



FOREST SANGHA newsletter

July 1989

2533

Number 9

THIS ISSUE

Question Time; Aj Sumedho ■
Allowing Silence; Aj Sucitto ■

Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu

Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka

■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah

■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro

■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka

■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido

Editorial: ■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■

BACK ISSUES ■

Gratitude to Ajahn Chah

June 17th was the 71st birthday of, Venerable Ajahn Chah, spiritual teacher of over eighty forest monasteries in Thailand, Britain and around the world. As is customary in the monasteries in England, the day's practice was offered in gratitude to him and for his well-being. In this Newsletter we present, through some reflections, an occasion for readers to recollect what he has made possible for all of us.

Luang Por's Way

Venerable Jayasaro is one of the senior monks at Wat Pah Nanachat. In 1988 he visited the UK as a translator for Venerable Chao Khun Pannananda. The following reflections on Ajahn Chah's life are taken from a talk given at Amaravati Buddhist Centre in June of that year.

My own first meeting with Ajahn Chah was on the full moon of December 1978. I had spent the "Rains" retreat of that year as an eight - precept lay person with Ajahn Sumedho at Oakenholt here in England. After the retreat I went out to Thailand. When I arrived at Wat Pah Pong, Venerable Pamutto, an Australian monk resident there at the time, took me to see Ajahn Chah. He was sitting under his kuti having a drink. He looked at me and smiled very warmly. He held out the drink he had in his hand, so I crawled over and took it. As I returned to my place I found there were tears welling up in my eyes. I was emotionally overcome for quite a while. Since that day I don't think I have ever wanted to leave the monastery or do anything except be a disciple of Ajahn Chah.

People often presumed there would be a problem with language for Westerners who wanted to stay at the monastery, but this was not the case. Someone once asked Ajahn Chah: "Luang Por, how do you teach all your Western disciples? Do you speak English or French? Do you speak Japanese or German?"

"No," replied Ajahn Chah. "Then how do they all manage?" he asked,

"Householder," Ajahn Chah enquired, "at your home do you have water - buffaloes?" "Yes, Luang Por" was the reply.

"Do you have any cows, or dogs, or chickens?" "Yes, Luang Por"

"Tell me" Luang Por asked, "do you speak waterbuffalo: do you speak cow?" "No" the householder replied.

"Well, how do they all manage".

Language was not so important to Luang Por. He knew how to see through the exterior trappings of language and culture. He could see how all minds basically revolve around the same old centres of greed, hatred and delusion. His method of training was one of pointing directly at the way our minds work. He was always showing us how craving gives rise to, suffering -actually allowing us to see directly the Four Noble Truths. And for him, the way of exposing desires was to frustrate them. In his vocabulary, the words "to teach" and "to torment" were more or less interchangeable.

Such training as this can only take place, if everyone in the monastery has great confidence in the teacher. If there is the slightest suspicion that he might be doing it out of aversion, or desire for power, then there wouldn't be any benefit. In Ajahn Chah's case everyone could see that he had the greatest courage and fortitude and so could trust that he was doing it out of compassion.

He realized mere sense restraint, although essential,
was not enough.

Primarily he would teach about letting go. But he also taught a lot about what to do when we can't let go. "We endure:" he would sag. Usually people could appreciate intellectually all about letting go, but when faced with obstacles they couldn't do it. The teaching of patient endurance was a central aspect of the way that he taught. He continually changed routines around in the monastery so you wouldn't become stuck in ruts. As a result you kept finding yourself not quite knowing where you stood. And he would always be there watching so you couldn't be too heedless. This is one of the great values of living with a teacher; one feels the need to be mindful.

In looking into Ajahn Chah's early life it was inspiring for me to find just how many problems he had. Biographies of some great masters leave you with the impression that the monks were perfectly pure from the age of eight or nine - that they didn't have to work at their practice. But for Ajahn Chah practice was very difficult; for one thing he had a lot of sensual desire. He also had a great deal of desire for beautiful requisites, bowls and robes, etc. He made a resolution in working with these tendencies that he would never ask for anything - even if it was permitted, to do so by the Discipline. He related once how his robes had been falling to bits; his under - robe was worn paperthin so he had to walk very carefully, lest it split. Then one day he heedlessly squatted down and it tore completely. He didn't have any cloth to patch it but remembered the foot-wiping cloths in the Meeting Hall. So he took them away, washed them and patched his robe with them.

In later times when he had disciples, he excelled in skilful means for helping them; he had had so many problems himself. In another story, he related how he made a resolution to really work with sensual desire. He resolved that for the three-month "Rains" retreat he would not look at a woman. Being very strong-willed, he was able to keep to it. On the last day of the retreat many people came to the monastery to make offerings. He thought: "I've done it now for three months, let's see what happens" He looked up and at that moment there was a young woman right in front of him. He said the impact was like being hit by lightning. It was then that he realized mere sense restraint, although essential, was not enough. No matter how restrained one may be regarding the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, if there wasn't wisdom to understand the actual nature of desire, then freedom from it was impossible.

He was always stressing the importance, of wisdom: not just restraint, but mindfulness and contemplation. Throwing oneself into practice with great gusto and little reflective ability may result in a strong concentration practice but one eventually ends up in despair. Monks practising like this usually come to a point where they decide that they don't have what it takes to "break through" in this lifetime, and disrobe. He emphasized that continuous effort was much more important than making a great effort for a short while only to let it all slide. Day in, day out; month in, month out; year, in year out: that is the real skill of the practice.

What is needed in mindfulness practice, he taught, is a constant awareness of what one is thinking, doing or saying. It is not a matter of being on retreat or off retreat, or of being in a monastery or out wandering on tudong; its a matter of constancy. "What am I doing now; why am I doing it?" constantly looking to see what is happening in the present moment. Is this mind - state coarse or refined?" In the beginning of practice, he said, our mindfulness is intermittent like water dripping from a tap. But as we continue, the intervals between the drips lessen and eventually they become a stream. This stream of mindfulness is what we are aiming for.

It was noticeable that he did not talk a lot about levels of enlightenment or various states of concentration absorption (jhana). He was aware of how people tend to attach to these terms and conceive of practice as going from this stage to that. Once someone asked him if such and such a person was an arahant - was enlightened. He answered: "If they are then they are, if they're not, then they're not; you are what you are, and you're not like them. So just do your own practice" He was very short with such questions.

When people asked him about his own attainments, he never spoke praising himself or making any claim whatsoever. When talking about the foolishness of people, he wouldn't say: "You think like this and you think like that" or "You do this and you do that" Rather, he would always say: "We do this and we do that." The skill of speaking in such a personal manner meant those listening regularly came away feeling that he was talking directly to them. Also, it often happened that people would come with personal problems they wanted to discuss with him, and that very same evening he would give a talk covering exactly that subject.

In setting up his monasteries, he took a lot of his ideas from the great meditation teacher Venerable Ajahn Mun, but also from other places he encountered during his years of wandering. Always he laid great emphasis on a sense of community. In one section of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta ["Dialogues of the Buddha," Sutta 16] the Buddha speaks about the welfare of the Sangha being dependent on meeting frequently in large numbers, in harmony, and on discussing things together. Ajahn Chah stressed this a lot.

The Bhikkhu - Discipline - Vinaya - was to Ajahn Chah a very important tool for training. He had found it so in his own practice. Often he would give talks on it until one or two o'clock in the morning; the bell would then ring at three for morning chanting. Monks were sometimes afraid to go back to their kutis lest they couldn't wake up, so they would just lean against a tree.

Especially in the early days of his teaching things were very difficult. Even basic requisites like lanterns and torches were rare. In those days the forest was dark and thick with many wild and dangerous animals. Late at night you could hear the monks going back to their huts making a loud noise, stomping and chanting at the same time, On one occasion, twenty torches were given to the monastery. But as soon as the batteries ran out, they all came back into the stores as there weren't new batteries to replace them.

Sometimes Ajahn Chah was very harsh on those who lived with him. He admitted himself that

he had an advantage over his disciples. He said that when his mind entered samadhi - concentration for only thirty minutes it could be the same as having slept all night. Sometimes he talked for literally hours. Going over and over the same things again and again, telling the same story hundreds of times. For him, each time was as if the first. He would be sitting there giggling and chuckling away and everybody else would be looking at the clock and wondering when he would let them go back.

It seemed that he had a special soft spot for those who suffered a lot; this often meant the Western monks. There was one English monk, Venerable Thitappo, whom he gave a lot of attention to; that means he tormented him terribly. One day there was a large gathering of visitors to the monastery and, as often happened, Ajahn Chah was praising the Western monks to the Thais as a way of teaching them. He was saying how clever the Westerners were, all the things they could do and what good disciples they were. "All" he said, "except this one," pointing to Venerable Thitappo. "He's really stupid" Another day he asked Venerable Thitappo: "Do you get angry when I treat you like this?" Venerable Thitappo replied: "What use would it be? It would be like getting angry at a mountain"

Several times people suggested to Ajahn Chah that he was like a Zen Master. "No I'm not" he would say, "I'm like Ajahn Chah" There was a Korean monk visiting once who liked to ask him koans. Ajahn Chah was completely baffled; he thought they were jokes. You could see how it was necessary to know the rules of the game before you could give the right answers. One day this monk told Ajahn Chah the Zen story about the flag and the wind, and asked: "Is it the flag that blows or is it the wind?" Ajahn Chah answered: "It's neither; it's the mind" The Korean monk thought that was wonderful and immediately bowed to Ajahn Chah. But then Ajahn Chah said he'd just read the story in the Thai translation of Hui Neng.

Many of us tend to confuse profundity with complexity, so Ajahn Chah liked to show how profundity was in fact simplicity. The truth of impermanence is the most simple thing in the world, and yet it is the most profound. He really emphasized that. He said the key to living in the world with wisdom is a regular recollection of the changing nature of things. "Nothing is sure" he would constantly remind us. He was always using this word in Thai - "Mai nair!" - meaning "uncertain". This teaching: "It's not certain" he said, sums up all the wisdom of Buddhism. In meditation, he emphasized, "We can't go beyond the hindrances unless we really understand them" This means knowing their impermanence.

Often he talked about "killing the defilements", and this also meant "seeing their impermanence". "Killing defilements" is an idiomatic expression in the meditative Forest Tradition of NorthEast Thailand. It means that by seeing with penetrative clarity the actual nature of defilements, you go beyond them.

Whilst it was considered the "job" of a bhikkhu in this tradition to be dedicated to formal practice, it didn't mean there wasn't work to do. When work needed doing you did it. And you didn't make a fuss, Work is not any different from formal practice if one knows the principles properly. The same principles apply in both cases, as it's the same body and mind.

And in Ajahn Chah's monasteries, when the monks worked, they really worked. One time he wanted a road built up to Wat Tum Saeng Pet mountain monastery, and the Highways Department offered to help. But before long they pulled out. So Ajahn Chah took the monks up there to do it. Everybody worked from three o'clock in the afternoon until three o'clock the next morning. A rest was allowed until just after five when they would head off down the hill to the village an almsround. After the meal they could rest again until three, before starting work once more. But nobody saw Ajahn Chah take a rest; he was busy receiving people who came to visit. And when it was time to work he didn't just direct it. He joined in the heavy lifting carrying of rocks alongside everyone else. That was always very inspiring for the

monks to see: hauling water from the well, sweeping and so on, he was always there - right up until the time his health began to fail.

Ajahn Chah wasn't always popular in his province in North-East Thailand, even though he did bring about many major changes in the lives of the people. There was a great deal of animism and superstition in their belief systems. Very few people practised meditation, out of fear that it would drive them crazy. There was more interest in magical powers and psychic phenomena than in Buddhism. A lot of killing of animals was done in the pursuit of merit. Ajahn Chah was often very outspoken on such issues, so at he had many enemies.

Nevertheless, there were always many who loved him. And it was clear that he never played on that. In fact, if any of his disciples were getting too close, he would send them away. Sometimes monks became attached to him, and he promptly sent them off to some other monastery. As charismatic as he was, he always Stressed the importance of Sangha - of community spirit.

I think it was because Ajahn Chah was "nobody in particular" that he could be anybody he chose. If he felt it was necessary to be fierce, he could be that. If he felt that somebody would benefit from warmth and kindness, then he would give that. You, had the feeling he would be whatever was helpful for the person he was with. And he was very clear about the proper understanding of conventions. Someone once asked about the relative merits of arahants and bodhisattvas. He answered: "Don't be an arahant, don't be a bodhisattva, don't be anything at all. If you are an arahant you will suffer, if you are bodhisattva you will suffer, if you are anything at you will suffer" I had the feeling that Ajahn Chah wasn't anything at all. The quality in him that ore was inspired by was the light of Dhamma he reflected; it wasn't exactly him as a person.

So since first meeting Ajahn Chah, I have had an unshakable conviction that this way is truly possible - it works - it is good enough. And I've found a willingness to acknowledge that, if there are any problems, it's me who is creating them. It's not the form and it's not the teachings. This appreciation made things a lot easier.

It's important that we are able to learn from all the ups and downs we have in practice. It's important that we come to know how to be "a refuge unto ourselves"- to see clearly for ourselves. When I consider the morass of selfishness and foolishness my life could have been. And then reflecting on the teachings and benefits Ive received, I find I really want to dedicate my life to being a credit to my teacher. Such reflection has been a great source of strength. This is one form of sanghanusati "Recollection on Sangha"-recollection of the great debt we owe our teachers.

So I trust that you may find this is of some help in your practice.



THIS ISSUE		HOME BACK ISSUES
Question Time; Aj Sumedho	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu	
Allowing Silence; Aj Sucitto	Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka	
	■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah	
	■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro	
	■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka	
	Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido	
	■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	

Image of the Dhamma

Sister Viveka reflects on the use of symbols and images

For just over a year now a photograph of a much younger, Ajahn Chah has graced the shrine in the sala at Amaravati. Many of us junior samanasa who were ordained in England have never met "Luang Por", although he seems the spiritual grandfather of our Western Sangha. This picture is one which I find quite uplifting: he is seated in the lotus posture, touching, one above the other, eyes lowered; a human complete in the stillness of his own being. This seated figure the outline of a pyramid symbolic of the protection of goodness; the black and white photograph has a distinct radiance - the light of purity, intense white. The beauty of this image affects my own mind, as a sense of joy in spiritual beauty, provides a boost of energy which can be a great help in times of darkness.

Both images have their place: the beauty of selfless
spiritual serenity, and the decaying body

Occasionally we hear stories of time spent with Luang Por and one gets an inkling of the compassion and humour of his being - which could express itself quite forcibly by all accounts! I have also heard people who knew him well say they feel that his illness is a final teaching to us. One senior monk shared something which happened when he visited Thailand and had the opportunity to spend some time with Luang Por.

He helped with nursing and looking after Luang Por's now sensitive body, which has no further means of communication or independent action. When the time came to leave he suddenly realized just how attached he was to Luang Por, and was overwhelmed with a sense of sorrow and grief, both at seeing him in this state and at the thought of leaving him. One of the most senior Thai disciples gave this reflection - that is not Luang Por Chah, 'that is an old sick body. Do you really think Luang Por is that? The monk said he was truly grateful.

Both images have their place: the beauty of selfless spiritual serenity, and the decaying body - helpless in old age and sickness. As human beings, old age is our common and inescapable inheritance. Yet a place of unity is also found whenever we align ourselves to goodness and truth.

Following Ajahn Chah's Dhamma teaching a whole Sangha of Western disciples headed by Ajahn Sumedho has grown re-seeded here in England, nurtured by Luang Por's support. Perhaps as you read this Newsletter you could reflect that it is very much due to him, and his effort to understand the Buddha's teaching and teach it to others, that there is anything to read now.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka ■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah ■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro ■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido ■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	HOME ■ BACK ISSUES ■
-------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

Living in the World with Dhamma

A translation of an informal talk given by Ajahn Chah to a group of visitors to Wat Nong Pah Pong.

Most people still don't know the heart of dhamma practice. They think that walking meditation, sitting meditation and listening to Dhamma talks are the practice. That's true, too, but these are only the outer forms of practice. The real practice occurs where the mind encounters a sense object. That's the place to practise, at the point where sense contact occurs. For instance, when people say things we don't like, resentment arises. If they say something we like, we experience pleasure: now this is the place to practise. How are we going to practise with these things? This is the important point. If you just go chasing after happiness and run away from unpleasantness you can go on practising like that until the day you die, and never see the Dhamma. This is useless. When pleasure and pain arise, how are we going to use Dhamma to be free of them? This is the point of practice.

Where confusion arises, that's where peace can arise. Where there is confusion we penetrate with wisdom, and there is peace.

Some people cannot accept criticism: they are very conceited. Instead they turn around and argue - especially so with children. Actually there may be something in what the children say, but if you happen to be their mother, you can't give in. Perhaps you are a teacher and your students may say something you didn't know before. It may be true; but because you are their teacher you can't listen, you even dispute it. Thinking like this is not right.

In the time of the Buddha there was one disciple who was very wise. At one time while the Buddha was instructing the monks on the Dhamma, he turned to this monk and said: "Sariputta, do you believe this?"

We study in the natural way; be it a sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile or mental impression, we should listen to it all.

Then Sariputta replied: "I don't yet believe it."

The Buddha liked his answer. He said: "Oh, that's very good, Sariputta. You are one who is endowed with wisdom. One who is endowed with wisdom should not believe too readily. They should listen openmindedly, and then consider the validity of that matter before believing or disbelieving."

Now this is a fine example of good Dhamma practice for a teacher. What Sariputta said was true, he simply spoke his true feeling. Some people would feel that to say that one didn't believe would be like questioning the Buddha's authority. They would be afraid to say such a thing; they'd simply go ahead and agree.

The world is like this, but the Buddha said that you needn't be ashamed of those things which aren't wrong or bad. It's not wrong to say you don't yet believe what you don't believe, so when Venerable Sariputta said: "I don't believe it," the Buddha praised him: "This monk has much wisdom. He carefully considers before believing anything" This is the right course for one who is a teacher of others. Sometimes you can learn things from small children. Don't blindly cling to positions of authority.

Whether we are standing, walking around or sitting in various places, these are the times when we can study the things around us. We study in the natural way; be it a sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile or mental impression, we should listen to it all.

A wise person considers them all. In the real practice the adept practises to the point where there is nothing on his mind. *

**Literally "No more stories/business"*

If we still don't understand like and dislike as they arise -as they really are - there is still something on our minds. If we know the truth of these things, we know that "Oh, this liking here ... there's nothing to it, It's just a feeling that arises and passes away." What else do you expect from feelings? If we think that pleasure is ours, suffering is ours, then we're in for trouble-we never get beyond the point of having some business or other on our minds. And these problems feed each other in an endless chain. This is how things are for most people.

People tend to be like this, they don't appreciate the value of Dhamma, they don't talk about the Truth. If one talks the Truth, people even take exception. They say things like: "Oh, he doesn't know the right time and place. He doesn't know how to speak nicely" -or whatever. But when people speak the Truth, one should listen. When speaking Dhamma the true master doesn't simply speak from memory, he speaks the Truth. People in the world usually speak from memory and usually in such a way to exalt themselves. The true monk doesn't talk like that. He talks about the Truth, the way things are.

Even monks these days are like this. I've heard some of them say: "I haven't become a monk to practise, I only became a monk to study" These are the words of one who has cut off the path of Dhamma practice. There is no way, it's finished, the end of the path. When they teach, they teach only from memory. Maybe they say one thing but their minds are in quite a different place. They only teach according to their memories, they don't teach to reveal the Truth.

The way of the world is like this. If one doesn't live in that way and instead lives simply, practising the Dhamma and living at peace, they say one is weird, not like other people. They say people like this get in the way of progress in the world, in society. They even harass them. So a good person may start to feel there's something wrong with him and revert to following worldly ways. He gets sunk deeper and deeper in the world until he can't find the way out. You get the situation which brings People to say: "Oh, I can't get out now, I'm sunk in too deeply."

People these days think too much. There are too many things for them to get interested in but none of them leads to any completion.

Suppose we had a cart, and an ox to pull it. The wheels aren't long, but the tracks are. As long as the ox pulls the cart the tracks will follow. The wheels are round yet the tracks are long. Just looking at the stationary cart one couldn't see anything long about it, but once the ox starts pulling the cart, we see the tracks stretching out behind us. As long as the ox keeps pulling, the wheels keep turning; but there comes a day when the ox gets tired and throws off its harness. The ox walks off and the cart is left there. The wheels no longer turn. In time the

cart falls apart. Its constituent parts go back into the four elements: earth, water, wind and fire.

People who follow the world are the same. If one were to search within the world for peace one would go on and on like the cart-wheel tracks without end. As long as we follow the world there is no stopping, no rest. If we simply stop following it, the cart - wheels no longer turn. There is stopping right there. Following the world ceaselessly, the tracks go on. Creating bad kamma is like this. As long as we continue to follow the old ways, there is no stopping. If we stop, then there is stopping. This is the practice of Dhamma.

If we really understand the practice of Dhamma then, no matter what profession or position we may have in life - be it a teacher, doctor, government worker or whatever - we are training in the Dhamma every minute of the day. People think that one can't practise as a lay person. This is to be totally scattered and to lose the path completely. If one has sufficient desire to do something, one can do it. Some say: "I can't practise Dhamma, I haven't got the time"

I say: "Then how come you've got time to breathe?"

This is the point. How do they get the time to breathe? Breathing is something vital to people's lives. If you see that Dhamma practice is vital to your life then you will feel that breathing and practising the Dhamma are equally important. This practice of Dhamma isn't something you have to go running around for or expending a whole lot of energy on in order to do. You simply look at the various feelings which arise in your mind. When the ego sees form, ear hears 'sound, nose smells an odour, tongue tastes a flavour, and so on, they all come to this one mind, the "One Who Knows".

Now when the mind recognizes those things, what happens? If liking for that object arises we experience pleasure, if dislike arises we experience displeasure. That's all there is to it. So now, living in this world, where can one find happiness? Do you want everybody in the world to speak only things which are pleasant and agreeable to you all your life? Is that possible? It's not. If its not possible then where are you going to go? The world is simply like this, so the Buddha said "lokavidu"- know the Truth of this world. The world is something we should understand clearly.

The value of Dhamma isn't to be found in the books where they tell us about this and that. This is just the external aspect of Dhamma, it's not the knowledge that arises from deep within our own mind. If we have profound understanding we realize our own mind, we see the Truth there. When the Truth becomes apparent within us it cuts off the flow of delusion.

These days people don't search for the Truth. These days people study simply in order to find the knowledge necessary to make a living, raise their families and look after themselves, that's all.

They study for a livelihood. Students nowadays have much more knowledge than students of previous time's. They have all the requisites at their disposal, everything is more convenient. They have more knowledge than before, yet people these days also have a lot more confusion than before, they have more suffering than before, Why is this? Because they only look for that knowledge which is useful in earning a living.



THIS ISSUE		HOME BACK ISSUES
	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu	■
	Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka	■
Question Time; Aj Sumedho	■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah	■
Allowing Silence; Aj Sucitto	■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro	■
	■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka	■
	Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido	■
	■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	■

Part of the Lineage: Part I

Ajahn Jagaro, the abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Australia, was a guest at Amaravati during the Winter 1988-89, Before he returned, he passed on some informal comments in an interview with Ajahn Sucitto.

Ajahn Sucitto:

What do you see are the similarities and the differences between the British monasteries and Bodhinyana?

Ajahn Jagaro:

Ajahn Sumedho and myself were established in the forest monastery tradition in Thailand, and in both cases found ourselves ending up in city settings which were unsuitable for the spiritual health of the Sangha. The differences which arise are in how it has developed, due to the physical situation of each country. Perth is small city; it is easy to get permission to build, and the climatic conditions lend themselves to a forest monastery similar to the monasteries in Thailand. So we evolved in that direction. But the need for Western teaching made it obvious that we'd have to maintain a centre in the city.

We tend to keep to the Thai form, because we have a very strong Thai community supporting us, because we're close to Thailand and because we have Thai monks visiting us.

Here in England the conditions are very different. The situation lends itself to something like Chithurst: an old place that you do up. That means that the community has to live together under one roof and the monastic life style is considerably different from Thailand. There is an emphasis on meetings, and on community spirit. The climatic conditions are also very different here, requiring adaptations of dress: You need socks, boots and hats and jackets.

Going back to a traditional situation you see the beauty
of gratitude, the beauty of respect, the beauty of
generosity.

AS:

Here you've got every kind of Buddhist convention and tradition, as well as many that are of no specific tradition. There are certain tensions with the conventions, because not everybody wants the Thai Theravada.

AJ:

Buddhism itself has been in England for so long. There has to be a much more ecumenical approach than we've had in Perth. Also you've got one million people in Perth and that's all, for two or three thousand kilometres around you; whereas in England you've got 50 million people and then the great population of Europe. This sense of being just a very small group - only a couple of monks for the first three years - and an outpost, tends to make us more cautious. The monastery doesn't want to become too radical because that cuts you off even

more!

AS:

You live comparatively close to Thailand and you go there yourself every year or so. Do you see any advantage in being able to go back to a traditional situation?

AJ:

I certainly see great advantage in the exchange of monks between the different places so that they see slightly different situations in different countries. Going back to Thailand is an experience that can be very valuable for monks. It brought home to me that I was part of the big Sangha, the tradition, and that has a tremendous strength. It always gave me a reflection on what we were doing in Perth, and also how we were forgetting and maybe losing some useful things.

AS:

Such as?

AJ:

Well, in the monastic form some of the emphasis on what we call acariyavatta - and respect to seniority. Also that separation between the laity and the monks: sometimes its a beneficial thing to keep that, rather than just becoming "buddies". Going back to a traditional situation you see the beauty of gratitude, the beauty of respect, the beauty of generosity, and you remember how there are good things to encourage. The refuge of Sangha is needed for the monks and nuns - maybe one can go over-board with the propagation of Buddhism.

I think for any monk, going back to Thailand is a useful way of re-establishing oneself as part of this lineage. It's not just your thing - you're a disciple of Ajahn Chah and you're part of the Sangha as a whole.

**The duties of attendance on a senior monk.*



THIS ISSUE		HOME BACK ISSUES
	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu	■
	Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka	■
Question Time; Aj Sumedho	■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah	■
Allowing Silence; Aj Sucitto	■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro	■
	■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka	■
	Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido	■
	■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	■

What is the Devon Vihara?

Here are a few reflections from Supanno and Pasadaka, supporters of the vihara in Devon.

When one leaves the city or large town and moves to the country to be "near the vihara", one tends to take for granted that one just slips into being part of the "vihara and its people". But what is the Devon Vihara, and who are its people?

Starting from the humblest of beginnings in 1983, one monk and an anagarika bravely took up residence in an appallingly run - down, dilapidated "chalet-bungalow" at Raymonds Hill, near Axminster. The "building" was hardly inspiring - but the Sangha presence and the response to it certainly was. Some two and a half years later, the Devon Vihara moved to the still unpretentious but comfortably solid and homely Odle Cottage, near Upottery. But the vihara is not so much a place as a spiritual focus - not dependent on the building or its surroundings - the outstandingly beautiful countryside, winding narrow lanes abounding in wild life, and the little forest nearby but naturally interwoven with them.

There is a feeling of belonging, a sense of being part of something very important, where one can give according to one's means, talents, time and energy.

Of course the vihara is essentially where the monks and anagarikas live and practise, and where by their teaching, reflection and example, they interact with lay people - whether they be followers or interested enquirers, local villagers or passers-by. It is not dependent on any individual monk or monks, though it naturally reflects very much the ideas and personal preferences of the senior monk. There's something very reassuring about the compactness and familiarity of the small vihara; one has a sense of "home from home", and takes a special interest in all that is going on. We learn to accept the many changes that have to take place. At first we may feel a sense of loss or disappointment as monks and anagarikas are exchanged, but in fact this helps link us with the larger Sangha family, when we visit the other monasteries and meet up again with those who have spent time with us here. There's a special feeling too, as we see anagarikas go forward for acceptance as bhikkhus, and remember them as Devon's Brent, David, Jakob, Bill....

Some half dozen Buddhist groups spread over four counties meet regularly and maintain close connections with the vihara, receiving teaching from the Sangha. Several retreats are held each year - at nearby Golden Square, at Sharpham House near Totnes, and Resugga Farm in Cornwall. All this in addition to prison visits, baby blessings, house blessings and wedding blessings and the many personal visits and interviews in the normal course of events.

All kinds of people come and go at the vihara - we see travellers from many parts of the world who call in "in passing" (how do they find it?). Sometimes they stay for a few days, in one of the two caravans on the "stupa" lawn. They seem amazed and touched to find a real live

working monastery, faithfully following the ancient Theravadin traditions, tucked away in the heart of the English countryside, drawing to it love and support from ordinary people all over the South-West and beyond.

What is it like to be a lay supporter, part of the support group of a small vihara? The term "support group" is often misunderstood, for it's not anything one joins in a formal way; it really comprises all supporters - everyone who consciously makes effort to help the Sangha, the vihara and each other. There is a feeling of belonging, a sense of being part of something very important, where one can give according to one's means, talents, time and energy. With this participation comes an open circle of friends: people who - because they are practising on the same path - are willing to allow one to be oneself, willing to forgive and forget any misunderstandings, seeing them all as the empty sankharas that they are. It's a group that one can always come back to - no matter what happens - because even when there are difficulties, we can use them, welcoming them as opportunities for learning and growth. Knowing that the monks and anagarikas have to work with just the same things, we can take heart as well as guidance from their example.

During the Ajahn's absences the vihara assumes a rather lower key, but the practice and helpful teaching continues, the slight shift in emphasis seemingly comfortably accommodated. But there is, naturally, a sense of loss when all the Sangha are absent together. True, many of the lay supporters know each other well; however - perhaps because of the smallness of the cottage reception room - there is seldom much opportunity for Dhamma discussion among lay people such as at Chithurst or in the sala at Amaravati, so then the focus is more on practical work and gathering for meditation.

When the Sangha is absent on tudong, there's a real involvement in that for lay supporters, and everyone takes a keen interest in their progress - how they're faring with the weather, are they keeping well, getting enough to - eat, finding places to stay, and so on. Suddenly the awareness of one's responsibility to support becomes sharper and the phone rings non - stop at the homes of the coordinators! There's great excitement for those who go out in search of the bhikkhus, with a car - boot full of food to offer at some hopefully recognizable rendezvous spot. It always feels a special privilege to join the monks and anagarikas away from home, and to sit with them as they recount their adventures so far.

Celebration days at the Devon Vihara are usually very well attended -an expression of faith and of spiritual togetherness, a sense of "big things" beginning to happen here. One's practice and energy receive a great lift; but we are very content too with the ordinary quiet times for, as is the nature of such celebratory events, they pass into the memory just the same as any other day!

So the Devon Vihara is many things to many people in many places. The few lay Buddhists whose vision, commitment and dedicated hard work first helped bring it into being are still very much at the heart of its life and administration. That heart - the spirit of Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha - is really how the vihara and its people came to be.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka ■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah ■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro ■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido ■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	HOME ■ BACK ISSUES ■
-------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

Out on a Limb

Venerable Kovido recollects his time as a newly-ordained bhikkhu in Devon.

Having spent several months at Amaravati, one of the questions I find that I am often asked is: "What is it like to live in a small vihara?" So having spent 18 months in the Devon Vihara, I thought I would try to jot down a few points.

Firstly, for the time that I was there, the senior monk was Ajahn Kittisaro. As the focal point he gave his imprint to the routine and the feeling of the vihara, and so, not surprisingly, many people who were attracted by his teaching were supporters of Ajahn Kittisaro, rather than Buddhism or the Devon Vihara. However, as with many teachers, the greatest teaching occurs when they move on and one discovers whether one has absorbed the point of their teaching or not.

Secondly, being a small vihara - three monks and two anagarikas - and because of limited space, relationships with people get quite personal. Some have described it as like being in a pressure cooker. Other people seemed to like it, including myself - but then, not having much energy, maybe I needed that pressure to heat up to normal. At Amaravati there is the space both for the monastic community and for lay visitors - to disappear, to be one of the crowd; at Devon there isn't. There is a lot of opportunity for meeting - gruel time and tea time being group events where the lag people are about ten feet away, at the most. In Amaravati it sometimes seems that you need a telescope or loudspeaker to make contact with people; at Devon you would have to make a special effort not to!

People can easily fall in and out of love with the vihara
or the monks; but in staying with the love and hate, a
lot can be learnt.

It can be quite demanding being in a small vihara because, although there's not so much work, there are fewer of you to do it and a lot of the day is spent in talking to people; this can be inspiring or bread war, baked by that person; you had seen them put it in your bowl when you went on almsround; and you know who pays your bills. This is perhaps one of the unique flavours of the Devon Vihara. Due to its position on Hartridge there are five or six villages within easy walking distance for almsround. Of the many almsrounds, quite a few are to people who aren't Buddhist, don't meditate and rarely come to the vihara; but they invite the monks to come and have a cup of tea and a chat, and like to support "the monks up on the hill". I remember one conversation with an elderly lady, which started on the topic of why we don't work for a living or grow our own food: "You know we couldn't live like that - being waited on by other people, mildly telling us off. "Now you must have some more cake and tea, and remind me to give you some bread that I've made for you, before you go!"

The concern is not only for our physical welfare, but also they let us know how something we are doing or thinking of doing would be viewed in the area. Even though one might not notice,

people watch us: "You stay up late, don't you", said one chap who had been watching us through his telescope. Or once when we went out for the first time, after having been busy for a couple of weeks, two or three people whom we would only occasionally speak to said, "What have you been doing? Haven't seen you around lately"

I think Devon Vihara is more like a big family, where most of the lay people are part of that family with a few distant cousins; whereas Amaravati is a big family - mainly monastic - where most lay people, excepting a few well-loved uncles and aunties, are like distant cousins. In Devon, because of that close relationship, people can easily fall in and out of love with the vihara or the monks; but in staying with the love and hate, a lot can be learnt. It provides a place for people of like mind to come together and chat, meditate and discuss the Dhamma. And so one sees that the whole thing is an opportunity for the cultivation of dana, generosity, sila, virtue, and bhavana, the development of meditation.

Although it may seem that, as a monk, you are already a good way on the path, it is very much a two-way process. It's not just that the lay people provide the material food and the monks the spiritual food; it's actually much deeper. Let me try to explain.

As a junior monk you are still struggling, trying to learn how to use the Buddhist tools, and although geographically one may be at the centre of the Devon Vihara, mentally one can be way out on the edge. And, just as the sight of a monk or hearing a talk on Dhamma may help a lay person to remember the way, so also the kindness and practice of lay people would often be the reminder and encouragement for me to remember and continue on that way.

In the eighteen months that I spent there, there were a lot of comings and goings and ups and downs, but one also saw the transforming effect it had on people's lives. Certainly it affected me. Before I went to Devon I was a bit wobbly as a monk doubting whether I could do it, whether it was ruining my health, whether it really produced good results. However, nearly two years later, when one of the monks recently disrobed I felt so sad. Maybe I'm wrong, but having seen the benefits of this form - both for oneself and other people - it seemed to me that he was opting for a second best.

Also, it is more important to be at the various events. At Amaravati, if you don't go to tea or miss a meeting it is hardly noticed, but at Devon it stands out. And you realize fairly directly that, just as your absence is noted, so your presence is appreciated and a help to the rest of the community.

The third point concerns the interdependence between the monks and the lay people. This may sound funny, because all the monasteries are run on the same system, but somehow at Devon it is more obvious. In Amaravati food arrives in your bowl every day, the bills are paid and the requisites are plentiful, but you don't really know where it all comes from except that it is the "generosity" of the "lay people". In Devon you know these carrots come from this person, these apples from that person and this Dhamma may help a lay person to remember the Way, So also the kindness and practice of lay people would often be the reminder and encouragement for me to remember and continue on that Way.



THIS ISSUE		HOME BACK ISSUES
Question Time; Aj Sumedho	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu	
Allowing Silence; Aj Sucitto	Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka	
	■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah	
	■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro	
	■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka	
	Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido	
	■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	

EDITORIAL

Lineage is more than history

At the time of the year's full blossom in the gentleness of May, hundreds gathered at the monasteries to honour the All Enlightened One, the full flower of humanity that we know as the Buddha. What a quietness attends ceremonies that pay tribute to his birth, enlightenment and final release! The heart's silence in gratitude and respect; the measured salutations to Buddha images; the reflections on Dhamma and the resolute meditation vigil are all part of the homage. And Wesak apart, they are the foundation of everyday practice.

Two and a half millennia separate the birthdays of the Buddha and Ajahn Chah, but in our time there's less than a month between the days when we commemorate them. Less than a month further on, we' can watch three men Going Forth as bhikkhus following the Buddha's Dhamma - Vinaya in the monastic style set up by Ajahn Chah. How real is the sense, and the distancing effect of Time? As you read this, these events are separated by mere moments, whereas for those who participate, there can be the realization of nonseparation. The mind's Going Forth is actually not fixed to one event in time or place. It's a universally reiterated theme in all spiritual practice. So, as we honour the tradition, we can feel honoured that our practice is what gives the highest meaning to a traditional Path.

To leave self-consciousness behind and turn to Dhamma
is to be part of the lineage of practice that we call Sangha.
In that commitment to Dhamma, as the Buddha himself
said, is the true veneration of the Tathagata.

A historical sense grants us the awe to be attentive. After that it can become a burden. History begins wherever you choose the events that are significant-and thereby remote, History can never include oneself or the present moment; so we may feel that the Buddhist tradition is apart from us. It's quite an irony since the place of Dhamma practice is oneself at this present moment - yet how long does it take a monk or nun to feel that they are a real and vital part of Sangha? How many lay people feel that the tradition is outside them, that they can't even visit the monastery without a proper reason: "Don't want to be a nuisance, don't like to intrude" Veneration without insight can easily put the religion high up on a pedestal beyond our reach.

To leave self-consciousness behind and turn to Dhamma is to be part of the lineage of practice that we call Sangha. In that commitment to Dhamma, as the Buddha himself said, is the true veneration of the Tathagata. It is significant for all of us, because it's the same for all of us: in effect we only exclude ourselves from the tradition when we maintain the isolation - and desolation -of self-view.

And over the years one becomes very grateful, personally grateful, for the Buddha's final and unfailingly clear directive: "All compounded things" (monasteries, masters and the moaning mind) "break up - be mindful and keep going!" There's no history in that, and no promise for the future - just a supportive lineage of practice.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka ■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah ■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro ■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido ■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	HOME ■ BACK ISSUES ■
Question Time; Aj Sumedho ■ Allowing Silence; Aj Sucitto ■		

Allowing Silence

A talk give by Ajahn Sucitto as part of a meditation situation at Cittaviveka.

As we mature, there is an inclination, at times even a yearning, towards a place of silence where we will realize peace and harmony. The inner focusing of meditation, its direction towards calm and balance, seems to offer a means by which to enter silence, albeit through the patience and effort worthy of a saint. And it requires wisdom: with time one recognizes the need to be wise about the means, because beyond the techniques, meditation is a learning to listen deeply without bias or hesitation. Its fullest blossoming has to be cultivated, not through technique, but through living with a bright mind. Then we are moving towards harmony with everything.

We learn to listen to everything: and our own personal "everything" will always include unresolved thoughts and feelings that we don't want to hear. A meditator soon witnesses the power of the resistances and preferences that the mind makes. In that colourful surge of impulse, thoughts, and feelings, our life as a mortal being is defined, confined and finally snuffed out: the unawakened being dies submerged in it. That compulsive tide is birth-and death, and it seems to stand in the way of peace and stillness.

"I" - the stream of personal experiences as it passes this moment - am meditated upon by an unlimited and benevolent silence.

But how to get beyond the sound and the fury? The practice of meditation is pure listening; and that listening has to be deepened by trust. We have to allow ourselves to be aware of our pain, our darkness, and our unfulfilled yearning, as well as our brilliance and our serenity. Such an awareness has to be allowed rather than forged through idealism, because whatever we create time will wear down. Only an awakened trust brings forth what cannot be consciously created - the boundless heart. that transcends our personal limitations. This is not inertia, but selfless response, the action of the uncreated, and it allows us to discover that the compulsions and certainties of the mind are impermanent and therefore ephemeral gestures. They are all the echoes of the habit of grasping, no real being at all.

So who meditates?

In that allowing, "I" give up all claim to attainment, salvation and damnation, and have no place or definition. "I" - the stream of personal experiences as it passes this moment - am meditated upon by an unlimited and benevolent silence. It is there at the beginning and ending of every thought and mood and happening - if I ease into allowing myself a little more time and patience to realize it. "My" worlds my heavens and hells and mundane realities are enacted in the theatre of the uncreated; I don't run this show after all.

If I allow myself, I begin to hear and trust in the silence around sound, the silence that does not conceive or create, or destroy. It roars in different modes: a deep Pulse, or a



higher steady tone, or an oscillating whisper like the murmuring of a billowing cloud. It embraces and suffuses all sounds, internal or external, and its mood is one of attention with no goal and no - stress. So the silence reveals itself as the mind's real home, and it is reached through being silently attentive to those endless wanderings of birth - and - death.

The silence that embraces rather than resists sound has a healing touch. You can listen to the silence around anxiety or sorrow, and it will bless - you with serenity. It will remind you again, because our memories are shaky - that life has darkness as well as light, and is a process of change. Trying to find lasting comfort in the restless cycles of birth-and-death is the disease of the unawakened will.

We have minds that can embrace failure and despair; that can sweep out to the vastness of the stars, or home in on an itch on our nose; that can create the most heart - stirring idealism, or the Most demonic brutality. We have minds that can travel through all phenomena. And most wonderfully we have minds that can hear the silence that goes beyond all phenomena. Hearing that, we realize the wholeness and boundlessness of our being, rather than become deluded by any passing form that it takes.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Gratitude to Ajahn Chah; Jayasaro Bhikkhu Articles: ■ Image of the Dhamma; Sister Viveka ■ Living in the World with Dhamma; Ajahn Chah ■ Part of the Lineage: pt.I; Aj. Sucitto interviews Aj. Jagaro ■ What is the Devon Vihara? Supanno & Pasadaka Editorial: ■ Out on a Limb; Venerable Kovido ■ Lineage is more than History; Ajahn Sucitto	HOME ■ BACK ISSUES ■
Question Time; Aj Sumedho ■ Allowing Silence; Aj Sucitto ■		

Question Time

Ajahn Sumedho answers questions put to him by lay folk at the end of a talk.

Question:

How would you describe the nature of the pure mind?

This is where the Buddha was very careful, because when you're trying to describe the indescribable, or define the indefinable, or limit the unlimited, you can get yourself into a lot of delusion. The only thing I can say is that as you let go of things more and more, and realize that all that arises ceases - you realize the cessation of things - then you realize the Unconditioned.

There's the conditioned, the Unconditioned; the created, the uncreated. You can't conceive uncreatedness. You have a word but there's no perception for it. There's no kind of symbol that one could grasp. You could have a doctrine about it, so religion tends to make these metaphysical doctrines that people believe in. But, since the Buddhist teaching is a non-doctrinal teaching in which you're to find things out for yourself, it leaves you without any real metaphysical doctrine in order for the realization to happen.

The conditioned realm only arises and ceases. It has no eternality or infinity to it. It's only a movement in the universal. So that whatever word you get or concept you have can be very misleading. We've had dialogue with Christians, and I notice Christian meditators now are moving more towards the Buddhist position and saying quite outrageous things like: "God is nothing or no-thing." But yet, for Buddhists, we would understand that and that .. "no-thing" is probably a fairly accurate description: whereas trinitarian Christianity is always giving God attributes as a Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

But Buddhism is clearly stated as a convention. It's not an absolute. It's a tool to use.

So you're always having these conditioned attributes that you're looking for, you're perceiving as God. And yet, you know in mystical Christianity you transcend this trinitarian view very much; and that is where you talk about mystery, or not knowing. Christian mystics don't have the psychological vocabulary that we do in Buddhism, so they tend to put it in a different way, But if you get beyond the terminologies they use, it's very much the experience of the mind that is free from a self-view - and from a binding to the conditioned world. So one sees the potential in all religions to point beyond themselves.

The danger is always in attachment to the conventions. Even with Buddhism, as beautiful and clear a teaching as it really is, not many Buddhists use it to be enlightened. They tend to attach to a certain part or a certain thing in it. But I think now there's more potential for awakening to this truth - which isn't Buddhist in fact - it is beyond conventions. But Buddhism is clearly stated as a convention. It's not an absolute. It's a tool to use. At least with Buddha-Dhamma you're not asked to support a convention in itself, you're encouraged to use it for mindfulness

and wisdom. And I can see that in Christianity also.

Hinduism and Islam have this in some form or another. Then there's the perennial philosophy. There's a lot of this really clear thinking going on now among human beings that is quite wonderful - the mental clarity and use of wisdom that is happening in different places on the planet. No matter how gloomy and pessimistic the newspapers sometimes are about the state of the world, I can't help but feel more optimistic. I can see that it is changing and that in just my own lifetime there's been a remarkable change in the development of a spiritual understanding and wisdom, compared with say twenty-five years ago.

Question:

Why do monks and nuns not claim attainments?

The rules for the monks and the nuns were made for particular instances. From my own experience of being a Buddhist monk, I can see how wise that is because it really makes you quite careful about how you say things. Sometimes you can get very enthusiastic about your practice, or you have insights and the thoughts do come up: "Oh, I'm enlightened" And if you go round telling everyone, then that can be very misleading.

In fact when monks would get that way my teacher, Ajahn Chah, would say- "OK, now you stay off in your little kuti and don't talk to anyone until you calm down"

The tendency to interpret these experiences from self - view - "I am" - is the danger; not that the experiences are wrong but you really need to be non-attached to the memories of them or to an interpretation of them from this position of "I AM ..."

There is suffering and there is the end of suffering: that's all the Buddha ever really said. The Brahmin priests were always trying to push him into making metaphysical statements, ultimate doctrinal statements about the I AM, or THE ONE and so forth. And he would always say: "I teach there is suffering, there is the end of suffering" Sometimes the Brahmin priests would say: "Well obviously he doesn't know, otherwise if he knew he could tell us" But then by telling people, as with all the metaphysical, doctrinal teachings of religion, what happens? People tend to just grasp the doctrine.

So if you believe in a metaphysical doctrine, then how you tend to interpret life will come from that belief. The Buddha approached it from existential experience - experience of existence - suffering and the end of suffering. However, the danger from that is to become nihilistic: to say that there's no God, nothing, that there's just the arising and ceasing, empty phenomena rolling on, meaningless nothing and so forth. That's the opposite of the eternalist view where there is a God and eternal life. The Buddhist approach is to neither extreme but to this penetration in the present, through the here and now, through mindfulness. And the key, the clue, is that suffering: the experience of suffering and the experience of non-suffering.

Now how many of you realize non-suffering? You don't suffer all the time, but are you really aware when you're not suffering? Just question yourself in that way, because the unenlightened human being tends to assume that one is a person that has suffered a lot in one's life. This kind of basic assumption from the personality position, tends to colour everything that we do. We can be living in a situation where we're not suffering at all but assuming that we suffer - even when there isn't any suffering. But through mindfulness, you're noticing non-suffering; I always bring to my attention as much as I can to the non-suffering. Before, I would assume that I was a person who suffered a lot. And so even in the most pleasant situations, if something was really nice and there was no suffering, then I'd tend to grasp: "Well what'll happen when I lose it?" Whenever this habit of I AM starts, you know "What'll I do if I lose this? What if it changes, or it's taken away from me, or I get sick, or something

changes in a way that I don't want?" - with that habit, even when things are going along very nicely, one is creating suffering around the possibility of suffering in the future. What the Buddha's saying is notice now, be aware, and that even in situations that one might interpret as suffering - for example, physical pain, cold, hunger, disease, loss of loved ones, one needn't suffer. The more mindful you are, and reflective and that, then you're not creating suffering onto the actual misfortune, or the unpleasantness, or the pain that you're experiencing. Through this awakened mind you're not creating, not complicating the way life happens to be with this ignorance, this projection.

Question:

How does mindfulness become a reality in one's life in the world?

Mindfulness is the ability to be awake and aware wherever you are. As lay people you don't generally have the supporting encouragement to practise mindfulness. People around you where you work may be not interested in Dhamma at all. Whereas in a monastery you have a conventional form that encourages you: that's the advantage of monastic life.

But people need to be mindful of the way things are in their lives rather than making the assumption that they can't be mindful unless they have a lot of supportive conditions for that. What you can't expect is a lot of tranquillity and simplicity if you're working where there's a lot of pressure on you to be a certain way or do something. Then you'll find these things will not be very helpful in tranquillizing your mind or in leading towards simplicity or peacefulness with the external forms. But you can be mindful of it and through that you find something within yourself that is peaceful in spite of the agitation and stressful conditions that surround you.

You can idealize monastic life: sometimes you have a very nice group around you where you get on well, and everybody's quite mature and sincere in what they're doing, and it's very, very pleasant to have people who you can trust and respect. And you get very attached to that. Then somebody comes in who is very disruptive, and you find yourself getting angry with them and you think: "I don't like this, we've got to get rid of this person so we can hold on to this nice community where everyone gets on. We don't want any disruptive, unpleasant things coming into it." That itself is a miserable thought. So we train ourselves to expand our minds to include disruptions.

You can get very attached to silence, like on a meditation retreat. But in a silent room, where everybody's still, any sound is magnified. Just the rustle of a nylon jacket ... or somebody; gulps too much, swallows too loudly or something like that, you can feel very annoyed. You think: "Oh, I wish that person would stop making those noises." What you're doing is, you're creating anger in your mind, aversion towards the way things are, because you want this total silence and you don't want it to be disrupted. But when it is disrupted, You see that you're attached to that. Yet to include all possibilities for disruption within any situation doesn't mean you go out and try to have disrupting things happen; but you've already opened yourself to - the possibilities rather than held onto an idea of what you would like.

Mindfulness allows us to open the mind to all possibilities, both for what we like and what we don't like. Then you can begin to more or less accept life's flow and movement, the way it changes, without being angry or fed up when it isn't what you want.

In fact, you begin to feel quite at ease with life when you can accept the whole of it as it is. A lot of people become very fussy and cowardly and timid out of just not wanting to get involved in anything that might agitate or create unpleasant feelings in their mind. You think: "Oh, I can't go there because it'll just upset me" But when you're mindful then you don't mind being Upset. Being Upset is part of living! You don't go round seeking to be upset but it does

happen. And you learn from it. It's a part of lifes experience.

