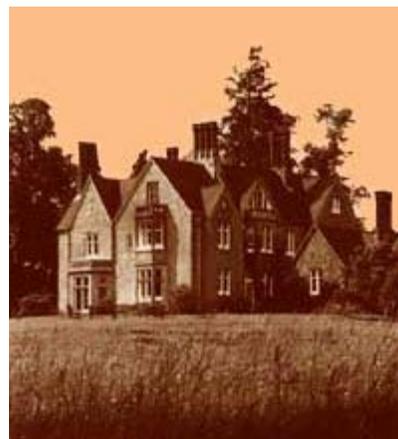
...there was only one cold water tap for washing purposes and the woodwork was devastated by dry-rot.

An auspicious sign? Well there were a few more: Mr. Hadley, subsequently being offered GBP30,000 more by a rival bidder, turned the offer down as he had given his word. Like the donor of the forest who was also not a Buddhist, he seemed attracted by the idea that Buddhist monks would be taking over his property. Neighbours reported him dancing up Chithurst Lane to a friend to tell her of the glad news....

In June 1979 the Sangha eventually moved in and found that Mr. Hadley had been quite honest in his appraisal of the house. Only four of the twenty rooms were in use, the electricity had blown; the roof leaked; there was only one cold water tap for washing purposes and the woodwork was devastated by dry-rot. The grounds were as bad: crumbling outhouses overgrown gardens, and thick brawbles through

which protruded over thirty abandoned cars.

And so it began and much of the next ten years is well chronicled history. Daily life at Chithurst is the same in essence as in any of the forest monasteries of Ajahn Chah: an emphasis on meditation and training in the monastic life, and a steady atmosphere of work in the house and on the grounds. The meadows around the house, previously grazing land have been recently restored to a natural state by the planting of indigenous wild flowers. Hammerwood itself has been extensively replanted with native hardwood trees and is being managed by a lay warden as a nature reserve. There remains one major building project to undertake - the conversion of the derelict coach house into a temple building for accommodation and occasional large gatherings.



The commitment to meditation and the quiet forest setting is reflected in the monastery's formal title - Wat Pah Cittaviveka - the Forest Monastery of the Serene Heart. But that serenity has also been made possible by the many people who have passed through Chithurst's open door. Some have come seeking a place of peace; some have come out of curiosity; many have come bringing their goodness with them as an offering. Whatever category you see yourself in, we do hope that you will be able to come and join the Chithurst community and the Maha-Sangha of guest bhikkhus on the Open Day.



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The Four Brahma Viharas

Ajahn Munindo is currently in Auckland, New Zealand. We expect him to return to Chithurst in April. Meanwhile, here is an extract from a talk he gave at the Buddhist Summer School in 1987.

There is one teaching in particular in this Theravada tradition which really stands out for me: it concerns the Four Brahma Viharas, or the Four Celestial Abidings. In the beginning when I used to hear this teaching explained I would think: "Well, this is not really what I took ordination for - I'm not really interested in the talks about kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and serenity. I really want the hardcore; I want to go for the direct path of Transcendent Wisdom; I don't want to hear anything about kindness: its a bit wimpish really - the sort of thing we used to hear about in Sunday School"

So in the beginning this teaching didn't make much sense; actually, it really irritated me. Yet as the years went by as a monk, I discovered how, through cultivating kindness, there was a new way of seeing the tendencies that before had made me wobble so much - tendencies like anger, greed, fear, confusion, anticipation, worry and doubt. I gradually began to realize the transforming power and wonder of kindness. Kindness is actually not insignificant: the Buddha didn't call it a Celestial Abiding, or a Wonderful Abiding, for nothing.

One of the occasions I remember of waking to the power of kindness was when I first came to England. I was travelling on a train in a relatively empty carriage. About half a dozen people were sitting at one end of the carriage, and I thought I would sit down at the back of the carriage and be quiet. The guard came in and checked the tickets, went away, and then came back again and sat just over the aisle opposite to me. I thought: "This is strange - he is taking an interest in me; what does he want? I've got my ticket ... "

Here, sitting on the train, was this man generating a completely different energy - I sensed that he really cared about me.

Then he moved over and said: "What are you up to then?" I thought, well, that's an invitation to speak on the Dhamma, isn't it! You know, we are not allowed to speak unless invited. and that was an invitation so I said: "Well, I'm a Buddhist monk and I live in a monastery in West Sussex, and have been living in Thailand for a few years"

At this point he interrupted, saying: "Well listen, son, let me tell you ... " and he pulled a book out of his pocket and started waving it in my direction - and I didn't get another word in for about 25 minutes! He obviously had something important to tell me about. Initially I thought: "Well surely he asked me what I was about" and there was a little kind of ... "Why doesn't he give me a turn!?"

But it suddenly dawned on me that he really cared about me. I think I noticed it because I had just been standing on a railway station in the centre of London where people had a different attitude towards me altogether: they had a lot of aggression, and a lot of resistance. Here,

sitting on the train, was this man generating a completely different energy - I sensed that he really cared about me. I left all of the argumentative carry-on in my head and came down to this sensitivity, to his really caring about me. I dwelt on that and I thought, "OK, well you care about me and I care about you. May you be radiantly happy, may there be no suffering in your life for you or your wife, or your children," He, of course, was going on and on, but I kept just this "May you be radiantly happy" going-and I really felt it. And after about 25 minutes he ran out; he stopped and said: "Well, tell me some more" And I started again and he started again; so I started, "May you be happy.." and it felt wonderful. I didn't really mind if he didn't want to listen to me ... "May you be happy ... "

Then we pulled into my station and I had to get off. Suddenly I had this tremendous feeling of affection for him. I thought: "What a nice encounter on a train" I reached over - he was very into Jesus - and I touched him on the arm and I said: "Do you love me? Well I love you and I'm sure that is all Jesus wants from us" He stopped and looked, something really happened at that moment, we really touched each other; a potential situation for a lot of aggression had been really tamed. This is the taming power of kindness. This is why kindness is actually a Celestial Abiding, it can cut right through the aggression. When we can discover this attitude of kindness in the heart, this, the Buddha said, is like the attitude that a mother has for her only child when she says unconditionally: "May my child be happy" It doesn't matter what the child does, the mother still feels like that. This then the Buddha said, is a truly Celestial Abiding and it has a great transforming power to it. We've all seen this power; when we witness an act of kindness our hearts are melted and transformed. Just to realize the power of kindness is a great inspiration. But if we can't locate this feeling of kindness what do we do?



The first factor of the eight-fold path is to wake up to the way things are, to see the way things are, to stay with the facts. The Buddha always encouraged people to be in touch with the truth. Now the fact is, often I would like to be kind. I think it is wonderful to be kind; I think the whole world should be kind. Yet a lot of the time I don't feel, that way. Sometimes I actually feel quite unkind. But the Buddha said: "Stay with the facts." So perhaps, in keeping with the Buddha's instructions to be aware of what is, there is a value in being mindful of any unkind feelings I might have.

So in meditation practice we experiment with our unkind attitudes. Rather than sitting there pretending: I love everybody, I would sit there and think: "I really wish everybody would just disappear." How does it feel to feel that way? It feels awful; it really feels painful to feel like that. If we actually feel the pain it causes us when we dwell in unkindness, it is possible to get a feeling for the state of awareness that is non-aversion. Aversion is a state, a feeling, and non-aversion is an awareness of that feeling. And non-aversion is a synonym for metta; non-aversion is actually the same thing as loving kindness. When we can get behind our aversion and abide in non aversion we have the seed for loving-kindness. So, rather than say: "Yes I think lovingkindness is wonderful, I should have lots of it, but I'm not that sort of person, I

was born with lots of fire in my heart and my mother didn't love me. and well, that is how it is" We say: "Right, well this is how it is. Yes I have a lot of heat, a lot of fire, a lot of anger - but I don't mind. I want to see it, I want to work with it, I want to be with it." Then we discover the workability of our anger; we discover we have access to loving-kindness by going through our anger. So cultivating the Brahma Viharas is not just a matter of saying: "Well I know how I should be" It is saying: "How am I? How does it feel to be this way?" Then we have access to these qualities of loving-kindness, of metta.

Compassion, or karuna, the second Brahma Vihara, is that selfless sensitivity to the suffering of others -that quality a mother has for her only child when that child is writhing in bed with a fever, a deadly fever, terribly ill. How does that mother feel: "May that being be free from suffering; for that being's sake, not for my sake -not at all. May that being be free from suffering" When we can allow ourselves to sense suffering when we can open up to our own suffering and to the sufferings of others - our sense of isolation, worry, and loneliness can be transformed. A meditation that we do in the monastery that I've found very powerful, is to sit and simply contemplate the feeling and experience of suffering. Then we think about the person next to us and sense how they experience exactly the same suffering. Everybody is experiencing exactly the same suffering of fear, desire or ignorance, and the wanting to be free from them. Just as I really want to be free from suffering, so do all other living beings want to be free from suffering, To open up and know inwardly that this is a shared experience transforms that sense of isolation into a new way of seeing, a new sensitivity to the human predicament.

In the time of the Buddha, a mother called Kisa Gotami became deranged by the loss of her child, and would not accept his death. It was only when the Buddha caused her to be aware of the universality of loss and bereavement that she came to her senses. From the isolation of her personal grief, her mind opened to the universality of compassion.

Sometimes you look at the world - you watch what is happening on the television or read the newspapers - and it is too much to bear. It is just too awful so you don't want to know about it any more. And what do you do? You deny your sensitivity. When we deny our sensitivity, we also deny our humanness, we also deny our life. So dwelling on the fact of suffering in our lives, isn't a morbid and negative thing, this sensitivity actually opens us up again, it begins to melt those restrictions and limitations.

When we've denied our sensitivity for so long, the heart becomes closed, cramped and isolated. We feel so lonely and afraid, that to open up to our pain seems like it is going to be too much. But that's just the way it appears; because we've turned ourselves off from life, it does seem that way in the beginning. But if we can bear with it, if we can use our intelligence to contemplate the way it appears and endure it a little bit, maybe we can come to experience a transformation of the heart. Maybe we can look at the world and the suffering of other beings: "Yes it really hurts" and not close ourselves off from it. We can do that - rather than looking at another suffering being with fear and loneliness. and saying, please don't be that way, I can't stand it. Please cheer up." Sometimes we do that when we see people suffering. Do we really want to cheer them up? Do we really want to help them for their benefit? Do we want this child to be free from suffering for the child's sake"? - or is it for my sake because I can't stand it?

Now true compassion is that selfless compassion the wish that all beings be free from suffering, because we're all in this together. There's a teaching which says: "Being born is like stepping on a boat that is about to sail out to sea to sink" That's how it is for all of us. If we lose touch with that fact and cut ourselves off from each other, then we lose touch with life. So the transforming power of compassion allows us to feel our own pain, and to be honest with the pain when we see it in living beings. So it transforms fear into understanding and

takes us beyond our isolation.

Mudita, the third Brahma Viliara, means sympathetic joy. When I first came across The Four Brahma Viharas in Thailand I thought: "Sympathetic joy, what on earth does that mean?" It took me a long while before I could even begin to get a feeling for it. When the feeling did come it came from looking at its opposite - I had a lot of jealousy -and it really hurt. So by somehow allowing myself to feel this pain of jealousy rather than turning away from it, there was a knowing that I really wanted to be free of it. With the willingness to honestly feel jealousy, the letting go occurs naturally. Just as when we feel something hot, you don't have to tell yourself to let go, as soon as you feel the pain of it letting go happens immediately. It's the same when we turn towards the pain of our anger, loneliness or jealousy; already by feeling these things a little, letting go happens. When we have a feeling for that freedom from jealousy, there is the seed for sympathetic joy. We can actually look at someone being happy and say: "I'm really happy that you're happy." This, the Buddha said, is the feeling that a mother has for her only child when she sees the child doing well. If we can locate this abiding, then when jealousy comes along it doesn't get in. It's like a well-oiled raincoat, the water doesn't get in - it just runs right off. So the transforming power of mudita or sympathetic joy is this quality of being able to take a situation like jealousy. which is really awful, and work with it.

So now to consider the transforming power of upekkha. Loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and serenity: the first three qualities, or Celestial Abidings as they are called, are very much heart qualities. And yet if there is not a perspective on the whole process, if we don't understand what is appropriate according to time and place, we might go and dump our compassion right down on somebody who doesn't want it. So the quality of serenity (upekkha) comes from the cultivation of wise equanimity.

We don't have that kind of control over life where just because we want somebody to be free from suffering, they're going to be free from suffering; it is really up to the individual. So the wisdom aspect of the Four Brahma Viharas is understanding the process of life. The compassion aspect is opening up the heart, and allowing ourselves to be sensitive. But if we're going through life with an open heart, and we don't have an overview of the cause and effect relationship - that everything arises depending on a cause, and that everything that arises will pass away - if we don't have that knowledge, then we don't have an understanding of what is appropriate according to time and place. The transforming power of upekkha means we can accept situations with understanding - we can work with our confusion. In the monasteries every morning we chant a reflection on upekkha which is that all beings, including ourselves, are: owner of their kamma; heir to their kamma; born of their kamma: related to their kamma; abide supported by their kamma. Whatever kamma is done, for good or for ill, of that they are the heir.

So the teaching of the Four Brahma Viharas is a teaching of transforming power. pointing to the balance between compassion and wisdom. When we have a feeling for this balance, this Middle Way, then we see the workability of every moment. Rather than life being the continual struggle not to wobble, there's an inner stillness which knows the workability of everything. We can begin to contemplate what is meant by life after death in a totally different way. We begin to sense that what is True Life isn't born and doesn't die; doesn't need to be cultivated and can't be destroyed.



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Progress in Hammer Wood

A conversation between Ajahn Sucitto and Mike Holmes, the warden of Hammer Wood.

Ajahn Sucitto: Generally hows the work in the forest getting on?

Mike Holmes: Well, this is not a straightforward question at all because working on conservation takes a long time, and because growth in forests is very slow.

We could start with the planting of areas and clearance of chestnut. That's coming along very well and our plan is developing. The young trees that we planted are growing well; the clearance of the areas that we have in mind to clear is going as planned, quite nicely, and so that's fine.

Then the conifers: we got a good thinning this gear which should last for ten years. We haven't been able to finish that job, but the two main areas that have been done are fine now, and will last for another ten years before more work is needed.

AS: How many acres, say long-term, are you thinking of clearing?

MH: Well I can't give you an exact acreage yet. It looks like about 30 acres will remain as chestnut and the other 20 or 30 acres that are chestnut now, we will eventually clear and plant. I think we need to keep 30 acres of chestnut. The idea of this is that a certain amount of cutting is done each year. From the wildlife point of view, when you're working chestnut coppicing, you want to cut a little bit each year so you have a rotation of habitat and then your wildlife won't desert completely. Its always moving round from one place to another and you get a sequence.

Where we've cleared and planted, the life is starting.
Insects have appeared and we are having success.

It's probable that a lot of our forest was heathland and that's showing up by the way that the vast amount of silver birch grow and by the heather appearing. However, there would have been oak forest before that. The heathland was caused by Bronze Age farmers who originally cleared the oak forest, so the oak forest that we plant will be the actual growth before the heathland appeared.

Birches are very good nurse trees for our trees, in that any wildlife that comes along and eats the young growth is going to have lots of birches to go to first. So we can expect a lot of our trees to be saved from deer and rabbits by the birch. Also it produces a weather screen around young trees.

AS: Do they grow very quickly.?

MH: They grow quickly, and then as time goes along they become much too dense for a forest, so we'll thin them and thin them gradually, as we do the pines, and then we'll get a mixed forest with what we've planted. It will provide a source of firewood for us in the future so we don't consider them to be the main weed; the thing that is really going to cause problems is bracken, which just swamps an area. No light can get to the soil, its very acid.

This is going to be a problem. Last year we did try pulling bracken, but it's a job that goes on and on. You pull bracken and you may have cleared a little bit, but you turn around a week later and there's a whole lot more growing. Also it's been discovered that bracken pulling, when the spores are alive, could cause illness with humans. So we just have to accept the bracken until someone comes up with a means of controlling it.

Where bracken hasn't taken, we can see heather beginning to take. There are some good patches of heather on areas that were planted about four years ago. This is marvellous. Heather is a very good thing to have. We don't want the whole thing covered in heather like moorland or heathland, but patches of it are great. Also brambles. Brambles are an important food plant for wildlife and they're taking quite well. So this is quite pleasing. We're getting a lot of growth.

AS: You talked a bit about wildlife and animals. Do you see much wildlife coming back?

MH: Yes. In a commercial forest, wildlife is absolutely at a minimum. You've got a state where there are no old mature trees, so you've got no holes: no trees where hole-nesting birds can make their homes. You've got no old oak trees, which support a tremendous amount of insect life and thus food for birds. This just doesn't occur: and in the monoculture that we had of chestnut and pine there was no life. Chestnut especially has nothing. The only life you find in chestnuts are the rabbits which live on farmland to which they move out when they're feeding; or they eat the young chestnut growth round the stumps. But that's all.

But where we've cleared and planted, the life is starting. Insects have appeared and we are having success. The first thing that I've seen hunting over our plantations are tawny owls. This year we've got nightjars, and not just one, but at least three I've counted chirring in the dusk - and probably more. This is terrific, because they're making their home in areas that we've planted. Young plantations are just what they like, where life is coming back, and there are insects. This is really good.

Last year we had nightingales, so I'm sure they're there this year. In young chestnut growth, there are warblers' nests, but they only stay there temporarily. They don't feed because there's no insect life for them to feed on in the chestnut, but there are always a few about. Where we've got young plantations and where there are little bits of chestnut left growing off the stumps, we get garden warblers, willow warblers. chiffchaffs nesting - we're lucky in that way.

There's still a shortage and there will be a shortage of the woodpeckers, which one expects to see in forest growth, but as the pines grow up there's food for them. Improvement came from the thinning of pine trees that was done over the last few months. There was also damage caused by the storm in October 1987. A number of stumps I've left in the snapped-off state. They'll rot and thus produce insect colonies, which will be food -



and so we can expect woodpeckers to find this and come back. This is all good planning.

Because of the valley and the bottom lands which are wet, and the lake in the woods, we have bats. It will take a long time for any tree to become mature enough for the cracks and crannies and hollow places that bats like, but we've put up a few bat boxes. However, so far they've been used by blue tits which nested there.

We've got an invasion of mink, which is a bad thing to have. They come up from the River Rother, and of course they cause a lot of problems with water birds. They get through a family of moorhens or mallard in no time at all! The moorhens have been mostly eaten, attacked by the minks; few of them are left in a family. The one thing that has appeared this year for the first time are mandarin ducks. There's been one successful family of mandarin ducks, so we're very pleased about that. There's a little colony which formed in this country round Virginia Water, and they seem to be moving out and spreading now. This is a good thing because mandarin ducks are very nearly extinct in China. This country is now the mainstay in the world of mandarin ducks.

We have quite a few deer, so that makes the wood attractive to poachers. We can say probably there are about 12 roe deer living in the Hammer Woods. Poaching goes on and there's not much we can really do about that. Gangs come streaming out of Southampton and they will hit a wood and shoot up everything they can find there and be gone. We always will suffer from poaching. The more people we can have, amongst ourselves, about in the woods at any time the better, because if you've got people about, poachers won't come so often.

AS: They're planting wildflowers at Chithurst. Is there any idea of actually planting anything on the forest floor-flowers, shrubs?

MH: Yes. Wild flowers have been tried in some places to see what comes along, and last summer and the previous summer, I collected masses of seeds.

Foxgloves are the first thing appearing in the way of wildflowers, and some areas you can see are really beautiful now with a mass of purple foxgloves on the hillside. This is a start, but generally the wildflower schemes which are going on around the monastery aren't going to work in the forest because the soil in the wood is much too acid. So we've got to wait until the acidity left by the chestnut works out of the soil and then we can start trying to get wildflowers back. It is interesting to see, in the older parts of the forest -on the west bank of the Hammer Stream where there have not been chestnuts-that there's a tremendous world of wildflowers. All the woodland flowers that you would expect from old forest -like yellow archangel - are there. We are very pleased about this, but it will take years to get things like that working in the areas that we're trying to bring back to life.

AS: Is there any work that needs doing on the lake?

MH: Well, the lake is a difficult one. The lake is silted up and shallow. I've just bought a boat which I hope to go out in and dig around and see what the bottom is, how deep it is and that sort of thing. But to do a proper dredging job there would firstly mean building a road into the lake - and that's going to be difficult with the soft sandy soil, and because huge great working barges and dredgers have got to be brought in. When you think of the cost of that sort of machinery, it's way out of anything that we can come near being able to afford. Then what would we do with all the silt that we dredge out? There's nowhere really to put that except to make a mess somewhere, and that's not a good idea.

AS: So will the lake tend to change and become broader and swampier?

MH: Yes. The edges at the top will always begin to dry out a bit and we'll try and make reed

beds. We haven't had success yet but this is one of the programmes - a reed bed round the edge, which is marvellous for wildlife. This is what we'll try and do in one or two of the corners.

I think the lake is as it is. But when you think of it, that lake is hundreds of years old. It was built for the old iron industry in the Middle Ages, and it's taken hundreds of years to silt up to the state that it is in, so it will go on for a long time yet before it dries up. I'm not worried about it unduly. I've got an archeological report for some work that was done in the fifties and it then talks about the lake, the Hammer Pond, which is completely silted up with leaves - if it was silted up then, it's still silted up. That was a long time ago, so I think it's an endemic problem that's with us and we just have to accept it.

But it's a very interesting lake. It takes all the water that's drained off the Milland Valley and there is quite a bit of farmland in there, some of which is this modern agri-business. They use all sorts of chemicals. And of course all these chemicals are drained down. They all come out of the Milland Valley down through the Hammer Stream. So we get the lot, and there have been pollution cases lately. Up until the middle of summer 1987, the hammer Pond did give the appearance all the time of being polluted. There was a nasty-looking scum and the smell was wrong. It wasn't good water at all. However, suddenly that changed. Whether some farmer changed his pattern or not I don't know, but now it's far less polluted. The water is much more natural, and cleaner than I've ever seen it before. We hope it stays that way. There are plenty of fish in there. With less pollution we should begin to see more life.

AS: What about the work, does it require a lot of people?

MH: Planting does. In December 1987 we were in competition with the work that was being done in the monastery. We had sufficient help because it was a small planting programme. We had a marvellous visit from 30 school children who came and helped, so we were all right that way. But obviously when we have a planting programme this needs a lot of people, it's really great when people come along. We have a lot of fun and plant a lot of trees, and the results can always be seen later. There we are-as the years go on, these trees grow up and people can come and say: "That's the tree we planted." That's always a nice thing.

AS: So who comes? Ecology groups, Buddhists?

MH: Well, yes. The local supporters of the monastery. There are a lot of interested people who support the monastery round about.

We're having good success over planting, so obviously we must be doing it right. Whereas commercial forestry organisations talk about low success rates sometimes in their broadleaf planting, we seem to get a success rate of about 95% and so, well - touch wood - everything's going well.

AS: How are you doing? It's such a lot of work and you have a job as well. Are you enjoying it?

MH: I think it's wonderful. I look upon it as my main job. The other job that I do is just the one that pays the gas bills. This is what I'm interested in. There's so much work to do here. You're doing something for the future and it's something that I'm interested in. Here I've got the job that I want. Now when you think about it, there are bat workers, ornithologists, botanists, foresters and many such aspects of conservation. Here it's all one thing. We have a situation where we clear an area of chestnut. Now in that area of chestnut there is nothing - no life whatsoever. The ground is absolute sand, it's toxic. All the humus is washed out, leached out, and so we're starting right from the word go. It's not just insects or flowers or bats or birds - it's everything! We're producing life, we're starting something. We're producing a life system. And this is great. It's the most exciting thing that I think I've ever done and I really enjoy it.

AS: Sounds like it too!

*Since the interview, Mike has retired from his salaried job.



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Question Time

The following is taken from a public talk given by Venerable Kittisaro to an audience of approximately 300 people in Bath, 1986.

Question: What does Buddhism teach about love?

Answer: Buddhism teaches that love has to be understood. We attach to an idea of love: love is 'liking' something. Sometimes we use love very loosely and not very carefully; but to really love something in the Buddhist sense means to allow it, to know it as it is, and to be willing to listen and be attentive ... like when a mother loves a child and the child just is the way it is. The mother can be attentive to that child's needs. It doesn't mean that the mother always likes it when the child is screaming and not sleeping in the middle of the night - but she's willing to be with that being. So the Buddha taught - as I understand it - that the purest form of love is actually not fighting something, not struggling against - something, but allowing that thing to live, to be present in ones consciousness; then one can be attentive to it.

But then you say: "Well, gosh, that seems pretty cold - that won't change the world!" But when you give attention to something without demanding that it be different, that very attentiveness has a profound transforming effect. This is what I found with my own body and illnesses*. For some reason I didn't die and at last now I'm able to go around and meet people. All I could do for many years was actually be with the body, be with the discomfort, be with the pain as it was. I could allow that to be in the mind, just as it was ... just care for it! Doing that can give so much nourishment.

We find in physics now they don't talk about an "objective observer" and "the observed"; that's out-dated nowadays, Nowadays physicists have come around to the Buddhist way of seeing things as a participant". Just in the mere fact of looking at something, you start to change it. Now if you look at someone you love and you see something you don't like and you try to make them be different, You are actually forcing - and sometimes that can be quite cruel. And so the Buddha would say that hatred can never be stilled by hatred. Hatred or aversion can't cease by fighting it: only through kindness, through not hating something, can a condition then live its own natural life and then die naturally. So hatred has to die a natural death. As soon as we try to kill hatred we actually reproduce it all over the place.

We're talking about harmony, talking about peace, but actually haven't even begun from the very basic level.

Question: What is the Buddhist attitude to social work and engagement in social issues - doing things to help, anything practical? Is it entirely impractical?

Answer: There's this idea that there's a great gap between action and contemplation. This is what we're beginning to see in physics: that the act of looking at something has a tremendous effect. How you look at the world creates your whole world, your whole attitude - of indignation, of liking it, of not liking it - it's very much from your attitude.

First of all, the idea that people who are just contemplating don't have any effect on the world: I think that needs to be considered. I know in our monastery when someone is peaceful

that too has an effect on the others; when someone is being very irritable all the time, that has an effect on the others.

Now what about action of the kind that you're talking about? Of course Buddhists are encouraged to be open and see what needs to be done. But don't look too far away too soon. Doing something important can be very energising, we can really get fired up a bout doing something really important. And then the ordinary things: getting along with our family, getting along with our business associates; we can just not have time for that, and then our work becomes very misguided. We're talking about harmony, talking about peace, but actually haven't even begun from the very basic level.

So I say: yes, as one meditates and learns to get a perspective on things then one learns to do whatever one can do. Depending on your own abilities, your own situation, you dedicate your life to being of benefit to the whole. And so as a Buddhist monk I have certain things that I can do. I myself don't go around growing food for other people and things like that - though I think that's a good thing to do -but my job as a Buddhist monk is to learn to live very simply on one meal a day, content with having three simple robes, to rely on whats offered, and to be always available to be interrupted, to be available for whoever comes.... That's just one tiny cog in this whole cosmos.

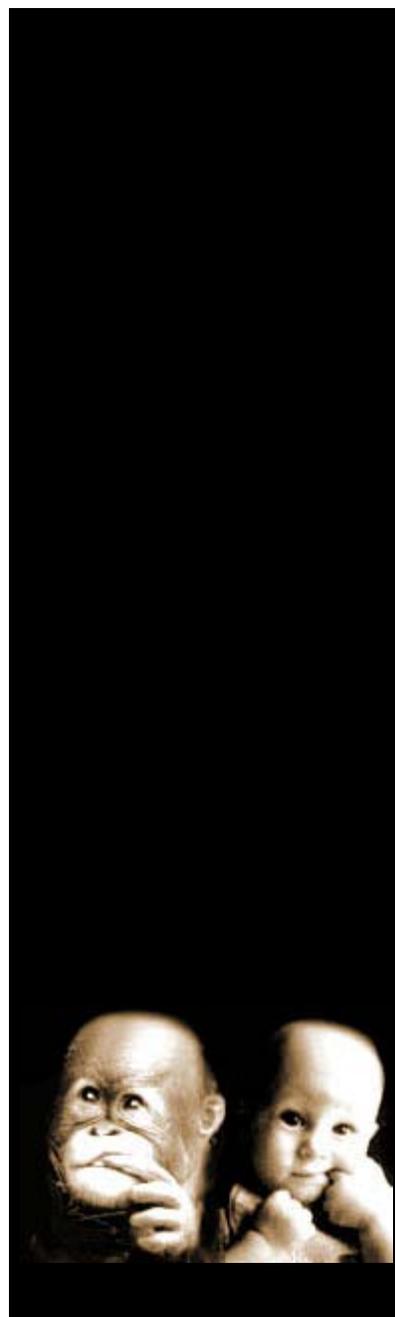
Each person in the Buddhist Way, when they start to contemplate what Right Speech is, what Right livelihood is, when they start to find from their own heart what is the most appropriate way - they can be of benefit to the whole. While doing that they don't ignore being mindful and attentive, because that mindfulness will always see that what they do is kept in balance and is not misguided by Wrong View.

So its a slow process maybe; but it encourages each being to grow up, to use the wisdom that they have, and to open up from being just concerned with this body or this little family, or this country, or this political party - to just keep opening up to the whole. If you take sides with one little group, it can lead to so much trouble - but the open mind just senses

Question: Is it really a question of understanding yourself before you can help anybody else?

Answer: There's a problem in the logic in that. When you write it down in a sentence, it makes it sound like you have to do all that selfunderstanding first and then -after you've become a Buddha, or after you've become an arahant-then you can go out and help people; and before that you can't do anything. Really it doesn't work out that way, both aspects work together all the time. Like myself: I felt really good going around helping all the monks do yoga, helping my teacher, running around always doing something; but then when I became ill and found myself unable to do anything, I was totally incapable of really being at peace with things as they were. There was no real Wisdom, and a lot of my action came out of desperation - desperation actually tainted and misguided some pf what I was doing.

So this is why there's always a balance in Buddhism, and some time for real quietude. How much time one spends being quiet is up to each person -a minute, or even just five minutes of sitting down and being still, not doing anything and just noticing what's racing through your mind, is useful. Then you



can notice the pull of what you think you have to do: the guilt of thinking you're being selfish - or whatever there is. Just to get those feelings in perspective, just to see that those are feelings which are running you around all the time, makes you someone who is at least more in a position of understanding life.

If we wait around until we're perfectly enlightened - I tell you what, I wouldn't be here tonight talking to all of you people! You'd have to wait until the cows come home, and they wouldn't be coming home! Because there's always another doubt that comes in ... maybe I'm not ready, yet.

When I think: "Am I ready yet?", if I'm meditating, I'm seeing that as a thought right now,* and seeing that thought has a beginning - "Am I ready yet?" - and that thought has an end; and noticing that when that thought ends there's peace in the mind. And when I can see that the thought is a thought which comes and goes, I can see it as a changing condition in the mind. I don't have to make a problem out of it any more, I don't have to wait for the time when there's no more doubting thoughts. I just know its a doubting thought and I can offer what I'm able to. So what we can do immediately with just one moment of waiting and of being patient with pain-this in itself brings forth an energy of equanimity and of patience.

So we start with the little things. If we want to be like Jesus and we want to save the world, that's fine. but where have we got to start? The Buddha started with the little things, he said let's be honest, climbing the tree from the bottom, you don't jump into Nibbana, you don't jump into God: you first learn to be patient with a headache. And then one up mindfulness in this present moment.

Question: Is it going to lead to a universal impracticality if we take up Buddhism? ... How do you feel about going into our technological world and making the changes that are needed?

Answer: One thing: it really isn't for me to make proclamations of what Buddhists think and feel - because there's no such statement. This whole Teaching is a path towards Awakening. Each of us is sitting here from a different position in this room, each of us has a different perspective. and for me to tell others what they should do and what they should see is difficult.

As a general reflection, though, I feel that we have tremendous power now to manipulate things and to create. We have the ability to create all sorts of things through science-, and we're beginning to understand some of the laws of how materials (what we call the aggregates of form). how these operate. We have great power to change, to move things, to move mountains, to dig up the earth: send people to the Moon, to blow up the planet. We have tremendous abilities to produce-, in fact our whole language and society there's a lot of emphasis on being productive.

Well, the religious impulse realizes that one has gone too far into the world of manipulating and changing. in the world of making life like we want it to be. There's an idea that if We just eradicate enough diseases with this marvellous science then we'll be disease-free, pain-free, trouble-free, and then we'll be happy. So that's a materialistic extreme. And when we go to an extreme we're always seeing life how it could be. through concepts. There's a tremendous power in that because desire the desire of wanting to make it how we want it to be - is a power that's able to create things. But sometimes it can become very cruel: although we have tremendous power to manipulate life. We still have hardly moved anywhere in our

what do you think?

sounds OK to me.

ability to get along with one another - we're still blowing each other up, fighting, getting separated, misunderstanding each other.

So, many times the religious impulse tells us how to appreciate things. and talks about opening the heart Now when you're a child and you go out onto the Seashore and you look at this vastness, your eyes just go open: wind is blowing in, thousands of waves and the roar of the sea as it's rushing in, and the mind has no wag of trying to manipulate that - or at least, mine doesn't. It's too Vast when Someone's mind is open, you're just listening and watching. And in that state, the state of wonder, the State of awe,'the State of communion, one is actually appreciating. Now that's the state of love, the State of really being able to be with something as it is, whether it's horrible or pleasant. And in that state one is actually a part of the whole thing, one is connected to the whole. But then that can be an extreme too! If you're attached to just wanting to be in a State of awe all the time well. what are you going to do about all that needs to be done? If wisdom together with the appreciation and wonder, then action arises out of wisdom. So with this creation, understanding will be rooted in clear-seeing and in compassion.

There's nothing good or evil about any of these things, be it medicine or nuclear technology. But it's the human minds that are using these things that have become divorced from reality many times. And so, rather than make proclamations about what people should do in the active sense, I'd encourage everyone to open up to life ... and then we start to see that I feel pain, and I don't like pain, and we realize that other beings feel pain and they don't like to have it. Then compassion starts to arise in which you "Suffer with" - you actually vibrate with Someone else. You realize that they're Suffering, and then you're just not inclined any more to do things that hurt other beings. But if you just tell someone "don't do that"; "be compassionate", your whole voice is one of force, one of issuing proclamations, Then you might get people to act the way you want them to, but there still would be avijja, there still would be ignorance. So the Buddha taught that the Source of the whole problem is ignorance. We point at that, and out of awareness naturally starts to come forth compassion, being one with the whole.

** Ven. Kittisaro almost died of typhoid fever during his initial training in Thailand. When he returned to England he experienced a three-year period of serious illness, and eventually was diagnosed as having Crohn's Disease. Since that time he has been learning accommodate and work with this condition. suffering wherever it happens to be and then makes an effort to alleviate that. Yes, its a crime that the world has so much suffering in it now and that we have so much power-yet we haven't alleviated a lot of the basic problems: that's very unfortunate. But the problem won't be solved by trying to force people to do it. It'll be solved by giving attention to it and each person doing what they can.*



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EDITORIAL

Thrift

We undertook a thrift campaign at amaravati in the latter half of 1989 to substantially reduce overheads; it stimulated some ideas that were later taken up by other monasteries. Reduction in the use of electricity was the main target, this involved abandoning the use of electric kettles, washing clothes by hand and - elderly or sick people excluded - rationing the use of electric fires. Ajahn Sumedho encouraged us not to make an ascetic practice out of it, but to use Wisdom, and to frequent heated communal rooms. The sala's wood-fired heating system was to produce the community's hot water and keep everyone warm, and we completed a major work project on insulating the men's from Chithurst. In fact residences with some help from bhikkhus we even had the energy left over to install a gas-fired boiler in the old people's quarters, thanks to some good hearts and late nights.

There's a real willingness to allow our lives to be moulded in terms of rhythm and form by a sensitivity to resources. And there's an enthusiasm to investigate new possibilities: we are currently thinking of collecting rain water for washing purposes. As these resources eventually come down to what the earth is capable of providing us with, we hope that others may pick up on our approach and share some of their ideas with us; it's an area that should concern us all. Oh - and we strongly recommend community consciousness as a means of generating energy, inner warmth and good ideas.

I've got to be mindful, and cheerful too! Sound familiar!
Welcome to samsara.

After the great Magha Puja gathering of over fifty samanās at Amaravati the resource of people is thinning dramatically. By the time that you read this our winter guest, Ajahn Jagaro, will be on his way back to bodhinyana Monastery in Western Australia, and Ajahn Sumedho will probably be in New Zealand after visiting California. After New Zealand he will, go to Australia and Thailand, so we don't expect to see him until June. With Ajahn Santacitto at the Devon Vihara, and Ajahn Kittisaro "on retreat" at Amaravati for the year, that leaves Ajahn Amaro and myself (feeling slightly orphaned) overseeing things at the Centre. Monks and nuns are going off to branch monasteries in Devon and Switzerland, and some to help with the preparations for Chithurst's open Day on June 25th. Then two of the anagarikas will be going to Chithurst in May to prepare for their bhikkhu ordination on July 9th - which all in all leaves us spread thinner than the butter on a cafeteria sandwich.

So the mind can go into its panic - because there's the Lay People's Exhibition to prepare - and there's the work on the bhikkhu vihara unfinished, and the lay women's guest quarters could use some refurbishment and there are the gardens, and the lawns to mow ... and we're getting so many books in the library that we need some more space and more shelves ... then there's the work for the Festival for Religion and the Environment - books, displays, paintings ... and there are retreats, meditation classics, workshops, parties of schoolchildren, people wanting advice.... and if all, that wasn't enough - I've got to be mindful, and cheerful too! Sound familiar!
Welcome to samsara. Where it begins is in the mind: and that's the only place it's ever going to

end. What's the point of practising Dhamma except to know and experience that? So at times when there's so much to do, we have to remember to do very little.

Do just a little at a time and let go a lot: that's the way out of samsara, and being open to the world makes it very easy: it really is too painful to indulge in proliferations, panic, anxiety and self-criticism. So we'll just live to be very sparing with what our minds create, and that's a campaign well worth contemplating!

Ajahn Sucitto



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Inside Freedom

Monks from Harnham Vihara regularly visit four prisons in the North. Here are some reflections on prison visiting from Venerable Nyanaviro Bhikkhu.

On the last full moon day I had a dream. Shortly before retiring I read an article about the Durham "H" wing, and having visited this prison on several occasions was drawn to the description of the conditions there - a description which left a vivid impression on my mind.

In the dream I found myself in prison - it began in prison. I can remember the eating hall, my own room, the area around the prison. The whole feeling of being there was like there was something wrong, there was something terribly wrong with the whole situation. One of the main things that plagued me was not so much the actual conditions - I wasn't experiencing anything that was grossly uncomfortable on the physical level - but in the heart there was an anguished feeling. I was wanting to know why I was there and then trying to accept the situation I was in: being condemned, limited - really limited - having a certain essential part of my freedom taken away from me. I was very Sad, and on waking up the sadness stayed with me.

To Sit in such an environment is somehow a supreme way of affirming the goodness of the heart.

The first time I ever went alone to a prison I noticed some oppressive feelings arising. I could not quite understand it. I had prepared myself and was feeling quite calm and positive, but just sitting in the room waiting for a prisoner to come and see me I could feel a heaviness descending - a pressure. When I left, this stayed for a few hours and I realized that it was a pressure that had not come from within but outside of me - the heaviness of the environment. I notice that now; it seems to be a hallmark of prisons, this flatness in the feeling of the place.

I think in my dream the prison was really my life situation. It was not the walls of the cell, it was not the perimeter fence, but it was the prison of the mind which identifies with the human experience on the level of things, moments, birth and death; the inability of the stuff of the world to touch us deeply, and its fleetingness. This was the sadness which I wanted to shake off. When I'm with a prisoner I do not try to see him in the usual way as a man who has been locked up or put away for breaking the law, but rather as no different to me; like me someone who wants to free themselves from the prison of the ego-obsessed mind, mental habits - the prison world that we can create through our ignorance and through our lack of good heartedness.

Plant Life

The plants in my room - all gathered together, on a chest of

Prison visiting is very rewarding: to simply cross one's legs and sit in the cacophony and seeming pandemonium of the cell block; men yelling, doors banging, kegs rattling, the strange light, the ugliness of the walls and the doors, the starkness and lack of colour, the lack of smiles, the rigid institutionalism. To Sit in such an environment is somehow a supreme way of affirming the goodness of the heart. It is like a great response or gesture that a human being can make: to just turn directly to the heart and be there, he with that, be fully human. In some ways it is very rich and vital, because so much is stripped away from are in that situation. One is - as it were - in isolation: a man is alone with the obviousness of his consciousness, he is pinned down with himself. In the midst of that if he can just stop still and be with himself, then there is meditation.

So often on leaving a prison I'm struck; left with a definite feeling of "How about that?", and it almost brings up a sense of guilt about my own wrongdoings. Seeing someone paying for their crimes physically and realizing that I am equally guilty. I can't just see a prisoner as impure, having committed something wrong, some misdeed. It brings up the shadow side of oneself where one knows that one has had moments of darkness, albeit not serious enough to be judged by the law of the land, but still in one's heart there is a twinge of shame or sadness. There is an honesty about prisoners - that's what it is because their crimes are out in the open. Everybody knows about them, everybody. That's what they are in for: it's been declared public and somehow in that making publicness of their crime, there is a potential for healing. Whereas for so many of us our crimes and darkness are held in, locked deep within, even hidden away from ourselves. Many prisoners will talk openly about what they have done and admit that they have regrets-and this honesty is appealing.

I think the image of a prisoner is a kind of negative archetype in the mind. It gives a chilling feeling. In different societies back through the ages there have always been prisoners, people locked up.

What strikes us perhaps, is that we realize that we too are prisoners: it seems to go deeper than just thinking freedom means that we can run around this planet going places as and when we please.

To know that that is not really freedom; just in the same way that locking up a man is not really taking away his freedom.

drawers.
Protecting
each other in a
nest of still
green.

The young
fuchsia has
greenfly which
it keeps to
itself like an
embarrassing
acne that
everyone can
see but is too
polite to
mention.

Like a
forgotten
plateau at the
top of an
inaccessible
mountain,
photographs
and emblems,
saints and
statues hide
behind leafy
mantles I view
the fringes of
fronds from
the floor where
I stretch out to
sleep
what do they
know of my
dreams?
Perhaps they
mingle their
potted plant
language with
my midnight
meanderings.

Sprinkling
diamonds of
plant vapour
into the
atmosphere of
the slumbering
body beneath.

And If I'm in
too much of a
hurry on
leaving the
room how sad
they all seem,
my green
friends,
neglected in
favour of swift
passages of
investigation
into the
drawers
beneath.

So my five

leaf-friends
have found an
abiding on my
chest of
drawers for
the winter. I
promise no
more than a
moistening of
water and the
warmth of an
occasional
heater. And by
thriving silently
they humbly
accept a
refuge from
the bleakness
of winter.

Once I did a one-day retreat in a local prison; the chaplain allowed us to use the chapel for walking meditation and a room for sitting. In the middle of the afternoon I was walking up and down when a very distinct thought arose: "I'll be glad to get out of here and back to the monastery". Reflecting on this it seems to have a humorous side to it (as some people see the monastery as a prison), but anyway, prison. but anyway, "Where am I going. Am I going somewhere that has more freedom than where I am now, just walking up and down?" And this seemed to display the conventional attitude of my mind towards the prison. It's a place where there is no freedom. So, to find freedom in a place where it's so easy to believe it is absent is a great challenge-and it is just this that we encourage prisoners to do. We encourage them to meditate in the most raw and direct way, no strings attached. no holds barred. We just sit down and do it: it's very real. The men are very direct and don't hold back so much - perhaps because they have nothing else to lose. They ask very straight questions and give you a look, very wide-eyed and deep, as if they are drinking you in and saying: "Who are you? Where are you really at?" And it goes right down to your boots (or sandals) and if you are straight with them then they will pick that up.

Making prison visiting your offering means coming to terms with the frustration of feeling that on, is creating but a small impression on an institution which acts primarily as a deterrent and punishment for men rather than a place of healing. But then how many human institutions are there which incline us towards true freedom, towards that clarity of vision which sees, and knows that the prison dream is just a dream?

We received the following letter from Pat Griffiths.

Dear Friends,

I'm enclosing a request from a Buddhist who is currently serving a prison sentence in Chelmsford, He's a very true and sincere Buddhist and is using this time to meditate and deepen his study of the Dhamma. He's also compiling a book and would like as many people as possible to write and tell him how Buddhism has changed their lives. So if you could help, he - and I - would be very grateful. Any letters should be sent fairly soon, as he is quite likely to be released on parole in July. His name and address: Stan Leggett, MM 3900 HM Prison, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 6LO

If you are interested in prison visiting or corresponding with prisoners, please contact Angulimala. c/o The Forest Hermitage, Lower Fulbrook, Warwick, CV35 8AS.

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A Guided Tour of Lay Practice

Ajahn Santacitto and Barbara Jackson have been working together at Amaravati on an Exhibition: "Lay People's Practice". For those who have not visited it yet, here is a brief tour...

Anyone visiting the exhibition on lay people's practice with a view to casually browsing or merely to being entertained, might not get much further than the entrance. Opening the door to the spacious Dhamma Hall one immediately encounters giant brushstroke letters reminiscent of Japanese calligraphy and framed in gold:

*The way of Buddha in Daily Life:
Living Your Vision For A Better World*

"Pleasant enough," one might think, "but what are they getting at?" A step further and the introductory statement in large bold type already seems to be asking us to make a decision.

Just curious? Looking for information? or, Looking for something deeper?

Those who are undaunted and decide to go on will find waiting for them a wealth of homespun wisdom, generously shared through the compelling accounts of everyday experience. These are people who have taken up the challenge of bringing into their daily lives the timeless teachings of the Eightfold Path as embodied in the ancient Theravadin Tradition -while remaining fully involved in the cross-currents of our complex modern society.

"Provided the laity remain responsive and sensitive to the Sangha, and the Sangha maintain their high standards, all should be well."

Standing reading the introductory board, one's peripheral vision may have already caught glimpses of Bodhi leaves dangling from overhead branches, and being drawn to turn around, one finds oneself face to face with the Lord Buddha at the moment of enlightenment. As an example of many origins; Buddhist works of art at this exceptional pairing symbolically connects ancient traditions to modern form and predominates in a gallery of over fifty 8-by-4-foot display boards. The painting of Lord Buddha brightly shines as the centrepiece of a full wall display, presenting both personal experience of practising alone, and an abundance of the Buddhas teachings which point to a clearer understanding of this. LONELINESS is portrayed visually as a leaf battered by the Eight Worldly Winds of gain/loss, fame/disrepute, happiness/sorrow, praise/blame. From here the Eightfold Path raises one up to the Bodhisattva's position of true ALONENESS. Beseiged by the armies Of Mara, both traditional and modern, one finds the Refuge that is impenetrable in the All-One-ness of the Tree of Bodhi.

"You want to find Peace? When you are with others you just want to be alone. When you are alone, you miss your friends. But peace doesn't arise through being alone, Or through being with, others. True Peace arises from Right Understanding" (Ajahn Chah)

Directly ahead, beneath the rays of a rainbow, is the second of Family Life where one is warmed by the candid offerings of parents writing on practising with children.

"The most important thing in dealing with children is honesty and example by parents and adults"

Then three beautifully creative paintings focus our awareness on the theme of Giving. One of these paintings presents the theme of mutual offering between monastic and lay communities, with lay, people's views on the development and benefits Of mutual dependency as the Sangha flourishes in the West.

"Provided the laity remain responsive and sensitive to the Sangha, and the Sangha maintain their high standards, all should be well."

The Precepts Board seems to share people's secrets on how they do succeed with working with the Five Precepts while Living in Society-and how they don't. The "do's" encourage and suggest a fresh approach while the "don'ts" reminds us of the familiar sound of our common predicament.

"I adore gossip and tend to exaggerate when telling stories. I know I Must be more mindful"

"The Five Precepts are in my experience vital as a guide. Forget them and sorrow and suffering follow inevitably. Keep them and one is able to be more open, joyful, efficient and on the ball."

Ahead we find favourite books and suttas as well as individual quotations and suggestions as to how these Helpful Resources may be wisely used.

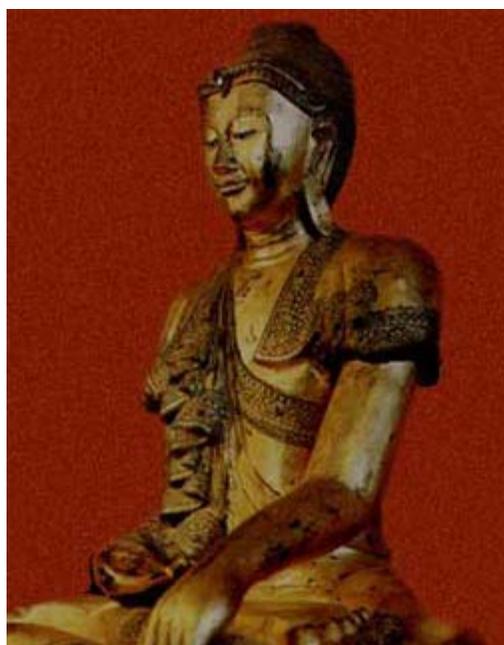
"It can be a problem that the teachings get stuck in the head rather than the heart. One doesn't need to read about suffering to know suffering."

Sculpture, painting, poetry and song form a corner on Buddhist Culture.

Bronze Buddha! Seated peacefully in your Temple of the Trees What words can paint the beauty of the carpeting of these Who surround your loving With the rainbow of the leaves.

Next to that are valuable practical tips on how Formal Practice can reach out into our daily life situation.

"I cannot separate the day-to-day life from the practice. Everything I think and do is the practice - mind you, it is not always skilful - especially the thoughts - but there's awareness and the effort"



Having reached the larger-than-life Thai Buddha image, benignly overseeing this vast array of lay practice, one encounters warmly encouraging perceptions of ancient Buddhist Devotion and Ceremonies as they are being practised today. Is this perhaps a place where East and West can truly meet?

"There is a beautiful energy contained .in rituals that touches something very deep in our hearts.... I think in the West, many are rediscovering the value of rituals which connect us with a deeper reality."

"Ven. Sumedho blessed my youngest child on request at home in the presence of a few friends....

Tremendous - wish there was more opportunity to have domestic milestones gathered into the tradition and practice"

Across the aisle is a pictorial forum of the experience which has helped some Buddhist groups work well.

"Being with like-minded people who do not judge you and do not expect anything from you, yet encourage you to continue on your path"

And last but not least, in a final burst of energy, is the suitably flamboyant presentation of the Family Camp experience with all the little ones well protected by a hovering Tibetan dragon.

"To be within a contemplative atmosphere and to, be among other people with similar ideas on child rearing"

There has been much to take in and much to take away, and just before stepping out of the door, the large "STOP" on the introductory board may again draw our attention, perhaps now finding ourselves more vibrantly resonating with its final paragraph:

" Basically we are all in the same predicament. in recognizing this, we may come upon life's challenge and the opportunity left us by the Buddha -to follow the Eightfold Path. To pick up this challenge and bring the path into our lives is our open ticket to freedom and Truth"

