



FOREST SANGHA

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Letting Go is the Greatest Kindness

Taken from a Dhamma-desana (teaching), given by Ajahn Anando on 10th December 1988.

A few days ago -a couple of us were talking about how important it is to be respected and feel appreciated: if people don't feel appreciated then they begin to feel depressed. When its brought to mind its so obvious; and yet why does it seem so difficult for us to stop and actually respond to people, particularly the people that we live with?

I've noticed that it is quite easy for me to take some people for granted. In the monastery there are the efficient ones, the ones that I know are wise enough, the ones that, if I am a bit abrupt or grumpy with them, it's not going to ruin their day. They can get things done; and because of that, I can very well take them for granted.

It's easy to take people for granted. Of course we love them, of course we care for them - but when was the last time that we actually let them know?

There are many different ways of expressing affection, and "metta bhavana", the cultivation of loving-kindness, is a way of doing so on the more subtle level. It's the most beneficial way of using the intellectual or conceptual level of the mind, the world of thoughts and ideas that tends to get scattered into a myriad of things. With metta,we direct that in a very precise and beneficial wag.

Over the years of practising this, I've noticed that one of the ways it manifests is in a greater patience and tolerance with adversity and with people who are annoying or unkind. Rather than taking some position as to how they should be, we can accept them and not contend. And when there is that lack of contention, then what we have to offer others is more tolerance, more patience or willingness just to be with them as they are, even if we are not particularly liking it. But not contending does not mean that we condone; "loving-kindness" does not mean that we like all things, all beings - some are quite evil - but we choose not to contend, not to take a position against them.

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as being one way or another, inevitably the
"compassionate cosmos" comes along and presents us
with just those sort of circumstances which shake us
until we let go.

I have noticed over the years of being in the position of teacher and abbot of a monastery, what used to cause me a lot of pain was my unconscious attitude towards some of the people in the monastery. I felt that I had to impose my ideas on them, and that they would probably deviate from what I thought would be right and proper. And it took a while of experiencing; the pain of that before I noticed that the source of the pain was my attachment to a particular view of myself in relation to them. I saw myself as one who is forced to train others, one who is forced to be an example, and whenever I held onto that particular view of self in relation to them, it always inhibited free flow of information, and real communication.

I kept seeing them in relation to a view of myself, and it was not until I could start letting go of my own preconceived notion of who I was and what I was supposed to be doing with all of them, that I could let them be as they needed to be.

And sometimes the way people need to be is not the way I think they should be. What I've found is that to just back off and give them the space to grow and mature and practise and live, brings about a great deal more peace within my own mind and it seems to have quite a beneficial effect on the community at large.

Whenever we hold on to a particular view of ourselves as being one way or another, inevitably the "compassionate cosmos" comes along and presents us with just those sort of circumstances which shake us until we let go. We are moved and we are disturbed until we see what it is that we are attached to; and then we let it go.

Parents are frequently people whom we have had love-hate relations with. And even though in some cases they have been dead for a long time, still we carry them around with us and they can be very real, very much alive. We can cling to a particular idea of ourselves and to a view of them, how they were, or how they are. And that's a great injustice both to ourselves and others - we are changing all the time.

How are we? Who are we? We've taken the idea of "me", as a particular person, to be true. "This is how I am:" "That's how they are:" "They were unloving, they were intolerant, they denied me some of the things I really needed for my development:" "If they were more loving, more affectionate, had more time for me, I would not have to experience this:" Can we see what the mind is doing then? Why do we believe that particular way of thinking? Why do we accept it as being valid, so completely true? Yet from experience with my own family I am amazed, absolutely amazed, at the power of family relationship, and how easy it is for one to get pushed back into an old role.

It has taken years of very conscious effort on my part to be able to relate to my family in a more cool and less fixed position. But the benefits have been quite marvellous. I find that I can really listen to my mother, really listen to my brother and sisters instead of being impatient with them, anticipating what they're going to say, or assuming they know what I'm thinking or what I want - and getting annoyed when they don't. But to really be with them as other people, is a matter of allowing quietness to

pervade.

Through quietening down we become really sensitive and can be with that person. All of us can develop the ability to listen, but unfortunately we do not give much time to it. I am sure that many of you have had that experience, when you are talking to someone. One gets the distinct feeling that they're just waiting for you to pause for breath so that they can say what is churning away in their mind. Of course, there is no communication there: it's people speaking at one another without listening.

Ajahn Chah used to encourage us to learn to listen with the heart instead of the mind. That puzzled me for a long time. It sounded wooly, airy-fairy. Yet he was a meditation master, obviously one who had real skills and abilities in teaching people. It was not till later when we were being forced repeatedly, to be with people, and to listen to them, that it became gradually clearer that if I allowed the conceptual part of the mind to play less of, a dominant role, I became more quiet.

When we let the quietness be what people become aware of in our presence, then as a natural and intuitive response to our quietness they feel freer, less pressurized by our preconceived notions about how it should be: and a real communication its much more likely to take place. People are more open in such an environment. I have noticed time and time again, when I suddenly react to what someone has said from -a preconceived notion of what I think they mean, or what I think is right for them, it doesn't really resonate.

But when there's a quietness, then the response comes from the quietness. Then there is a certain feeling or tone about the exchange that tends to stay, and when that response is needed by the person it seems to be there.

To let go of fixed views or positions about ourselves and others is a very charitable, a very kind thing for us to do.

Traditionally, there are eleven benefits to the practice of Metta bhavana, meditation on loving-kindness. Of these, the first is that when we go to sleep, we wake up easily and happily. We are never troubled by unpleasant dreams. Some of the other benefits are that divine beings love and protect us, and also human beings love and protect us. But if we want desperately to be loved, the obvious connection is that to receive love, we must give it. That doesn't mean that we go out embracing people on the streets, but practise in the much more subtle ways that I have been explaining.

In this practice joyfulness also arises naturally, and joy is one of the Factors of Enlightenment. When there is that joyfulness, then what accompanies it quite naturally is a physical ease, and these two factors lead on to greater tranquillity and concentration. Then the concentration which follows is the suitable condition for the arising of insight.



Another benefit of metta is that we die without confusion, and if prior to death we have not developed insight, then metta bhavana will condition rebirth in a divine abode, or a very favourable state.

Now, whether or not one wants to accept that there are all these benefits, I think we've all had some taste of what it feels like to infuse the mind with lots of goodwill. Imagine what it would be like if we made much of this practice, so that it became something that the mind turned to quite naturally instead of frequently being filled with negativity - which tends to be the norm for most of us. If we could put that aside: not feeding it and not denying it, no longer allowing the mind to dwell on it....

Metta bhavana can be very difficult at first. Much of my life has been doing what I did not want to do - and it has just intensified since I have been a monk. Sometimes when the alarm goes off first thing in the morning I think, "Oh, my God, even the birds do not have to get up this early," and I'm too tired, and you know - we all know - what the mind is saying. The negative whine. So I try to turn that around a bit, not give it any room in the mind, and instead, spend a few moments focusing on the breath and on thoughts of goodwill.

I've been doing that for a while now, and it has been a very fruitful and influential practice. Apart from other effects, it brings a clear intention for my life: to live in a way that brings benefit to the world. These strong influences help determine the way I respond to circumstances.

When I was on retreat last summer, another senior monk was staying in the room I had vacated. One night I returned to get a book or something, and although it was quite late at night he still was not back. He was probably out teaching. I was about to leave when my eye caught sight of the bedding on the shelf so I decided to take it down and make up his bed, so that when he came in, a bit shattered from the day's activities, there it would be. I did it without thinking and on the way back to where I was staying, I started to feel quite happy about doing that for him. It surprised me a little bit because it was such a simple thing and it would have been just as easy to walk out and say, "It will only take him a minute you know, thirty seconds, to pull the bedding down, throw it on the floor and go to sleep" Yet some time later he mentioned it in passing, saying, "I don't know who did it, but it certainly made me feel appreciated."

So these very insignificant little actions can have quite an impact on the person. This way of practising deals with the thinking mind in a very skilful way, whereby we can encourage thoughts that have a beauty and nobility. Then we can respond to the world from a noble viewpoint, taking care to closely observe those views of self and others that we cling to.

So I offer this for your consideration tonight in the hope that it will be of benefit.

The Blessings of Loving-Kindness

If, monks, the liberation of the heart by loving kindness is cultivated, developed, frequently practised, made one's vehicle and foundation, firmly established, and properly perfected, eleven blessings can be expected. What are these eleven?

- One sleeps peacefully;
- has no evil dreams;
- one is dear to human beings;
- one will be protected by deities;
- fire, poison and weapons can not hurt him;
- his mind becomes easily concentrated;
- the features of his face will be serene;
- he will die unconfused;
- and if he does not penetrate higher,
- he will be reborn in the Brahma World.

Anguttara Nikaya

Visit to the Buddha-land

On August 30th this year at the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, Talmage, California, the ordination platform was set up for the going forth of seven bhikkhus and twenty-eight bhikkhunis. This is an extremely auspicious event by any monastery's standards, but the occasion was made even more auspicious by the harmonious gathering and unified practice of elders from Mahayana and Theravada schools. Venerable Master Hsuan Hua invited bhikkhus (and bhikkhus) from all over the world, including many masters from China. the centenarian Cambodian Mahathera Bhante Dhamavaro and several other Mahatheras, as well as Ajahn Sumedho and ten bhikkhus from our monasteries.

The Sagely City lives up to its name, comprising some seventy large buildings in 200 acres of Northern California countryside; but more important, it is a place where a dedicated and disciplined way of practice makes the bodhidattva ideal a tangible reality. Those of us who went and were strangers to the highly stylized conventions of Chinese Mahayana were nevertheless inspired by the hallmarks of good practice: sincere commitment and selflessness with their resultant tastes of freedom and joy.

Sunday at Chithurst

My four year old son asks every morning, "What are we doing today?" All through the week there are a wide variety of answers but invariably, on a Sunday, the answer is the same, "We're going to Chithurst."

Sunday at Chithurst, and every Sunday at that, could seem like a dull proposition to the uninitiated. To us it -is a joyful day when we gather together in harmony with all kinds of people - young, old, Buddhist, Christian, British and Asian. We never know whom we shall meet or how the day will turn out, but repeatedly sunday is a pleasant experience for us.

The atmosphere at Chithurst is such a nonthreatening, supportive one that people are able to open up in safety. We talk to strangers as if they were our close relatives and we feel relaxed about our young child running out of sight in the grounds of the house (even though he often returns both wet and muddy).

In the frantic age of the appointment diary, where friends scan their scribbled pages, squeezing each other into slots of time, where can one meet up casually with like-minded people? The monastery springs to mind. Here, we take care of both our social and spiritual needs in an atmosphere of generosity, peace, expressing our gratitude by offering food and other requisites to the monastic community.

We are offered so much in return for our support, the monastery playing many roles in people's lives: that of social worker, psychiatrist, friend, spiritual advisor, to name but a few.

I recently tried to explain to a friend why I like going to Chithurst regularly. I said that one could meet ANYBODY from ANYWHERE and that these meetings took me away from the mundane level of daily existence to a wider plane, where wider thought was possible and where non-judgement was the norm.

Those of us with small children find it difficult to join in with concentrated discussions - is there a parent among us who can claim that uninterrupted conversation exists, let alone is possible? -or with silent meditation (unless we can get to an evening sitting), but we can and do enjoy the offering of food and the relatively manageable blessing afterwards.

There is no rush at Chithurst. We don't need to reserve our seats or show an identity card. Credentials are irrelevant and the spirit of helpfulness and of giving are all-pervasive.

Sunday is our day of renewal, a reminder of the "good life", and we are grateful for it.

Collette Bradley

Our Visitor from Thailand

His name is Ajahn Jun, or Chan, according to how you try to render Thai sounds in our spelling, and he is abbot of a monastery in North-East Thailand [having been a disciple of Ajahn Chah for many years). He is with us for the Vassa, and his benign presence is sensed so unobtrusively that if not specially noticed you might miss it, at least on the conscious level. His words of English are fewer than my words of Thai but verbal communication seems hardly necessary. Sometimes expression takes a different form, as in his vivid pantomime of a girl on the plane powdering her nose and applying lipstick! When he does deliver a brief discourse, interpreted by the faithful Venerable Javano who accompanies him, it is simple, clear and to the point, and we sense the underlying toughness rather, the inflexibility of purpose - which has made him what he is. And we are amazed and grateful for the blessing of his presence among us.

Part of the lineage; Part II

The conclusion of an informal interview with Ajahn Jagaro, abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Western Australia.

Ajahn Sucitto: What do you think a monk from Australia or Thailand might learn in a British monastery?

Ajahn Jagaro: Well, when you go to a new place you get a perspective, you see things being done with a slightly different emphasis. This is because the monastic form is not a stagnant tradition, the whole thing's dynamic. Life within this tradition is alive with choice of how you respond to the environment, and the greater your overview the more it enables you to use that tradition wisely. I'm very, very keen personally to have an exchange of monks between the different monasteries -not just for a visit, but as part of their training. This will help to bind our Sangha together. While in Australia I had an idea of being in the same community as the monks in England, but I couldn't feel that bond of being one Sangha; this was because of the geographical separation, which sometimes prevents this for the smaller monasteries. In outposts such as mine, the feeling is that you are isolated, and there isn't anywhere else to go. So there can be a feeling of being stuck with no option -which is fine if the people can practise well, but if difficulties arise it can be very hard to work through. I'd like to suggest that, as part of the training for the Western monks in Thailand, they consider spending a couple of years in a Western monastery. This would have a lot to offer for their own practice; it would break the tendency to have preconceived ideas about other places. Through lack of contact, the monks trained in England can easily have the idea that monks in Thailand are very selfish, concerned with their own practice and not really into helping anyone. Monks in Thailand can have the idea that the ones in the West are just into building and socializing. But its our community, and this understanding brings the sense that we're willing to help each other, I see that that's the next step for this Sangha. Through this exchange I think that a new unity - a new bond - will emerge.

AS: Do you have any long-term ideas about how things are going to go in Perth?

AJ: Well, the monastery is set up for having nuns, so the natural progression will be to have nuns there. This will probably mean bringing a nun from Amaravati, because theres no example for the women in Australia. We have one woman who has been an anagarika for two years, but I see that the proper procedure will be to send her to Amaravati to receive the ten precepts and to train, because here at Amaravati there its a training already established, which is evolving and which is working. Then, later on, as siladharas they could go to Australia. The situation there is suitable for nuns, but its certainly a different environment and it would probabably be quite difficult.

So I was thinking to begin with, maybe a nun could go for just a year to get a feel for it. Once we have nuns there, it may act as a catalyst for Australian women, and it would be an addition to what the Sangha can offer to the laity.

As far as numbers of monks, this is the fourth year that we have had ordinations, which is very encouraging. Numbers have steadily grown; however, because of this exchange idea that I've already discussed, it means that the time is coming when our monks will have been in Australia long enough to

go to other places so we'll probably be losing some of the monks and sending them - over to Amaravati. We may gain one or two, either from exchange, or from ordination, but I think the size of the monastic community may remain steady.

AS: That's six monks now.

AJ: Yes. As far as expansion to new monasteries - I don't foresee very much of that until we have more teaching monks, but we may extend our teaching programmes within Perth. Up 'til now we haven't done much travelling outside of Western Australia, but that may change.

We have heard that on returning to Thailand on route for Australia, Ajahn Jagaro was given the Silver Conch award. for public service by the Prime Minister of Thailand. As he is the first non-Thai to receive the award, we would like to congratulate him on this singular honour.

*Recently one bhikkhu and two samaneras have taken ordination, and one bhikkhu has gone to Thailand.

Help Needed in Assam

A letter to Amaravati.

Dear Sir,

This is to introduce ourselves, that under the aegis of "Jinaratan Buddhist Missionary Destitute Home and School" sponsored by International Brotherhood Mission, Dibrugarh was established in the year 1981. There are 75 destitute children both male and female at the mission and we received nine children from the Judicial Custody at Dibrugarh for their reformation. Apart there are staff members. The mission is providing all the basic needs of the destitutes. Having been registered under the Societies Act of Govt. of India, it has no regular and permanent sources of income to bear its heavy day to day multifarious expenditures.

The mission is imparting general education up to fifth standard at the moment, and also imparting general vocational training like sewing, tailoring, knitting etc. to the children.

Further, we have plans to take up some more projects to impart training in things like printing, photography, radio repairing etc. There is a plan also to own our own land and buildings in the very near future.

The number of orphans are gradually increasing and we are in need of funds. Now, we invite your kind attention to help build this only Buddhist mission in the NE Region of India.

Thanking you, With regards, Yours truly,

Ven. Achariya Bhikkhu Karuna Shastry

General Secretary.

INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD MISSION

Naliapool, Dibrugarh-I

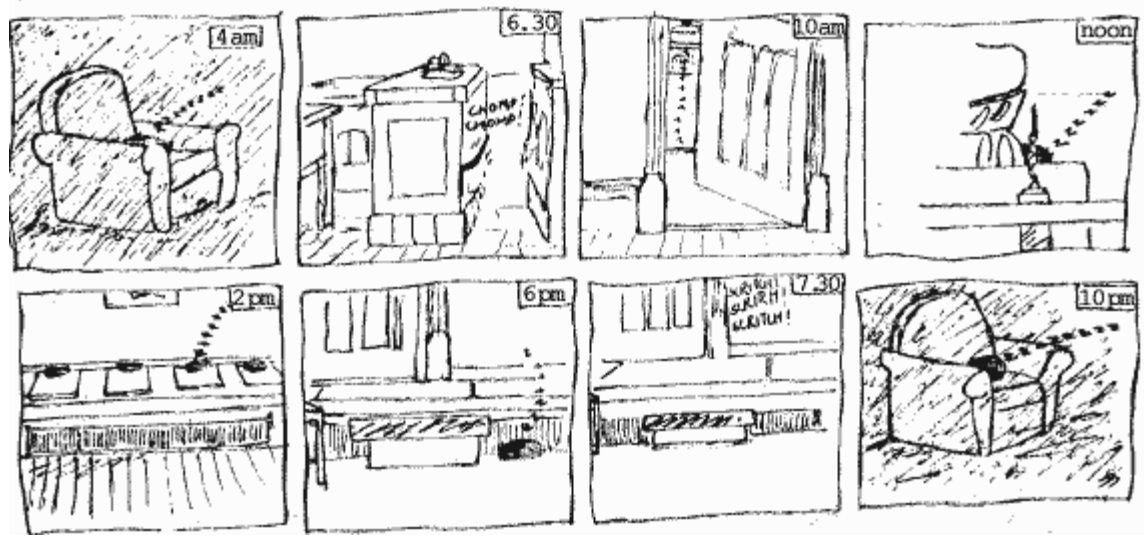
Assam, India

PIN-786001

Doris

Doris, the Chithurst cat, passed away peacefully in August. Those who knew her may appreciate the following cartoon of Doris's daily routine at the monastery.

ANOTHER HARD DAY...



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Walking The Way - Nuns' Tudong

Leaving Chithurst on the morning after the Tenth Anniversary celebrations in 1989, a group of nuns spent two weeks walking ("going tudong") along the South Downs Way. Sister Thanissara shares some of her experiences. On return, at the completion of their tudong, they were just in time to witness the Bhikkhu Ordinations (Upasampada).

After much careful thought and planning, the nuns were able to begin their tudong walk along the South Downs - setting out from Winchester Cathedral - and walking the 100 miles or so to Lancing College. To start out in such an ancient cathedral was the perfect beginning: Winchester is both the old capital of England and a place visited by many pilgrims. Before we donned our packs and set off we wandered around the majestic building. A touch of auspiciousness was added when a Deaconess read a protection prayer from the pulpit - one had the feeling that it was planned just for us.

It took a few days for us to get accustomed to the weight of our backpacks, and to avoid following doubtful thoughts that crossed the mind about whether we could complete the miles that stretched ahead. After a while though, it seemed as if there was something missing if we did not have our packs strapped to backs. Comparing notes about blisters, aching knees and logs became another feature of the walk. It was interesting to see that when the physical body was stretched beyond normal requirements and one was exposed to the elements the mind would naturally simplify and learn to deal with one moment at a time. In such a situation, without the demands of everyday modern life, it was easy to appreciate the life-style of monks of old who wandered for many years. This simple mode of living gave rise to a natural contemplation of Dhamma and I found myself lamenting over the way our modern life dislocates us from the very immediate and powerful teaching that is provided by being exposed to nature without the cushion of modern conveniences. How much our reality is based on the security and comfort of living within four walls, structures and timetable! To be able to sit and watch the sunset, to feel the rain drenching us, and then the wind blowing dry our wet garments, was both a joy and a luxury.

A good lesson learnt - watching a desire arise and pass
is much less hassle than trying to fulfill it!

Throughout the walk we camped in fields and were offered our mid-day meals by various groups of lay supporters. The meeting places and times were arranged beforehand. Amazingly enough all the rendezvous were successful and nuns and lay people found each other quite easily. It was a humbling and enriching experience for us to realize that our lay supporters had gone to so much trouble to prepare food and to journey out with it - sometimes many miles - from their homes. We would like to express our gratitude to all those who offered support for our tudong in one way or another.

One of the places where we received hospitality along the way was at the Krishnamurti Foundation, Brockwood Park. Here we were very warmly welcomed; plentiful supplies of food were offered; showers and a simple wooden building with a wood burning stove were also made available to us. After settling in we were shown around the new building that had been erected after Krishnamurti's death. We were all rather awestruck by its beauty and the tasteful interior design. The central point was the octagonal quiet room. Wooden beams separated each segment and met at the top in a small circular shape giving the impression of a Dharma wheel. A thick white carpet covered a sitting bench which encircled the room. Sitting in there, the mind became quiet very easily; the room itself seemed to emanate a powerful stillness that helped wash away any worries or anxieties leaving a sense of calm and centredness.

During the guided tour we were taken into the publications room and were invited to take any of the books on the shelves. Not being used to just helping ourselves to things we stood a little amazed until eventually we were given a very fine selection of books to take away with us. When we left Brockwood Park we felt nourished spiritually with a renewed strength that came from glimpsing in the words of Krishnamurti something beyond the mundane.

For the first few days of the walk the weather was very changeable but, as time went on, it started to get hotter and hotter. At certain camp-sites we would stop for a few days, wandering off to a nearby wood to meditate, or walking to explore the surrounding countryside. At one particularly beautiful spot we could see the blue sea twinkling in the distance. It was a very tempting sight in such hot weather especially after living inland and not having the opportunity to go to the sea for many a year. By the second day the temptation was too much and a few of us set off on the 20-mile walk to the sea and back. Needless to say it clouded over and the reality of arriving at a rather scruffy, deserted beach and having a dip in the chilly, grey, seaweedy water was a very different reality from the imagination of what the twinkling blue sea would be like when seen from a distance. A good lesson learnt - watching a desire arise and pass is much less hassle than trying to fulfill it!

Towards the end of our walk the heat became almost unbearable, especially on one of the days when the air was muggy and thick. During our meal that day we were overwhelmed by thunder bugs; they crawled all over our faces, and dropped into our bowls and cups. As they became indistinguishable from the food we were eating we speculated whether we might have broken the first precept of not taking life or the rule about eating something which had not been offered!

True to their names, the

thunder bugs heralded the most extraordinary storm. We were camping out in an open field; it was a very interesting experience to be in small tents - supported by metal poles - in the middle of a stupendous lightning storm! There were times when we wondered whether we'd live to tell the story. The storm grew in ferocity and - after the initial joking about frazzled nuns - I began to feel fear that a primitive person might feel when faced directly with the awesome forces that surround us, but which - in our modern society we are anaesthetised against. Somehow death felt very near, and in the face of that the ego shrank and showed its true colours - flimsy and inadequate - when confronted with its own mortality. The only thing that seemed relevant was to let go of everything, calm the mind and body, and open one's heart to universal compassion.



After the storm, our spirits lifted, and, the next morning it was a relief to see the sure world of daylight. Yet, as the heightened awareness, of the previous night began to diminish, there was a sense of loss. One noticed a certain, fragility in the air as if all the plants, trees, animals and birds had been holding their breath throughout the storm and, with its passing, had been allowed to breathe again.

Our last stop was at Lancing College, where we stayed in the garden of the headmaster's house. We were well received by his wife, a wonderful Christian woman, who showed us around the school and school chapel - an amazing building that was absolutely huge. The building of it was initiated over 100 years ago by a man called Nathaniel Woodward, who also founded several schools for poor children. His life's work made a very inspiring story, and showed how courage and faith could bring far-reaching results and benefits.

As the walk drew to a close, I noticed that one had to be very careful not to attach, to the happiness that this experience had brought us. Contemplating the nature of mind, one sees that

unwise attachment to any feelings of happiness that arise - when conditioned by circumstances - leads to depression and a sense of loss when those circumstances change. I found that the antidote to this was to bring forth a sense of equanimity by reflecting on the transient nature of all states. By contemplating in this way, I noticed - strangely enough - that after a few days back at the monastery, the memory of the walk had faded to such an extent that it was hard to believe it had happened at all.

Walking together as a group of nuns we had an opportunity to get to know each other in a different context. When living so closely human nature becomes very transparent - both in ourselves and in others. Looking directly at all the likes, dislikes, ups and downs that a group goes through allows us to better understand our common humanity, practising Dhamma with such an understanding, we can transcend the limitations of our human condition. I found that I draw great strength from the nuns commitment to the Dhamma; their willingness to live within a demanding and limiting precept form, and to endure through the dying away of selfishness. It was also very good to share this commitment with our lay friends along the way, and to be reminded more intimately of our interdependent relationship.

This was an experimental tudong walk for us, to see what worked and what didn't. As the years go on, we hope that such endeavours may continue so as to bring us closer to the spirit of the mendicant life, for the benefit of ourselves and all beings.



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Unlocking Human Potential

The following interview was held in July of this year, when Ajahn Sucitto talked with Ajahn Pabhakaro and Venerable Nyanaviro about their work in prisons in North-East England.

Ajahn Sucitto: Is there a general feeling of how prisoners have become interested and what attracts a person to Buddhism?

Ajahn Pabhakaro: There are those who have become interested from a series of talks that we have done. Then our presence becomes known to the whole prison through inmates talking to inmates.

AS: The prison authorities have actually invited you in to give talks?

AP: The main encouragement initially has been from the appointed Chaplain at the respective prisons we have been going to, as well as the Governor of inmate activities and general senior staff. I have also been in touch quite regularly with Ajahn Khemadhammo, who is the founder and spiritual director of Angulimala, the Buddhist prison chaplaincy organization. He has a wealth of experience from visiting prisons in this country over the last ten years and has always been willing to offer sound advice.

AS: So the authorities were always fairly positive and supportive?

AP: Yes, very much so. When I first went with the main C of E Chaplain of Durham to meet the Governor of inmate activities, he asked about us coming to start a meditation class at the women's prison. Her response was to welcome with both hands anything that we could do to help the inmates use their time more constructively, calm them down and help them to settle in during their time there, and we had her full support; so you really cannot ask for anything better. She went on to say that it would be good if we could offer meditation to the officers as well, because they often tend to be scapegoats - whereas in reality they have a very difficult and stressful job. In the women's prison we have had a very positive response from the officers. To date two of them have actually participated, one on a very regular basis. Several have visited Harnham. Our relationship with the male officers has also grown and interest has been expressed, so all in all there is very little negativity, and a supportive and friendly feeling is the norm.

To present that quite radical image of peace and kindness in a place where there is an extraordinary lack of it.

AS: How do inmates relate to a monk? Do you think they might say to you what they would not say to a lay person?

AP: Definitely so, because our robes and our shaven head is a very bold statement of something. So, either we are religious freaks or fanatics, or someone who is quite sincere and dedicated to what we are doing. Once they actually meet us the response is quite positive, there is a lot we have in common. Often people have never thought of how monasteries and prison are similar. The single cells and a cloistered affect give the feeling of a retreat situation. The whole day is structured, and there are times when you are locked up; in a high security prison, you are on your own in your cell for 12 hours at a time and that's a lot more time than we give our retreatants.

AS: Do you find they ever "test you out" - where they check out whether they can rely on you?

Venerable Nyanaviro: Yes. You have to search into yourself to present your life-style in the most immediate way - it's all about being peaceful and moral. So I found myself being very aware of my role as a monk.

There was a really good example the other day, when this woman on the "H" wing wanted to come and see Ajahn Pabhakaro. He had never met her before and she sat down in the room with us and said, "I would like to know all about what you do because I have seen people coming out of your meetings and they are always so happy and smiling, what is this about?" It's the kindness that draws them towards us. Also, some of the men have expressed their respect towards Ajahn Pabhakaro for his fearlessness walking around in his robes with his shaven head, to present that quite radical image of peace and kindness in a place where there is an extraordinary lack of it. Some men are attracted to that. They are very sensitive and aware of who comes into the prison - there is no one else they get to see - so they scrutinize people in that way, and it is very challenging to us as well, but in a good way.

What we can offer is something that we cannot offer into a lot of other parts of society. A prison is a total institution and monastics are used to that total institutionalization of life-style. We know what it's like to be with yourself a lot, and to have to experience unfulfilled desires, and to have a routine and discipline. The approach we have is in line with that of Bo Lozoff (Director of the Prison Ashram Project) which is to encourage seeing prisons as potential centres of kindness. A prison can be secure, but it needs the attention of a lot of caring people from our society, who are prepared to show inmates understanding, patience and kindness. With the development of trust, they can relearn - or maybe learn for the first time - what it is to be a responsible human being. I can't see any other way of dealing with the huge problem of rehabilitation. What we are doing is like asking, "Is such an approach possible?" One is saying, "Let's be human here, in spite of how awful this place is, or how awful some of your minds probably are as a result of kamma" That's something that brings you right back to what's essential.

AS: There is a strong tendency in society to see their crime which may be something of a fairly brief duration - is actually their self. A very common view of someone who has not been in prison would be that these are people who have done harm, hurt people, and so they should be punished, "Why should you be kind to them, they haven't been kind to anyone else" Would you like to comment on that?

AP: Obviously there is some crime involved to get them into prison, whether they are "ultimately" guilty or not: but I have been very clear from the beginning that it's not my business. What is my business is to make myself available and open, and to make myself trustworthy through being honest. What they did - for me - is not important; what is important is what their potential is. What I want to appeal to is that potential to transcend what they have done, and to encourage and support their

highest qualities - of love and understanding. What they need is not to forget about their crime but, in their own time and space, to see clearly what they have done - especially if what they have done has been harmful to others That's the only way it can be rehabilitating. Unless; you give those supportive conditions, all you are doing is reinforcing the crime and the criminal mind - and then it is just a perpetual going back.

AS: Can you give us a couple of examples of how you notice a situation developing at prison with the teaching?

AP: We'll talk about the women first. It started with an invitation from the Chaplain to go and show "Alms bowls to Newcastle" [a television documentary] about Harnham and myself, as a subject of interest, something different. They were interested and asked very good questions, and I offered to, come and start a meditation class. Within a fortnight we had started our first meditation class. None of them are Buddhists, none of them had ever been exposed to any Buddhism, only one had ever done meditation, and so we were starting from scratch. What that has grown into is a continuing Weekly Class. At first we tried to play the Buddhism down and just encourage the meditation, but the growth has been such that Buddhism has come into it more and more. I mean, how do two Buddhist monks teach meditation without saying something about Buddhism? We got permission to make meditation stools for their personal use and now all of them make an effort, at least once in the twelve hours that they are locked up, to sit for a period of time. Lately they have taken the initiative to meet on their own on weekends that we couldn't come in, and that went quite well. Now they are talking about trying to do that once during the week - as a group - in the little chapel that they have on the wing.

An idea came up for the Multi-cultural Fair, which was to have a prisoners' stall, with things that the inmates have contributed themselves, and they seemed to respond very positively to this. They have done things for charities in the past, so we are going to encourage that and see if we can get the support from the people who look after those areas for the inmates. It is rare in the inmates' lives that they have something that they can give to, be generous towards and support. There is never the encouragement or an appeal to their kindness.

VN: I think the situation in Frankland with the men parallels that a lot. What really got it going was a series Of six lectures on "An Introduction to Buddhism", which brought in about 10-15 men, and out of that evolved a regular weekly group, which is like a Buddhist service. Now we are sitting, we chant, and we have a lot of talk because the prisoners like to talk a lot. It is very new to them, they may have had a little bit of experience with Yoga or TM or read a book, but nothing much really - so again it was starting from scratch. Now, after a period of months, we are getting to know the men more and some of them have opened up to us more



about what they are going through. We are talking of some people who experience mind states of an intensity that a lot of us are not, used to.

They go through so many ups and, downs; some guy may not come to the group for a while, and it could be that he is going through absolute hell - its, not, that he's losing interest, but very extreme stuff may be coming up. One chap told me that every morning when he wakes up, he notices that his mind just moves straight towards depression; not just because of where he is, but because of the strong tendencies that his mind has. That's what he is up against - just to get up and try to meditate when everything is loaded against him. So in some ways, it's not quite the same as your average Buddhist meditator.

AS: How long do they stay with it? You both mentioned that in some ways it is a situation in which there almost isn't any choice. When they get out, are they going to stay with it, or just forget it all?

AP: Only time will tell, one really doesn't know. In Buddhist groups outside prison, there's a lot of ups and downs and comings and going's - how much do people stick with it in those situations and take it away? As a teacher, you're always sowing and nurturing seeds and so why should it be any different in prisons, and how far in the future do you want to see this? How much they get out of it is very much on an individual basis.

One of the things that I am encouraging very gently, and trying to demonstrate through their own experience, is the protection of the Refuges, and Five Precepts. The one thing that will keep them straight is if they can actually see the benefit of those, and adhere to them in their lives when they leave the prison-and, to the best of their ability, whilst,they are in prison.

Dear Ajahn Pabhakaro

Yes brother, 'tis I Jimmy. I'm not usually one for writing but - I just felt I had to write and say "thanks" for the last six weeks, and especially for last Tuesday which was fantastic. Please pass on my thanks to the other monks and to the lay brothers and sisters who treated us so kindly and for a brief time made me feel human again.

I was right brother. I got some terrible stick after walking around the yard with those candles and flowers but I can handle it. If you can truck around in an orange dress and a bald napper I can do the same with candles and flowers. I somehow knew there'd be a price to pay for all that beautiful food and drink but it was worth it! ...

There's no doubt brother that since I first met you I've changed. Not in a way that anyone would notice but in a very personal way that only I am aware of. I feel that you are showing me the way to the answers though I'm not even sure what the questions are yet but rest assured that when they come to me I'll be firing them at you from all angles. So en garde brother.

Anyway that's it for now PB. I'll see you on Tuesday so till then take care and stay as cool as you are.

Love, Jimmy

Dear Editor,

This letter is to indicate our appreciation for the instruction in meditation we've received from Brothers Pabhakaro and Nyanaviro. We're continuing to follow their guidance in this matter, finding their visits to the prison very encouraging. Meditating with them in a group has helped us not to "throw in the towel". It appears that all those attending these "sessions" pursue the practice in their calls alone. We recognize the potential in meditation to help us to live more calm,

aware and progressive lives. We are still only at the initial stages and can't sag definitely what overall impact it will have. However, we have all concluded that it promises additional calm and contact with the less familiar aspects of ourselves.

We are, simultaneously, being guided as to how best to deal with any potential overload of tension, an important technique when living in a highly contained environment like jail. There can only be advantage's for us in being reminded of the variety and multiplicity that is "life", because, in jail, there is the danger of seeing, days, weeks etc. as part of a routine. Our lives are enhanced by the warmth and affection we feel towards these two individuals, a feeling they initiated by their very positive approach to us. We believe they care about us and about those around them generally. This exchange of affection has added a happy and positive feature to our lives. Their good wishes towards us are not taken for granted, because jail life can be lacking in that respect. Obviously prisoners find themselves absorbed in personal problems and tend, therefore, to look inwards.

There is, as a consequence, a lack of community spirit and general caring. Plenty happens in prisons to cultivate the cynicism rampant in here; credulousness is not always helpful in these circumstances. But the cumulative affect of this cynicism is to distance us from the idea of sincerity in people. The arrival of the "Brothers" dented that wall of cynicism, reminding us that there will always be the human attempt to "improve" or "be better". Each reminder that such struggle exists and advances can only reinforce our sense of solidarity with the world, even if we're physically isolated.

Beyond any religious or institutional motivation, there will always be the common desire, however latent, to "be better". We wish to improve and progress to the maximum of our ability. Our values do not regularly adhere to the established norm, and we are not Buddhists. We are, nevertheless, very concerned to be, what we understand as, progressing people. We will be the ones to assess our own lives eventually, as now we are the ones to select, within the obvious constraints, what we deem useful pursuits. We consider ourselves critical enough judges of the worth Of most activities. In saying that, we want to indicate the value we perceive in meditation. We are still only at the stage Of 'Sensing" the extent Of its relevance, but the fact that we have not "flung in the towel" is an indication of how we estimate it, because, oddly enough, we are busy people.

Yours sincerely,
Three meditators

Angulimala is the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy organization, which coordinates prison visiting and correspondence with inmates. Help and -support is always needed; to find out how you might help, please write to:

Ajahn Khemadhammo
Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy
The Forest Hermitage,
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Warwick CV35 8AS
Telephone(0926) 624 385



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Question time with Ajahn Sumedho

Ajahn Sumedho answers a series of questions on meditation and practice in lay life.

Question:

If one looks inward, too much, does one miss out on the lessons the outside can teach?

Well, because of the sensitivity of this human form, you're impinged on by other people. But the emotional states and the sensitivity involved in being in this state are to be reflected on rather than taken personally. So you begin to see what selfishness is in your relationships.

In monastic life, for example, you have to share everything everythings communal - so a good part of our experience of life are the reactions we have to each other. There are different types of characters and different ways of doing things; some people you find more attractive and others less attractive. All of this is observed, so that you're not just following these habits, but you're beginning to really see a lot of these selfish attitudes and biases -and feelings of being threatened by others.

I remember experiencing this years ago with one of the monks. Intellectually, I liked him very much, but whenever he started coming near me I had this tremendous fear arise. He was a very kind person - never hurt me - but whenever this particular monk came into my field of vision I started feeling fear. And then, because I was puzzled about it, I started realizing that the particular way he moved and carried himself conveyed aggression to me. It was not his intention, but the actual movement of the way he walked and carried himself converged to this mind some aggressive force.

I hadn't been aware of that because I tend to be very abstract about people: you know "this one is this way and he's good natured, he's kind"; but then you get confused by these irrational reactions that don't fit into your intellectual perception. The way people move sometimes has a very strong effect on us that we're not always aware of.

I began to see that even when everything is going right,
 once you are caught in this habit of worry, you still
 worry.

The convention of the Buddhist monk puts the male into a non-aggressive, harmless form; one of the important parts of the training is in harmlessness. The whole appearance - the shaven' head, bare feet, the robes - is to remind the individual man himself he is a monk, and also to convey harmlessness to the society around. This is why I think, once you get used to Buddhist monks as a perception, you feel devotion and respect: if the life is lived properly then it represents compassion, harmlessness, restraint - good virtues. Now if you take skinheads - they don't convey harmlessness, do they? Their whole expression is to convey aggression and brutality. They develop a way of walking, and looking, and moving, and they put on things

that make them look aggressive and mean. This tends to bring fear into the mind.

The training of the Buddhist nun is to put the female form into a state where, it's not trying to attract men or arouse jealousy in other women. So the proper training of a Buddhist nun is one of not trying to draw attention to herself.

By training in these ways, we become, aware of conditioned tendencies in ourselves. If I had no such convention I would probably never have thought of it much. In Thailand, as a monk, I became very aware of the reaction people had to me, and I began to wonder why they would jump back when I had only good intentions. I wanted to be friendly, and yet when, I came directly to them they backed off. Why? Then I began to see that, for one thing my size could appear overwhelming, and that it was also because of the habitual movement of the body.

Living in Thailand for a number of years, I developed a genuine appreciation for that particular respectful way of living, where you're trying to bring out the best in people -rather than arousing things like greed, or anger, or aversion, or envy, or lust. You're no longer moving out into the society with the intention of arousing these kind of states of mind in people, but you're living in the society trying to - be that which is nonaggressive, harmless - that which conveys to the mind the possibilities for the human being to be peaceful and awake, mindful, wise, and restrained.

Question:

You said that worry is what we produce when we don't have any faith in travelling beyond pleasure and pain, Can you say a bit more about that?

I am a great worrier! When we first came to England everything was very uncertain: how would we survive as Buddhist monks in a non-Buddhist country? Would we be beaten up and attacked by people, would anyone give us alms-food, or what would happen? But in actuality my life here in this country has been a good one. I began to see that even when everything is going right, once you are caught in this habit of worry, you still worry. It became obvious that people were interested in the Dhamma and they were going to feed us and we were going to survive and monasteries were going to be supported; but then when there wasn't anything to worry about, one could find something else! And being in a responsible position - like the abbot of a monastery, you get into positions where you can't just hide behind someone else. In Thailand I could hide behind Ajahn Chah's robes, and because I wasn't a native Thai I could get out of a lot of things, so that there were certain advantages. But being here I always felt that I was the focal point, and so there were tendencies towards doubt and anxiety.

In reflective meditation you go out to the feeling of worry. I would begin to open to that very feeling of worry or doubt, uncertainty, rather than try to suppress it through affirmation. but I found that the way out of worry was not by suppressing it but by totally accepting the feeling of it. The insight that came from that was that in the sensory realm there is an awful lot to worry about. It

Being Still

Breathing was
a raft ferrying inward
Looking,
I became Aware of thoughts
Visiting spaciousness
Of mind then, leaving,
Still, like a tree,
All weathers touched me,
Cool and heat,
Waiting as I was for new
Verdance and deeper light.

George Coombs

wasn't just a neurotic hang-up! In this realm of pleasure and pain and personality and success and failure, there is a lot to worry about. You could trip and break your leg, you could have a heart attack, you could be beaten up or there could be a nuclear holocaust, there could be an IRA explosion and all kinds of things. Then because you have a memory you can hold on to things of the past: "This happened to me five years ago and what if it happens again?"

A country like Britain has developed to try to give us a sense of security - you have a stable government, you have welfare, medical services, education, all these things laid in for us -and still we worry! So I've realized, that that sense of insecurity and uncertainty is just the way life is.

But if you go to the actual feeling of insecurity, you find it peaceful. It's a kind of paradox: when you are reacting to that feeling, you get worried and frightened by it; but as you open to that uncertain, insecure feeling that you have and the violent reaction to it, and bear with it - you will find its peacefulness. You will find a sense of peace with yourself. Worry, if skilfully used, takes us to serenity of mind; because when you're with that very feeling of insecurity, your thinking, mind - with its "what if this happens, what if that happens? - will stop operating. Then you will begin to recognize emptiness of mind, which is a state of mind which is very receptive to the way things are. Then you have perspective. You begin to have real faith that you will be able to cope with the problems of life that you experience.

For example, I realize the potential at any moment for having a heart attack, or being beaten up, or the ozone hole growing bigger, or all the whales disappearing in the ocean, or being taken over by the Communists, or whatever.... But what I know now is that I trust that whatever happens I will respond to it appropriately, because these things are not the important issue any more. One is in tune with something transcendent, rather than thinking, "Well if I don't have this I'll just die, and if this happens I won't be able to stand it". I realize that whatever happens I'll stand it!



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Extinguishing the Fires of Delusion

Wat Kern (The Monastery by the Dam) lies close to the Laotian border in a region of Thailand designated as a "red area", a danger zone where farming and 'monastic settlement is not generally encouraged. Nevertheless, Wat Kern is regarded favourably by forest monks because of its isolation. Ajahn Puriso, who was born in Australia, has been the abbot there for over two years now. In this interview with Ajahn Munindo, recorded earlier this year, he explains the practical difficulties and some of the ethical dilemmas that come up when trying to protect the forest in North-East Thailand.

Ajahn Munindo: Perhaps you could explain how Wat Kern came to be here in the first place.

Ajahn Puriso: In 2512 (1969) the dam was completed, and the waters had started to rise. The animals fleeing the water came into this area - which is about 1,000 acres. There were many more animals here than there would normally be in a forest of this size. So at that time the local people were having a hey day, slaughtering the animals - particularly snakes and wild geese - in great numbers.

Then some villager living nearby who had heard of the forest monasteries of Ajahn Chah invited Ajahn Chah to come here, ostensibly to try and save a Buddha's footprint relic which was in part of the area which was going to be flooded. Ajahn Chah came here to retrieve this Buddha's footprint, which he did. And of course when he came here and saw the forest he thought: "This is a nice place" He saw the untouched pine forest and the high population of wild animals, and he also saw how it was being destroyed. I think he probably suggested that somebody put a monastery here. In any case what eventually happened was, the head of the Forestry Department for the district and the Head of the District invited Ajahn Chah to come and start a monastery here; and the idea was not only to start a monastery but also to protect the forest. This is one of the last remnants of this sort of forest-dry tropical forest.

AM: So how long have you been living here as the abbot? Were you here from the beginning when Ajahn Chah was given the place?

AP: I wasn't here until just five years ago. When Ajahn Chah saw the monastery, he sent one of his disciples - an energetic young monk - who had quite a thriving community here for a while.

Lighting fires is something like a national sport. The forest is something you burn.

AM: Would it be fair to say that if you hadn't been here the forest probably would have disappeared? **AP:** That would probably not be quite accurate, because if I hadn't been here I'm sure other monks would still have been here and keeping some hold over the place, just by being here. But if there were no monks here, everyone says there would not only be no

animals left but no forest left - it would all be turned into fields. So the forest of 1,000 acres has been fenced off. **AM:** So the forest and the animals would have been destroyed by local inhabitants of the area - its not people coming from outside that are doing the damage. What do they do in the forest? **AP:** Most of the villagers round here are not the ones destroying the forest. It's usually criminal types, who steal and have no respect for the land or anybody. There has been a lot of antagonism, especially over hunting. They seem to have no real need to keep destroying the forest, but they slash and burn to clear an area, sell it, and start on another area.

After I'd been here a year I saw three main categories of forest destruction going on. There are also many more milder kinds of destruction, which are important, but I decided not to worry about them. I decided to concentrate on three areas.

First, lighting fires - which is something like a national sport. The forest is something you burn. The most damage is done by the burning of great areas of forest at one go - its complete destruction. It's hard to understand, because we live in the city and come to the forest and think it is a lovely place. But the forest to someone who lives in the forest is really an unpleasant place. It is primitive and burning it all down will turn it into nicely organized fields. I have been lost in the forest, and it is an incredibly unpleasant experience - I found it really inhospitable. There are vines which have thorns just waiting on the ground to get your feet ... there are ants I've felt like burning it down a few times myself!

The second area is cutting down big trees changing the face of the forest to scrub. They even cut many small trees the thickness of your finger, taking hundreds of them to make grass thatching for their roofs. They'll cut trees the thickness of one's hand or arm - they always pick tall straight ones - and they keep those as a rail to hang their jute on. A lot of this is very wasteful.

The third area is hunting and foraging. They'll burn the forest to make it more accessible and harder for animals to hide; the burning also makes animals run, so they are easier to shoot. They come at night and shoot these little flying squirrels, called "gliders" twenty to thirty in one night - to sell them. So the hunting and a lot of their activities are not for the survival of these peoples; they can get by without.

When they come and
look for fruit in the
forest, they will cut
the whole tree down
just to get the fruit -
no idea how to
preserve it at all. I
remember last year a
big tree was cut and
it fell right across the
main road to the
monastery. The
reason it was cut
down was to get a
bees' nest at the top
of it. Sometimes
they'll burn the forest
to go in to find bees'
nests or get resin out
of certain trees - they

will get the bees or resin but, not put the fires out!

AM: So how do you actually go about protecting the forest? One person can't police the whole forest.

AP: It's never been just one man; the monks all assume it as part of their responsibility. The main work we have to do is putting out fires, which is quite a heavy responsibility. The equipment is basically a beater - a long bit of bamboo with three lengths of fan belt attached to it - with which you smother the fire. Alternatively, there are water tanks and water pumps.



Every year the monks have to fight fires, and in the height of the hot season, it's about 103 degrees F. You crawl back to your kuti [hut] after a meal and rest for a while - its so hot. Then you have to go out and fight a fire for a couple of hours; then you might rest for a while; then there's another fire, and you come back about dusk, have a bath before evening meditation; then there is another fire. It's very hard to just endure, it's very unpleasant. Last year it was the worst year for monks having to fight fires - we had, to go out every day for quite a long period. At that time there were actually eight monks and all the monks felt they had to chicken-out, it was such a difficult thing to do.

Most damage was done last year - half the area of the forest was burnt down and a lot of other damage was done as well. The fires here often sweep through and damage the leaf coverage of the forest floor. The rain too is so extreme: there is no rain at all until May not one drop until May and the fires start in January. When I saw that, I thought, "This is the turning point." I could see much more clearly than in other years how the area was changing from dense forest to scrub. So I decided we needed help.

The second year I was here we'd had a lot of trees being cut and we only had four to five monks at that time. So I had the water patrol police come and stay: I gave them one of the kutis and they stayed there for three months. They hardly had to do anything at all. It was just their presence here - there was no hunting or tree cutting for the whole three months. So I could see that was one way to get good results. People are not afraid of the monks - if they are caught doing anything, the worst they can get is upbraided. If it's the border patrol police they

might get arrested or life made generally unpleasant for them - their guns might get confiscated - so they just stop coming.

Fortunately there were some lay people who made an offering here - a lady whose husband was a Colonel, so I asked her if we could have the Army here to help. The Head of the Army for this Province came down with officials from the District, and they sent some National Guards. They're staying here now. We've had very good results.

AM: I see you're also training Alsatian dogs to go round and check on poachers. Does that bring up anything negative from the village people?

AP: I don't think there's any animosity. Although I'm going to be building a wall - walling people off from the monastery - I don't think it causes that much negativity among the villagers because they will have built the wall themselves and made money, which will bring them prosperity. They have a hard time trying to find any work.

AM: It clearly needs money to build these things and to take these measures. How is the monastery supported if it's not by the local people?

AP: Most of the financial support of course comes from Bangkok. As you know, all monasteries are supported by donations. This monastery is regarded as being very remote and uninviting generally, and so when they see a Western monk staying here for five years ...

AM: Do you use the teaching to educate the people and bring about a sense of responsibility for the dwindling forests of Thailand?

AP: Yes, it's something I've had to contemplate for some time, because there is very little sense of conservation at the moment. The forest is something you burn. I recognize this attitude - you can't say it's actually wrong, but you can try to point out the causes and effects.

At one time the population was not very big and the forest was huge, so they could snatch a bit of forest and leave no serious effect. But now there are a lot of people and not much forest the whole situation has changed completely, so they have to change their attitude.

Buddhism does not have a specific teaching for conservation, because at the time of the Buddha there were no conservation problems. There is no direct teaching about conservation except loving kindness and compassion. I tend to teach about being more heedful - the opposite of thinking: "Here I am, born in this world, and I'll get what I want - nobody shall stand in my way." So it's getting across the idea of asking, "Where do I come from, how can I manage to live on this planet Earth, How many forces are there, how many conditions are necessary for me to be here?"

"Where does your body come from? If you have a strong body, it's because mother and father had good genes, gave you good food, so these are the results of causes...." This is something we can talk to villagers about. Then I say this can be applied also to Mother Earth. Everything we are is just a reflection of our attitudes, how we think and behave. The West is clever with science, making things grow faster by use of fertilizers, but is Nature really something separate from us that we can manipulate to our own ends? In actuality we are part of Nature. So if we are treating Nature with lack of respect, we are destroying our own environment, and that will assuredly backfire.

So that's what I talk about in Dhamma talks. Everywhere I go now I make it part of a talk, and because it's a new idea people sit and listen to it, not having considered it before. There is a sutta in the Buddhist scriptures where the Buddha speaks very positively about the planting of trees, and the benefit of digging wells - providing water for others.

AM: Is this also something you aim to do? **AP:** Yes. I've had a plan to start re-planting - to get some rubber trees. We've planted these in North-East, Thailand, and they grow quite quickly and they don't deplete the soil. They planted eucalyptus trees in the past, and they are finding out now that they deplete the soil quite a lot. Rubber trees are shady, succulent trees but they are too expensive for villagers to buy - so we thought of perhaps planting a test area, then letting the villagers come and get their cuttings from there. We'd have to see how well they grow. Other monasteries are doing that. Some have acquired many acres of land around existing monasteries. Setting up monasteries is an ideal way to protect the forest.

AM: From the latest developments in the relations between Thailand and Laos, it seems that you are going to share electricity with your local power generator here, and they want to cut a huge tract of land right through the middle of the forest to carry the electricity. How are you negotiating with the authorities concerned with this project?

AP: What's happened is that they want to erect some high power lines which will come through the monastery. At first I was disappointed, but we had a professor and a journalist here from the West visiting, and when they learned of this, they said I should do something about it. I recognized this, but felt I was not going to get into a large campaign with newspapers, rallying and demonstrations - things a monk should not be getting involved with. I wanted to do it in my own quiet way.

So I got in touch with a lady I knew, stating the case and saying I would appreciate it if the authorities would reconsider the path and find a different route. I was very mild and diplomatic, having no strong hopes of success - I'd just do the best I could. The lady who read the letter considered it worth doing something, so she wrote an official letter to the head of the judicial department asking them to help out the monastery as best they could....

Conservation, however, is still little thought about, except when there are national disasters. Logging companies should get formal permission to log certain areas, but on occasion they have been logging in an area where they shouldn't have been, leaving buffer zones but otherwise logging right, left and centre. So when the rain started washing down the hillside, the huge logs were also washed down, smashing into people's houses. It was a national disaster in which about 800 people died. It was seen that it was caused by timber companies, so now there has been a ban on logging all over Thailand.

I've been trying to get Wat Kern recognized as an official monastery for over four years now - it takes a long time. Part of the trouble is, that it is such a huge area of the Forestry Department's land. (I've a sneaking feeling it's also to do with the logging companies.) According to the law, the monastery can ask for about seven acres of this piece of Forestry Department's land, then the entire forest falls under monastery protection. It's almost like leaving the land alone for a period of time - say, thirty years. But that kind of arrangement is out of favour now, and the latest idea is to make a Buddhist Park. In this setup the monastery could actually build kutis in the area, and be recognized as a park or sanctuary.

The planters of groves and fruitful trees,
and they who build causeways and dams,
and wells construct, and watering-sheds,
and (to the homeless) shelter give:
of such as these, by day - by night,
Forever merit give."

Kindred Sayings, Vol. I

THIS ISSUE**Editorial:**

- Cover:** ■ Letting Go is the Greatest Kindness; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Walking The Way - Nuns' Tudong; Sister Thanissara
 ■ Unlocking Human Potential; Aj's Pabhakaro & Nyanaviro
 ■ Question time; Ajahn Sumedho
 ■ Extinguishing the Fires of Delusion; Ajahn Puriso

HOME**BACK ISSUES**

EDITORIAL

A refuge for the world

Most, of the contributions to this Newsletter stress the attitude of kindness or concern for the welfare of the world in its variety of forms. In going forth one doesn't cease to respond to the world, but ,the training matures that response to one that is no longer limited by the biases of self-interest. Suffering is always ready to pounce whenever the heart moves, from the stillness of spiritual friendship into personal or emotional involvement. Wanting people to be a certain way, and having an expectation of results are the pitfalls.

Currently the Summer Camp School is in full swing at Amaravati. It's a rather more structured event this year, and has required a full and sustained commitment from most of the senior monks and nuns, as well as those more recently gone forth. Having left the family life behind, the need for Dhamma for children engages us in it again - from a different angle.

True responsibility is when you can respond with wisdom
and compassion.

Maybe the situation is new, but a willing response to the world is a traditional practice, not without its ironies. Having left home, most of us after all have spent considerable amounts of energy in rebuilding, preserving and taking good care of monasteries.

Researching into the Buddhist relationship with the environment for the WWF "Religion and the Environment" event has increased my awareness of the part played by forest monasteries in the preservation of the forests-, in Britain this also includes reforestation. Within the last generation, the forested area of Thailand has shrunk from around 80 to around 15 percent of the country, and bhikkhus visiting Amaravati from Thailand have been commenting on how lush and richly forested southern England is by comparison. Perceptions of the remote jungles of South-East Asia have taken quite a beating.

Perhaps the forests are all vanishing. It's a time when the untouched paradises are all gone, and the sheltering lonely places disappearing. So the time is also ripe for an awakening to our true responsibility: to care for the world. True responsibility is when you can respond with wisdom and compassion. To reject the world, or to, be engrossed in it would be a lot easier than the precarious balance of love without attachment.

The purpose of the gone forth life is to perfect that balance. Samanas train themselves to seek nothing - and expect nothing from the world: for any such seeking is the home of all suffering. When the very possibility of having a world that will fulfil one's wishes is renounced, the heart can open joyously and be a Refuge. Worldliness ends and true benevolence is the unbidden response. Through Dhamma we can become as cool and sheltering as the trees, offering a Refuge to whatever comes our way. It is our human responsibility.

Ajahn Sucitto