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THIS ISSUE

Editorial: ■ California Dreaming; Ven Amaro ■

Cover: ■ Working with Love; Three reflections
Articles: ■ The Life of a Forest Monk; Luang Por Jun
■ Visiting the City of 10,000 Buddhas; Ven Vipassi
■ Amaravati's Child; Sandy Chubb
■ UK Buddhist Education: a Dhammic Perspective
■ Samatha Meditation; Aj Brahmvamso

HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

Working with Love

Love is one of the ways in which wisdom manifests in the world. In the following three pieces, love is investigated in the light of the Buddha's teachings.

go
to

- Ajahn Sumedho
- Venerable Nyanaviro
- Veronica Ferry

A Mature Balance; Ajahn Sumedho

Enlightenment is nothing more than growing up, being a mature human being. It is the perfection of human kamma, in other words: maturing, being responsible and balanced - being a moral, wise human being, who is no longer looking for 'someone to love me.'

Maybe we can't find love in someone else, so we want God to love us. We say, 'I believe in God, and he loves me - nobody else does, but God loves me.' But that's still immature - to want love from 'out there', from someone else. A lot of religions just appeal to that level of emotional development: God loves you if you do good, and gets angry if you do bad; when you're naughty you go to hell, and when you're good you go to heaven. So you do good, not because it's the right thing to do, but because you think that if you do bad, God is going to punish you and send you to hell.

Now enlightenment is something really practical that each one of us can realise: each one of us is capable of being awake. When you're a child and emotionally immature you have to have love from someone else, because you can't love yourself yet. But when you're mature and balanced, you can love - you don't need to be loved by someone else.

It's nice to be loved by others, but it's not necessary. You're not going around, saying, 'Please love me'. When there's wisdom, you can love - you don't need to be loved any more. That is the maturing of a human being, and there's no rebirth in that.

Love is the natural radiance from wisdom. When there's wisdom, it's the natural way to relate to others - but when there's no wisdom, we tend to corrupt love with lust, possessiveness, jealousy and fear of rejection. All these things distort any kind of love we might be able to generate from our own mind, unless we love through wisdom rather than through desire.

He was a very lonely person, but it had all been masked by the enormous defences which he had developed over the years.

go
to

- Ajahn Sumedho
- Venerable Nyanaviro
- Veronica Ferry

Nobody Is Beyond Help; Venerable Nyanaviro

One aspect of the life in our monastery at Harnham is the work we do in prisons. There have been times when prisoners have opened up and shared with me the most painful aspects of their personal life. Many have had a whole history of violence going back to early childhood. Never having received any affection in their lives, they turned to crime and violence as teenagers and inevitably ended up in jail.

One very moving experience took place when I was in Frankland, a top security prison. There is a high proportion of 'lifers' there - a term usually applied to murderers, rapists and bank robbers. I was with a young man who had quite a record of violence and was in for having very nearly killed somebody. I was alone with him in his cell. We had come to know each other over the weeks - he was a registered Buddhist who had become interested through the martial arts. He was very, very tough! He stood as tall as myself (about 6'3") but had a much sturdier exterior, and he could look you straight in the eyes. Quite intimidating! I was alone with him in his cell, when he told me that his deepest desire was to kill another person. He had the idea that if he could actually take somebody else's life, the feeling that would arise would be an extremely powerful one - and he felt the need for that experience. I was at the time sitting cross-legged opposite him on his bed. I gulped!

I had never sat with anybody before who had told me in all sincerity that they would really like to kill someone. I felt completely useless, and made an effort to breathe through my heart, staying with this person, just allowing him to come out with his story. When he had finished, he asked, 'Well, what do you think of that, brother?' (They call each other 'brother' in the prison.) I didn't know what to say. What do you say to someone who feels that level of anger and violence in himself? I was sad. It was a very strange experience. I thought to myself, 'I feel so utterly empty... useless. . . what on earth can I offer this man?'

My mind had completely given up. I was totally astonished by what he had told me. Then something just came out from of my heart, I asked him, 'Have you ever felt love in your life, have you ever felt love towards anyone else?' He said, 'No, no, there's none of that in my life'. He went on to say that his earliest memories were of his father regularly beating him up, knocking him to the floor. He could never stand up to his father, so when he got older he decided to take on other people instead.

Then I asked, 'Have you ever even thought that relating to others with kindness rather than violence and anger might be a more wholesome way of carrying on, a nicer feeling for yourself?' I left it at that, as I had to go on and see someone else, but I recall feeling very sad as I left him in his cell. I thought to myself, 'I don't think Billy can make it. He's really beyond

help.'

The next time I saw him, some weeks later, it was a very different experience. He had been meditating on his own, and told me that one night while he was sitting, he suddenly had the realisation that inside he was very lonely. He was a very lonely person, but it had all been masked by the enormous defences which he had developed over the years. The world for him had been a very painful place and he had learned how to shut himself off. Of course, as a result, he had emotionally incarcerated himself within a very small lonely space. Once he realised that for himself, he gained some insight into his predicament, which was wonderful to witness. He was already making the effort to see the results of acting kindly to others - either through a smile, or through being more patient and letting some of his fellow prisoners just be who they were. He said he was working on it, taking one step at a time.

This was very rewarding for me. It gave rise to a feeling that these people are worth of every effort one can make. If I had believed my first impression, maybe I wouldn't have bothered with him any more. It gave me confidence that in even the most extreme kind of human being, there is still something there that is feeling. It might have been denied and repressed, but it's there and you can point to it. For those people who are prepared to be still enough to look, and tune in to their inner being, it's very rewarding - regardless of how painful an exercise it may be.

None of us in this monastery have to go through such heavy kamma to reach our hearts (I don't expect). Through leading more moral lives we generally have more ready access. But being with people who have not been keeping the Precepts one sees the inevitable results. One realises that nobody gets away with anything. But you also realise that nobody is beyond help.

**go
to** ■ Ajahn Sumedho
■ Venerable Nyanaviro
■ Veronica Ferry

Healing and Metta; Veronica Ferry

May i be well.....

Metta meditation became an invaluable part of my life five years ago. I first started using it as part of a healing process, in the very concrete form of literally willing myself well again after a chain of events which had nearly led to a breakdown; neither tranquillisers nor various



forms of complementary medicine had been the answer. I felt the disease was not entirely mental or physical, but to do with the heart. I needed something that I could do for myself to relieve the sense of impatience over the whole situation - something which, once learnt, I could do on my own without reference to anything or anybody else.

Since then, I have continued to use the meditation in my work as a nursing auxiliary on a radiotherapy ward. I usually use it silently. The meditation provides me with a confidence in any situation - often by providing a calming rhythm to my actions which appears to transmit to the patients I am looking after. Ultimately, it allows me the confidence to sit quietly and remain fully with people, even as they die. Occasionally, if it feels appropriate, I have the opportunity to work with it more directly. When dealing with pain, some patients respond better to having the words: 'May I be well, may others be well', to say or think, rather than using breathing techniques. Sometimes these words provide a breakthrough in understanding; a patient may realise and acknowledge that he or she has cancer, and is no longer going to be 'well' in the physical sense of the word, but may have the ability to be more 'well' in mind and heart than at any time prior to the illness. I keep the use of the meditation very simple, without reference to 'meditation', 'metta' or 'Buddhism'. I find that after a busy shift I am able to leave the ward more calmly if I have individually, however briefly, wished each patient well - particularly when I know there is nothing more that I can do for them at a practical level.

At home in formal practice, whilst finding other forms of meditation beneficial, I frequently return to metta. In a busy life it enables me to go some way towards accepting my limitations as a wife, mother, nurse and member of the human race. It helps me to cultivate the qualities of patience and endurance - qualities which I find so elusive, and so very necessary. Sometimes I use a guided metta meditation tape with headphones in order to lock out the sounds of family life; it is not always possible to find a quiet time in a day, with shift work and growing youngsters! The use of the tape can overcome the feelings of isolation that meditating on one's own can bring. Practice in the morning allows me to open to the day - even if it only lasts minutes! The important thing is that this time does seem to increase as the years go by. Similarly, evening sitting encourages me to let go of the debris of the day. It's by no means perfect: as a chronic insomniac, I still resort to sleeping tablets and use herb teas - but there is a significant improvement in my attitude towards insomnia. Other forms of meditation obviously can be used to the same ends; it simply depends on one's nature which is more suitable.

In my case, time and metta meditation have allowed the healing process to reach a point where it is possible to resume what had previously been a mutually destructive relationship with a parent; to lead a happy family life; and to hold down a job - all of which was unimaginable a few years ago.

I am enormously grateful that I was in the right place at the right time to receive instruction in this form of meditation.

May others be well. . . .



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The Life of a Forest Monk

Phra Iridaviro Thera, better known as Luang Por Jun, was our guest at Amaravati from July 1989 to June 1990. Sangha members and lay guests will long remember his warmth and vigour, and the clarity of his teaching. Luang Por is one of Venerable Ajahn Chah's most senior disciples, and he is spiritual head of several monasteries in Thailand. While in England, he kindly consented to be interviewed by Ven. Pabhakaro. Here is the first part of that interview.

Please Luang Por, would you tell us your life story, as best you can, in brief?

Before I became a monk, my life was primarily concerned with ways of making a living to support myself, the way people in the world do. I went everywhere, did everything, and when I contemplated these things in my mind I felt that it would be very difficult to find the Dhamma. Worldly life seemed to be about seeking things externally through having a good time, with no real end or completion in sight. People sought entertainment by drinking and looking for a good time without realising that these things had no real substance. During one rainy season I went to Bangkok to find a livelihood there. I observed the different types of people in Bangkok - the very rich, the very poor, beggars - the full range of human existence within a city. I knew a rich man who had many wives. One day one of his minor wives came to the house and had an argument with his major wife. He tried to persuade them to get on together and pacify the argument, but to no avail - they continued to argue amongst themselves. Having many wives he also had many children, so he would spend time moving from household to household. He never found any happiness in any of them, despite his immense wealth. I felt a sadness and weariness with the situation of the world.

How old were you, Luang Por, at this time?

I was 23. I continued my search in the world and began to notice people in the positions of authority. Often they were not fair or just, and would even exploit and take advantage of others. Quite often people took the blame for things they did not do, and so were punished unjustly. I began to see that the world was very uncertain and I made up my mind that I would return to my village at the end of the rainy season, and use the money I had made to buy robe material and a bowl.

So I began to inform my friends of my plans. My friends didn't believe me or support what I wanted to do. Fine. I let them think what they wanted. When they realised that I was serious, they decided to offer me bowl and robes and the requisites I would need as a monk. I finally returned to my village and told my family my plans. They had no objections and were quite pleased.

Now put all of these things aside for the time being, so

that you can put them behind you.

So I took Upasampada [bhikkhu ordination] and began to think that I would like to become a forest monk and seek the quietude of a cave or the forest. I sought the life of a wandering forest monk, but my preceptor didn't think this to be a good idea. He thought it selfish to just go off on my own, and encouraged me to stay and support my Dhamma brothers and sisters. 'What would happen to you if you went off and then fell ill? Stay here, close to your friends and family so that you can be cared for.' My preceptor said it was a rare occurrence to have someone in the village who had made such a firm determination to give his life to the Dhamma and to the robe. He said I would be of great value and benefit to the monastery if I stayed. My preceptor did promise to send me off to the city where I could learn to study the scriptures. I realised that even if I never went away and learned to study the scriptures, I would still benefit by staying with my preceptor and learning how to serve him and help look after the monastery and the junior monks.

So I agreed to follow his advice and stayed in the village monastery for two or three years and became involved in building works and things of this nature. After my fourth Vassa [Rainy-season retreat] I still hadn't been sent anywhere to study, so I approached my preceptor about going to the city. He agreed - and so I went off to Ubon city in the year 2500 [Buddhist era, or 1957 C.E.] to study Pali. I had already completed my three-year study of the scriptures.

When I arrived at the monastery in the city I commenced my Pali studies, memorised the Patimokkha [bhikkhu training rules], and learned the different sorts of chanting. We wouldn't even have the same chant twice in just one month, and my mind begin to spin with all the new knowledge. This verse, that verse, I became caught in a chaotic cycle of turbulent thought. I did manage to learn and complete quite a few things that first year, but by the second Vassa, I was absolutely fed up! I had headaches from studying so much. The monastery was beside a noisy cinema that often didn't close until after midnight.

I began to wonder what to do. I couldn't study and memorise the scriptures for much longer, so I thought maybe I could become one of these monks who is a professional speaker and give desanas [Dhamma talks], if I studied the fancy language and intonation that they used. I couldn't come to a decision, and I would have been too embarrassed to return to my own village as I had not achieved what I had set out to do. My mind was very upset and confused. I also began to experience a lot of lust and desire.

An old man that I knew - he was actually the grandfather of a friend of mine - came to the monastery to take ordination. I began to question him and asked him if he would like to study the scriptures after he was ordained. 'No,' he replied, 'I'm too old for that. I'm going to stay with a forest master at Wat Pa Pong. All you have to do is meditate in the forest - close your eyes, adopt the right posture - and everything comes to you. It sounded like just the thing for me; I wanted to go as well! He was leaving after his ordination, in 10 or 15 days, so I went and asked the abbot if I could go to Wat Pa Pong. 'Have you given up, then?' he asked me. So I had to tell him that my heart was no longer in studying, and I had come to the conclusion that I should go to live in the forest.

He gave me his blessing and his support, so I began making preparations to go. I didn't know what the routine of a forest monastery would be, but I bought a mosquito net and new robes together as well as Ovaltine and milk powder to drink

**On a Visit
to a Buddhist
Monastery**

before going pindabaht [alms round] in the morning. I made sure that I had enough money with me as well, just in case*.

**The irony of Ajahn Jun's 'preparations' is that according to the discipline that forest monasteries lay emphasis on, possession and use of money, and storing and consuming Ovaltine and milk before dawn (the time of the alms round) are forbidden.*

The day came to go and so we were off. I hadn't contacted Luang Por Chah before I left my monastery to ask if I could come. When we arrived at Wat Pa Pong monastery we went to pay our respects to Luang Por Chah. He was expecting the old man that I had travelled with, and told him that a kuti [hut] was ready for him. The old man introduced me to Luang Por Chah and told him how I had become fed up with my studies and wanted to live in the forest as his disciple. Luang Por Chah responded by saying he wasn't sure if there would be room for me; he was surprised to have someone turn up at the last minute like this without asking beforehand.

Ajahn Chah turned to me and began asking about me: which village had I come from, when was I ordained, how many Vassas did I have, and so on. I told him that I was sincere about being a monk, that studying hadn't been very fruitful and that I was ready to entrust my body and life to him as my teacher and train as a forest monk. Ajahn Chah was sympathetic, but told me he regretted there was no space for me to stay at the monastery. I offered to stay in the kitchen or the sala, but he would only allow me to stay if I had a hut of my own. The lady who had given us a lift to the monastery asked Ajahn Chah if she could offer 120 Baht [about £2.50] to the monastery to cover the costs of building a small grass kuti for me to live in. Ajahn Chah was silent for a moment or two, and then gave his consent. 'All right,' he said. 'Let's give it a try.'

After puja that same evening, Luang Por Chah sent for me. I went in, paid my respects, and he asked me what I had thought of the monastery after my first day there. Did I miss the monastery I had left? 'No,' I replied. Did I think I would be able to stay at Wat Pa Pong? 'Yes, I think so.' He didn't really say much to me that first night, just told me that the practice was right there in the monastery, just as things were. The next night he asked the same questions again: it was only a few days before we would enter the Vassa, and he wanted to ensure that I would stay for the Rains. 'Yes,' I told him, 'I'll stay.' 'Good,' he said, 'but if that's the case, all of your requisites and possessions will have to be examined.' Ajahn Chah's background was similar to my own. He had lived in a village monastery for eight years before he started to live strictly by the Vinaya and practise in this way.

And so he began to question me and cross-examine me in the presence of the other monks - there were about four or five other monks at Wat Pa Pong in those days. I opened my case and the Ajahn began looking through. 'Did you buy this mosquito net?' 'Yes,' I replied. 'Then put it over there,' he said. 'Did you buy this new sabong?' 'No,' I said, 'They offered it to me.' 'In that case put it over here.' And so we went through my whole case, item by item, with Ajahn Chah

Half in novice-white,
half priestly saffron.
Her welcome
wide-eyed,
immediate, direct:
'How glad I am it's you!'
I feel the warmth
of being chosen,
select.
On soft and gentle feet
Acceptance, confident,
complete,
from this small source
flows out.
Our spirits meet.

Bubbling her melodious song
All the meditation long
Warm in my lap
The Amaravati cat.

Mrs. Rosemary Stevens

asking where each item had come from. 'What about the robe you are wearing? Did you buy that too?' 'No.' I told him. 'Did you wash it with soap that you bought?' 'Well, yes, Ajahn.' 'Then take it off and put it over here.' And so it was with my angsa [shoulder cloth], until finally my sabong [lower robe] was the only thing I had on after surrendering my other robes. 'You can keep the sabong,' Luang Por said. I breathed a sigh of relief. I realised by then that Ajahn Chah meant business and would have no nonsense. Of course I didn't dare say anything. After I had given up my robes, one of the other monks went and got some robe material and made the appropriate markings on the cloth. Ajahn Chah saw me eyeing the pile of robes I had just given up. 'This is nothing to be sad about,' he said, 'Those things didn't come to you in a pure way, and in our practice we are developing the path of purity. This same thing was done to me, and I had even more things taken away. They set fire to them. But I won't do that to your robes. We'll send them back to your home village.'

Luang Por Chah then asked if I had any qualifications or worldly experience that would be useful at the monastery. I told him about my building and brick-laying experience and my study of the scriptures. Could I give desanas? 'No, I didn't learn any of that.' He saw the various tattoos that I had and wanted to know if I knew any magic charms or spells or incantations. 'A few,' I said. He made me write them on paper and then throw them away as a sign of giving them up, and then made me relinquish the charms and amulets I had as well. Ajahn Chah went on to say, 'Now put all of these things aside for the time being, so that you can put them behind you. I want to teach and train you to practise in the way that we do at Wat Pa Pong. And whether you think it is right or wrong, I want you to do your best to train in this way, to trust and follow the teaching.'

I knew that it was important to do as I was asked. I was nearly at the end of my rope after the route I had taken via my village monastery and studying the scriptures. There was no other place I could go, so I was quite happy to surrender and give myself to the practice. But after we had finished that evening, Ajahn Chah still hadn't given me any guidance or instructions on the practice. When he left that night, he just told me to come over to the sala when I heard the bell the following morning and we would practise together.

The next morning Luang Por Chah gave a talk on training the mind (bhavana) after we finished the chanting. Afterwards we got ready for alms round. I wasn't used to wearing two upper robes together as they did on alms round, and a novice had to help me put them on properly. They were old and tatty, quite a dark colour and well worn, but I was quite pleased to have them.

Time passed by, and soon there was only a day or so left before the Vassa began. We began building the little thatched-roof hut I would occupy. One of the novices was having a difficult time digging out the foundation, so I took the shovel from him and began digging away. Ajahn Chah just looked on and smiled, but didn't say anything. When the foundation was finished, we needed some vines to bind things together. Ajahn Chah sent the same novice to get some, and thinking I would save the young novice some trouble, I went to give him a hand pulling them down and cutting them up. Ajahn Chah still didn't say anything, he just watched smiling**. I didn't have a clue what he was smiling at, and I thought he was smiling with approval at my work, that I must be showing him what good handyman I was. The kuti still wasn't finished before the Vassa began. Ajahn Teeang was invited to spend the rains in his home village, so he left and I was offered his kuti.

*** More transgressions of the training! Bhikkhus are forbidden to dig soil or damage plants.*

I gradually settled in at Wat Pa Pong. Everything was different than I had previously imagined it would be. But I was earnest and resolute in my practice, very sincere, and determined to be

a good example, particularly since Ajahn Teeang had left and I was the monk immediately junior to Ajahn Chah. I was very cautious to present a good example, and some nights I wouldn't even sleep. I was very keen to practise. I would wake up in my kuti worried that I was late for morning puja and make my way through the dark forest without a torch, stumbling over everything, to reach the sala and discover it was only midnight or 1 a.m.! So I would stay there, and practise meditation, even though it didn't seem to be producing fruitful results. But I was earnest in my pursuit and persevered....

to be continued



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Visiting the City of 10,000 Buddhas

Earlier this summer, along with four other bhikkhus, Venerable Vipassi had the privilege of being invited to serve as a Precept Master in an ordination ceremony for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis held at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in Talmage, Northern California.

In recent years, our Sangha in England and the Sangha of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas have developed a very cordial relationship. It began when Luang Por Sumedho was invited to meet the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua while visiting California several years ago, and has since continued through the exchange of visits by various members of our communities.

It has been surprising and delightful to discover that there is so much common ground. The apparent differences fade in significance when one considers that both our sanghas place great emphasis upon strict adherence to Vinaya, and practise Dhamma within traditional (Thai or Chinese) monastic conventions. We also both stress a high degree of commitment to community life - which requires the relinquishment of personal freedoms and viewpoints. The similarities of aspiration, of trials undergone, of lessons ground home, of insights discovered, all serve to create an empathy of spirit. One can readily understand how Chinese pilgrims, travelling in India in the centuries after the Buddha's parinibbana, could report that monks of differing Buddhist schools, adhering to widely differing interpretations of the teachings, could often be found living in harmony together in the same monasteries.

In 1989, a dozen of our bhikkhus - along with Theravada and Mahayana monks from various parts of the world - were invited to participate in a large-scale ordination ceremony at the City, it being Master Hua's intention to stimulate auspicious occasions when the two traditions would work together. Last year, the Venerable Master led a delegation of monks, nuns and lay people to Europe, which visited Amaravati and Chithurst. During this visit the Master again expressed his view that it was high time that the Northern and Southern traditions took more opportunities to work together amicably as disciples of the Buddha, rather than feeling separated by their differences. In the light of this developing spirit of co-operation, I looked forward with special interest to our visit.

One of the most surprising first impressions we had upon arriving at San Francisco is the fact that it's cool and foggy! So much for the eternal sunshine images of California. In fact, San Francisco has a climate all of its own. During the summer months sea fog is drawn through the gap in the coastal mountain range (which forms the Bay Area) by the warm air inland, and then recedes a few days later when the land cools again, allowing the sun to reappear. On the night we landed, the Golden Gate Bridge was shrouded in mist, and people strolling across it were bundled up in down jackets and ponchos. Yet Venerable Heng Jau, who met us at the airport, warned us that, although it might be cool down here, 120 miles north at the City of Ten

Thousand Buddhas they had been having a heat wave, with temperatures as high as 117 degrees F.

The monks live in what was the area for the criminally insane, and since they have not had time to renovate their own quarters there is a certain oppressiveness to the atmosphere, which their presence only barely softens.

Our first couple of days at the City were spent resting and getting used to our new surroundings. We arrived just at the end of a two-week retreat being given by Ajahn Sumedho, assisted by Ajahn Amaro and Sisters Thanissara and Abhassara. The retreat had gone well - about forty people had attended, with another ten or so residents from the City sitting in (and reportedly appreciating the opportunity very much).

The atmosphere at the City is very surprising. Down at one end of the main street of an ordinary little North Californian town there is an enormous yellow Chinese temple gate. It is as if beyond this point one has entered China: besides the largely Chinese monastic population of a hundred or so monks and nuns, there is also a large number of Chinese lay people living on the campus. Hence English is more of a second language here.

The feeling of the place is not unlike that of Amaravati. At first it is easy to get lost! There are over seventy buildings set in nearly 500 acres, and, as the site was once the State Mental Hospital, many of the buildings have a strongly institutional feeling about them. In fact, the monks live in what was the area for the criminally insane, and since they have not had time to renovate their own quarters there is a certain oppressiveness to the atmosphere, which their presence only barely softens.

Elsewhere, much has been done. The main Buddha Hall, where most of the ceremonies take place, is very impressive. The central figure is a huge statue with a thousand hands and eyes - the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara - flanked by statues of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other deities. The hall is also lined with, literally, ten thousand Buddha images. After the comparative simplicity of the shrines in our monasteries, this can at first be rather overwhelming.

The atmosphere of devotion that pervades the City is palpable. Devotional practice points the mind and heart in a tremendously positive direction - and strongly counteracts feelings of self-doubt and negativity that can arise at certain times in one's spiritual life. I felt uplifted and energised by many of the ceremonies. The chanting is ethereal - one hundred or so voices tunefully chanting together to the accompaniment of many varieties of bells and drums.

Namo shurangama assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The wonderfully deep dharani, the unmoving honoured one, the foremost shurangama king is seldom found in the world. It melts away my deluded thoughts gathered in a million kalpas, so I won't need to endure countless aeons in order to attain the Dharma Body. I wish now to achieve the result and become an honoured king, who then returns to save as many beings as there are sand grains in the Ganges. I offer this deep thought to the Buddhalands which are countless like motes of dust, to repay the kindness shown me by the Buddha. I pray that the World-Honoured One will not witness as I vow to enter the five turbid realms. As long as a single being hasn't become a Buddha, at death I won't seek the leisure of Nirvana. May

forward

forward
is the way to go

the exalted hero's awesome strength, his kindness and compassion, search out and dispel even the most subtle of my doubts, causing me quickly to attain the Supreme Enlightenment and sit in the Bodhimanda of the ten directions. Should even the shunyata nature entirely melt away, this perpetual vow will never wane. . . .

Thus begins the morning chanting!

The ordination proceedings were somewhat different from what we are used to in the Theravada, but there are many similarities also. Acceptance into the Bhikshu or Bhikshuni order is preceded by a two- or three-year novitiate period. As the date of the ordinations draws near, the candidates enter a 108-day preliminary formal training period during which their suitability is assessed. The beginning of the ceremonial proceedings is then marked with a formal announcement of the names of the candidates who have been selected: this year, 7 men and 45 women - all Orientals except one, a middle-aged American man. (Some of the candidates had come more recently from the Far East and will return to their home temples after a period of post-ordination training).

The proceedings span several days and have three main sections (this is referred to as the 'Triple Platform'). These are, firstly, the examination by the Karma Acariyas (teachers who examine the candidate to ensure that he or she is suitable), then the Upasampada (acceptance into the Order), and finally the bestowal of the Bodhisattva precepts. At each stage there is a formal request for the Masters to instruct or bestow the precepts, a ceremony of repentance for past offences, then the requesting of the Sages, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Ten Directions to come and bestow blessings and to bear witness, and finally the enactment of the procedure by the officiating Acariya.

About twenty-five monks acted as Precept Masters: eight from our sangha (including Ajahn Sumedho), Ajahn Pasanno from Wat Pah Nanachat, some Vietnamese elders, some Chinese elders, Ajahn Khantipalo from Wat Buddha-Dhamma in Australia, some monks from Wat Dhammakaya in Thailand, and our old friend, the 103-year-old Bhante Dhammavaro - as well as the monks from the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua was too ill due to a kidney disorder to officiate at most of the proceedings and only appeared briefly; he requested Ajahn Sumedho to stand in for him as Upajjhaya (preceptor), which must have come as rather a surprise to Luang Por! And, no doubt, as a great honour.

The Precept Hall (sima boundary) is a carpeted platform, bounded by mirrors, around which the Precept Masters sit. The assembly circumambulated the hall three times, chanting the Great Compassion Mantra to purify the place before the ordination could be carried out. The candidates had to make their requests in Chinese, English and Pali. At one point they were asked: 'Are you a great hero?' - to which they replied with gusto, 'Yes, I am a great hero!' Apparently this is the high-point of the ordination ceremony - a demonstration of the heroic nature of the Bodhi resolve.

The proceedings took up most of the day, and after the final formalities had been completed, we were asked to walk in single file back to the Buddha Hall for a group photograph. As we left the Precept Hall, I noticed what at first I took to be large bundles of yellow cloth piled up on either side of the path every ten feet or so. I suddenly realised that these were the new monks and nuns in full prostration, reciting 'Na mwo ben shr shr jya mu ni fwo' (Homage to

in the light
of dark
and
so
alone
together
is the way
in the light
of dark
and
sway
without
yet giving
every
all
to crooked
strong
to weak, or
tall
forward is
the way to go
in the light of dark
and
so

Jacqueline Fitch

Fundamental Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha). Forming a corridor lining the route all the way to the Hall were prostrating chanting figures - monks, nuns and hundreds of black-robed lay people - all prostrating and chanting. The whole thing was breathtakingly beautiful. Further inspiring occasions followed. That evening the monks reconvened for a 'Triple-Recitation' Patimokkha, a recitation in Pali (by Ajahn Amaro), in Chinese, and in English of the code of discipline that is more or less identical in the two traditions. Such 'Concord Observances' have traditionally been used as a symbol of harmony when fraternities within the Sangha have branched off into different ways of practice. So, in terms of our monastic frame of reference, that was a very moving event. The following day the newly-ordained monks and nuns received the Bodhisattva precepts in a long and solemn ceremony that enshrines the Mahayana aspiration. The ceremonies concluded with the transmission of the lay Bodhisattva precepts to a large number of lay people.

Besides the inspirational qualities of the occasion, and the moving atmosphere of devotion in which the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is bathed, I found that one of the most impressive aspects of the whole situation is the level of commitment of the monks and nuns to their monastic life. The day after it was all over, the four hundred Taiwanese visitors and most of the visiting precept masters had left; the bhikshunis had changed from their ceremonial canary yellow robes into workaday grey and brown, and the City had the familiar atmosphere of Amaravati after Magha Puja, when Ajahn Sumedho has flown off to Australia and our visiting monks and nuns have all left.

There's a certain feeling of coming back to earth, back to the ordinariness of daily life. When things are unspectacular, one has to go beyond reliance on inspiration and get down to the steady re-application of effort, patience and dedication. This is where true cultivation occurs.

Venerable Master Hsuan Hua offers some reflections.

This meeting between the Theravada and the Mahayana traditions deserves celebration and commemoration. What is important is that beginning from today, the Southern and Northern traditions will no longer have to be separated into different schools. We are neither in competition with each other, nor will we be distinguishable one from the other.

My policy is that not only should Buddhists heal the divisions in our family, but we should also unite with other religions in the world. I don't reject any one; I want to be unified with them all.

In the past, Asian Buddhists clung to their separate, tiny states, not recognising the importance of co-operation. The various ethnic groups and cultures knew only their small scope, and usually paid no attention to other schools or traditions - content to spin inside their own little sphere.

Now that Westerners are beginning to take part, a new spirit of co-operation is possible. With this meeting, Buddhism has reached its proper international standard. We have different cultures and races joining together, and finally, we can make the meaning of 'Sangha' a reality. As you know, 'Sangha' means 'the harmoniously united Assembly'. This is a true Sangha gathering.

Moreover, our gatherings are free of contention and strife, and also there is mutual esteem and cherishing. This is just the way the original spirit of Buddhism should be. We should sustain our energy of co-operation at this level.

Now I know the measure of my mind has its limits, but if your generation of disciples from the Northern and Southern traditions can unite in a single body, then we can realise our promise of making Buddhism expand and grow great.

If someone wanted to return to lay life, what would you say to them? With me everything's OK, no problem. If you want to advance, you may; if you want to retreat, it's up to you. I only speak the teachings - whether or not you listen is your choice. Living people can die, and the dead can return to life. Who tells you to be that way? Who's in charge of this process? Who tells you to return to lay life?

In cultivation, there are two major obstacles for left-home people - two things that make us upside- down, and unable to stand firm: money and sex. If any one of us can see through these two things and put them down, then that person will be a successful cultivator. In the Theravada style, not holding money is a very wholesome Sangha practice, a good dharma. And as for sexual desire, it is just a residual habit. If, when that energy arises, one can remain unattached to it and not follow it, it will disappear, and that is true liberation. Money and sex bind us so tightly that it is really hard to get free. That is all you need to know in a nutshell.

I don't give gifts on the occasions of good-byes, nor do I want to receive anything. However when people want to give me something, I tell them to leave behind their afflictions. I'm not greedy for them, but the more the better! People would be much better off without them. That's one thing I want you to leave with me; I will receive that gift willingly.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Working with Love; Three reflections	HOME ■
Editorial: ■ California Dreaming; Ven Amaro ■	Articles: ■ The Life of a Forest Monk; Luang Por Jun ■ Visiting the City of 10,000 Buddhas; Ven Vipassi ■ Amaravati's Child; Sandy Chubb ■ UK Buddhist Education: a Dhammic Perspective ■ Samatha Meditation; Aj Brahmavamso	BACK ISSUES ■

Amaravati's Child

Sandy Chubb, with her husband and two children, spent a week in the company of the Sangha and other families at this year's Family Dhamma Camp.

'Mixing up the ages in a wholesome atmosphere, free from all the innuendo games we normally play - the children respond to that as well - that's the best part about coming here.' Secretary and co-ordinator Keith Errey was talking about his feelings on this year's Family Dhamma Camp at Amaravati Buddhist Centre in August.

'There's a lot of activity for the children which at first they don't think they'll like, but as soon as they sign up, they love it. Undoubtedly, the aspect of all people having to muck in and help in the spirit of dana is what makes it. You could get these services at Butlins [a commercial holiday camp for families], but with an entirely different result.

'The presence of the Sangha, and the fact that we are within a monastery, is the key. There's a sense of gratitude in being offered a share in the facilities of the monastery: the sala, the library, the space.' Keith, a scientist from Oxford, was a good reminder of dana to everyone during the week, dealing with endless questions each day with easy-going, smiling patience. He and his wife Lynn, who taught a packed early-morning yoga class, brought their two daughters, Olivia and Jessie (who played the title role of Prince Vessantara in the play the children performed.)

This play was a re-working of a much-loved Jataka tale: the story of the Buddha's previous life as Prince Vessantara. The Prince's faith in the practice of dana was so great he gave away his entire kingdom, his beloved wife and children, and his magic white elephant. Eventually they are returned to him. The play formed a natural climax to the week, and all the gifted adults involved in helping, the children, and the audience enjoyed the build-up of excitement and the fun of the performance with its dazzling colours, masks, music and flowing costumes.

This was the sixth annual camp for families who want to explore ways of living, teaching and sharing the Dhamma, in the peaceful setting of Amaravati. Some camped in tents, others were housed indoors. Days were divided into unique Dhamma teachings for the children (each class taken by a different nun or monk), morning and evening chanting and pujas, meditation, art, crafts, lots of different workshops, and - throughout the day and evening, with everyone down to the small children joining in harmoniously - the cleaning and kitchen jobs.

We all thought puja would be boring, but it isn't - the chanting makes you calm and peaceful.

There were camp fires with toasted marshmallows under a full moon. Venerable Shingo, a

visiting Zen monk from Japan, ran classes in calligraphy. There were 'tribes' meetings in the afternoon in the huge marquee and, on three unforgettable evenings, Apahn Sucitro's extraordinary accounts of his travels in India, full of insight, modesty and humour. These bedtime stories made an impression on everyone, cropping up in discussion nearly every day.

The theme of this year's camp was the Paramitas, the ten powers of goodness which are cultivated on the path to enlightenment by all living beings. The spirit of the paramitas ran through everything, from the Dhamma explanations after morning puja to recreation and workshops.

'I've enjoyed the Dhamma classes more and more, and feel I need even more of them. So do lots of us older ones,' says Manita, who is a 16-year-old ballet student. 'The monks and nuns told us things about Buddhism we hadn't heard before, and everything we heard seemed to be directed at us personally.'

For Sujata, aged 13 from Manchester, this was her first camp. 'A lot of us used to be really shy talking to the nuns and monks, and now it's not so bad. We saw that many of them were shy of us, too. They seem to really understand what it's like to be our age. We all thought puja would be boring, but it isn't - the chanting makes you calm and peaceful.'

'Usually you think of religion as dead serious and boring,' said 14-year-old Kikhil from Wigan, 'but the Dhamma classes are put across in such an interesting way. It's loads of fun.'

Sister Cintamani worked out a perfect day's walk half-way through the week: several miles of changing terrain, a hot countryside of baking cornfields changing with dark, pungent forests, culminating in a sensational view over Ivinghoe Beacon. Nine members of the Sangha joined us, and added their gift to the day by taking and blessing lunch with us on the hill-side, where an impromptu shrine was assembled by the children, who brought special offerings to lay on it.

Not everyone had a family with them, but Julie-Ann from Manchester - who ran the juggling classes - thought it was good to be in a family context. 'The meaning of the family has become quite different. I liked working the paramita theme into the juggling, and discussing patience, determination and energy with the children. Best of all, I liked getting to know the Sangha better, finding out how the life of the monastery can help a lay person. There were lots of little things in my mind which have come up and been cleared.'

Tony Bruni, who looked after the bookings and finance, brought his daughter Francesca along. 'The best part of the week for me was sitting with the Sangha in the morning at 4.30. I was teaching T'ai Chi three times a day; funnily enough, I didn't get tired. It was a very tight schedule, but if I found I was losing my relaxation, I got out a bit, then came back in later.'

The organisation ran like clock-work. Medhina, co-ordinating the activities and timetable, always had time to help anyone who needed her (I saw her running up a rota on

First Born

First born,
first seen,
new born
unseen.
Today is the first day
of a new life.
Not yet overfilled with
personhood.
Womb fresh
softer than the breath of sleep.
How precious
Two priceless eyes that look for
the first time
at everything.
A pure mirror for our stale
seeing
A blessing of light, human
B E I N G

Venerable Sobhano

her word processor at 5.30 one morning). Sally cooked delicious, imaginative wholefood meals, three times a day, for over a hundred people; and Beryl was a skillful housekeeper. For Venerable Sobhano and Sister Cintamani, it was the fruition of hours of work, running the camp so very well, yet allowing their monastic lives - concerned at this time of year with the Vassa retreat - to remain as undisturbed as possible.

'We had a lot of preparation for this week, and we both did a lot of our own personal preparation,' said Venerable Sobhano. 'The camp isn't considered to be a threat to us, but something to open to. All the monks felt that they have learned a lot, having to teach the children. Also, it happens within the context of our discipline, which develops the strength to contain this kind of energy without our being overwhelmed by it. Take the noise, for instance. Children aren't trained to be still and sensitive, so their parents like to bring them into contact with the Sangha, so they can see how to be composed and still be happy. It is important for young children to feel there is something in their life which is sacred - something to revere - otherwise, the world becomes a drab place.'

There is a subtle distance between the Sangha and ourselves, which over the week is woven together into a fabric. Whenever a lay person 'connects' with a monk or nun in discussion, that sense of separation dissolves. Afterwards - with infinite delicacy - the distance is re-erected, but in a way which makes that encounter even more acute and precious.

One morning, passing a carpentry group who were outside in the sunshine painting some shelves for the camp toilets, I overheard two boys discussing metta. Chetan, aged 11, explained: 'We painted the back of the shelves, and the others (Heather and Anne, 13-year-old twins) asked us, "Who is going to see that?" 'Nine-year-old Edwin chipped in: 'We said, "The wall sees it. Loving-kindness to the wall! That's metta!" '

After breakfast on the last day of the week, when everyone was scurrying to do their dishes, my 12-year-old daughter Georgia stopped me in mid-flight, saying: 'Mum, there's a Dhamma class I want to tell you about.' It was the first time she'd commented directly on anything in the week, so we sat down again, and she told me this:

'Sister Abhassara was telling us about when she became a nun. She had with her this beautiful porcelain statue of the Chinese goddess of compassion*. In her hands was a bottle of sweet dew, which she sprinkles like rain over all beings, out of compassion for their suffering.' Then Georgia related the story of a tragic death which occurred at that vital moment in Sister Abhassara's life. I don't want to go into it here, as it was Sister Abhassara's own story, meant only for her Dhamma class.

**Kwan Yin, from Mahayana Buddhism.*

However, Georgia went on to say: 'After the accident, Sister Abhassara was sitting with the Sangha, desperately trying to compose herself and make sense of it all. After a long time, the monks suddenly started to chant a blessing on loving-kindness and compassion. The sound was so piercing and sweet, that it made Sister Abhassara think of the goddess of compassion. She had never heard anything like it.

'And Mum, afterwards she sang it to us, and I just can't describe it, it is so lovely. And then it started to pour with rain; it just teemed down.' We sat there amid the dirty breakfast plates and looked at each other. And nothing more needed to be said.

THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Working with Love; Three reflections	HOME ■
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UK Buddhist Education: a Dhammic Perspective

A report on a weekend conference held at Sharpham House, Devon, 6-9 June 1991.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the role of education in unlocking our true potential as human beings is coming in for ever-closer scrutiny. Shorn of its moral dimension in the West by the triumph of a secular society, education has increasingly stressed technical virtuosity at the expense of nurturing the whole being. 'We are producing human beings with minds as sharp as razors and about as broad,' lamented the last Archbishop of Canterbury, and the results of that imbalance are only too plain to see in the ecological degradation of our planet and the violence and intolerance apparent in human societies.

In the traditional Buddhist countries of Asia, especially those societies where the Theravadin form flourishes, the symbiotic relationship between Sangha and laity, monastery and school, has long lain at the heart of Buddhist practice. Although that relationship has been attenuated by the spread of Western influence, the underlying importance of values and ethics is still acknowledged - and where more appropriate to start in fostering those values but in the home and the classroom, the twin nurturers of childhood potential?

The Sangha of Western monks and nuns in the UK is now over a decade old, and we are beginning to explore new ways to develop its relationship with the wider lay community. The great success of the Family Dhamma Camps at Amaravati over the past six years has underlined one of the practical ways in which the creative energies of Sangha, parents and children, can work together in harmony for the welfare of others. The inspiration of that example has led, over the past two years, to the establishment of a Working Group of teachers and lay supporters of the Sangha, whose purpose is to explore ways in which a Dhamma School for 9 to 16 year-olds could be founded. The ligaments of what such a school might entail have already been fashioned through the drafting of a trust deed for charitable registration and consideration of both curricula requirements and the means whereby parents, teachers and Sangha can make contributions.

School is where we are taken out of life to learn about
life. What we learn is usually associated with where we
learnt it

Given these developments, the opportunity to meet for a long weekend at Sharpham House in Devon to discuss the wider issues raised by the Dhamma School initiative was very welcome. The conference brought together twelve individuals who have been intimately involved in the

related issues of education and Buddhist practice - either as members of the ordained monastic community, or as participants in the Dhamma School Working Group, or as scholars, teachers and writers. Discussions were based around six presentations which were given more as informal reflections than as written papers. Stephen Batchelor (Sharpham Community) spoke about the Buddhist philosophy of education as manifested in the great classical universities of Buddhist India - Nalanda and Vikramashila - and the relevance of their curricula for the instruction of present-day children. Colette Bradley (Education Otherwise) and Lynette Gribble (Chair of the Management Council of Park School, Dartington) talked from their personal experience: Colette discussed the way in which parents have developed skilful means in terms of home-based education for their off-spring, while Lynette gave some trenchant reflections on the practical problems inherent in the establishment of a new school.

Barbara Jackson (Amaravati) and Guy Claxton (Schumacher College) brought the discussion back to matters of principle. Barbara asked us to consider the relationship between morality and education, while Guy looked at the nature of the learning process and the sort of qualities of resourcefulness, resilience, and reflectiveness (the new 'Three Rs') which he would hope to see manifest in any Dhamma-based education. Hazel Waddup (Head, Hangleton Primary School, Hove) then talked about her own attempts to introduce an awareness of ecology and wholeness of being in her own state-funded school.

Much of the value of the meeting lay in the informal discussions which took place around the presentations. These discussions ranged over highly practical considerations of the most appropriate way to select teachers and the nature of the relationship between the Sangha and the school, as well as rather more philosophical concerns - such as whether the concept of anatta (non-self) was suitable as a subject for investigation for children who were in the process of coming to an understanding of themselves as separate individuals. The conference was also lucky to be able to hear Michael Young (Lord Young of Dartington) speak about his interest in educational initiatives - particularly in present-day South Africa - which can bring the benefits of education to those who have never experienced school or who, for various reasons, cannot travel to school and have to study at home.



the relentless search for truth

It is intended that a synopsis of the conference proceedings will be published by the Buddhist Publishing Group at Sharpham, and a more detailed record is available from Peter Carey, Trinity College, Oxford OX1 3BH.

Those participating in the conference are very grateful to Maurice Ash and the Sharpham Trustees for their generosity in making the facilities of Sharpham House available, and to Jan Hartell, the local conference organiser, and Heather Campbell, who took minutes of the entire proceedings, for their invaluable and cheerful assistance. It was a memorable weekend.

from notes compiled by Peter Carey

Colette Bradley:

It is an odd notion that school is where we are taken out of life to learn about life. What we learn is usually associated with where we learnt it: we do not always recognise that our skills

are portable.

Stephen Batchelor:

Traditionally, Buddhists have seen education as encompassing whatever skills are needed to function in the world of one's time. Likewise, in China and Japan, monasteries became not only places for the study of the Dhamma but of many of the classical arts, brush painting, geomancy, calligraphy and gardening. Buddhism has adapted its own learning environment to whatever skills are within our world; to educate ourselves and our children in ways that enable us to function within society while at the same time remaining true to our Buddhist principles. To find a balance between these two needs is the challenge of the Buddhist educator.

Barbara Jackson:

A Buddhist School is a school run on Buddhist principles, not an elitist or exclusive school for Buddhists.... It is our personal responsibility to incorporate Buddhist standards into our lives, recognising what we will and will not tolerate; where we stand on the questions of violence, sexism and racism; questioning how we impose decision-making on our children: whether we can allow them to be free; whether we expect or deserve to be respected.



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Samatha Meditation

Ajahn Brahmavamso is a senior monk at Bodhinyana Monastery in Western Australia. The following piece has been extracted from a talk given prior to an all-night meditation vigil, during which meditators have the opportunity to develop and learn about concentration.

Samatha meditation is about calming the mind down, calming the bodily activities, calming the speech and calming the activities of the mind. It's quite interesting to notice that when one faces a retreat situation one looks for activity: sitting in meditation one looks for things to do, for things to occupy the mind, rather than just being peaceful and quiet.

It's very easy to see that if my own mind thinks in a certain way, my body acts accordingly. That is a very useful reflection, because it means that there is more than one way to quieten the mind. Rather than just quietening it down in formal meditation, one can practise samatha meditation by restraining the speech and the actions in one's daily life. If one can restrain oneself in those situations - whether it is cleaning, washing up, walking, coming and going - then, when it comes down to sitting cross-legged on the meditation cushion, it is much easier to restrain the activities of the mind.

o o o o o o o

To develop samatha, first of all get hold of the breath - so you can see it. In order to do this you have to restrain other activities, the things that come up into the mind that tear you away from your object of meditation - whether it's thoughts or plans, or feelings of pain in the body, you have to restrain your mind from going out to those things, and stay with the breath. Once you can see the breath clearly, then you can actually calm it down and find what effort is required to make it smooth and light and the mind peaceful. This is the first practice in traditional anapanasati.

You may have noticed that whenever the mind is calm, the body doesn't give you so much of a problem. If you can get into a quiet state of mind quickly when you first sit down meditating - while the body is at ease, before the knees start to ache and the back becomes sore - then the body won't disturb you throughout the rest of the meditation. So quieten the body first of all, and then go to the breath and get hold of it wherever it is. It doesn't matter where the breath is - where the sensation is - wherever it is, see it there and catch hold of it and don't allow it to disappear. It is an effort - it's attaining or going towards something, doing something, rather than just letting go too quickly and doing nothing - rather than just watching the mind wander here there and everywhere; that's really not what the practice is all about. Quietening the mind down first of all is a prerequisite for any wisdom to arise.

When you really start to practise, you feel physical happiness, just by refraining from doing all those things that cause dukkha.

There is a sutta which is the extension to the Paticcasamuppada. It extends what happens after dukkha; it doesn't stop there. According to that sutta, dukkha is the cause of the arising of faith, the arising of confidence in the teachings - the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths. Once one sees dukkha, then one realises that there is something to be done. I often find with teaching that people don't practise. They don't do anything, for the one reason that they don't see any dukkha - or rather, they don't recognise it in their lives. They don't see the suffering or the cause of the suffering - the place where the suffering is - and therefore they never do anything.

So it's obvious that dukkha is the very cause for people to arouse themselves and say, 'Right, I'm going to do something about this!' That's the confidence saying, 'No longer am I going to run around, going to other places, looking for other teachers, doing other things - here is the problem. I'm going to stick to this spot, and sort it out!' That's when that link happens, that's the start of doing something about the problem of human existence. That's really recognising dukkha, recognising where it comes from, and doing something about it.

Once one has that fundamental faith - that confidence - to stop, to stay in one place and face up to the problem, then the next step is joy. This joy comes from understanding that here is the problem, and here is the way out of it; there is something you can do. Joy gives rise to interest (piti), which is really wanting in one's heart to do something about it, and this fuels the energy for the practice.

Then comes happiness (sukha). When you really start to practise, you feel physical happiness, just by refraining from doing all those things that cause dukkha. That much gives happiness. This is where the transcendental dependent arising starts to get interesting, because the factor of sukha is the cause for the arising of samadhi. If one hasn't got happiness, then there is very little chance for samadhi to arise. If one is having a very hard time - an unhappy time - and the mind is very closed, there is no way that samadhi can arise. Samadhi can only come from the basis of happiness. This is where talks can be really useful - they can inspire you and give you that interest, and from there you can gain samadhi and see for yourself.

The next step from samadhi is seeing things as they are. Now this factor comes after samadhi, not before it; it's not the cause of samadhi, but the result of it. The only way you can see what is going on is when the mind is quiet, concentrated. The reason that one doesn't see things the way they are outside of a quiet clear mind is because the mind is under the influence of defilements - greed, hatred and delusion. These are the things that distort our perception. You all know that when we are angry it distorts our perception of a person or a place. If we are angry, this monastery is the last place we want to be. Then the next day, when we are happy and the sun is shining, it is a wonderful place! The same monastery, but the defilements distort our perception - desire distorts our perception. When one doesn't see clearly, how can one see things as they really are - how can one understand what is going on? Avijja [ignorance] distorts perception. So to see things as they really are, one has to clear the mind of these things that distort the perception - if only for a short while. In that short while, one can see the way things are.

I've always felt that the idea of insight meditation can be a misleading one. Often it has been the custom or the fashion to say that samatha meditation is 'dangerous', because you can get stuck in jhanas [meditative absorptions]. But how many people do

you know who have got jhanas - let alone are attached to them? At least if you have a jhana, if you are very peaceful and getting blissed out, you know one place where the defilements have temporarily subsided. At least you are getting somewhere, you are doing something. Also, it is the nature of jhanas - of the quiet mind - that after one comes out of these states, the mind is clear, and nine times out of ten wisdom will arise. There is a danger there that you can get attached to jhanas, but the danger is not that much.

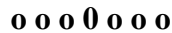
But where there is a danger in this Western world is in vipassana, because you can get notions about vipassana from a book. You can read an idea and straight away you think, 'Now I understand.' This is where one really attaches. You think, 'This is the way it is. I've seen the way things are' - when the mind hasn't been clear enough to get beyond the defilements. Delusion is ruling the day, the defilements have caught you again. Vipassana which comes outside of a quiet clear mind is not to be relied upon. That is the danger of vipassana. So, often it is more dangerous to be stuck with a view, than to be stuck enjoying a jhana. If one is practising samatha, at least one knows if it is being successful or not. One can tell very clearly, very easily if the mind is quiet or not. With vipassana it may be difficult to know if the insight that has arisen in your mind is true or not - whether you really are seeing things the way they are, or whether you are deceiving yourself. That is the big danger with delusion - delusion is delusive! It tricks you.



life is like a ...

So one does the practice: one cultivates happiness, cultivates samadhi, cultivates seeing the way things are - this basic insight. You will know if it is insight, if it gives rise to dispassion. You can ask yourself if you still get angry, if you still get irritated; if you still have desire and greed, and really want things - whether it's personal attainments, or fame in the monastery for being the great meditator, the best cook . . . if these are the things you really want, then you still have not really seen the way things are. If it really is insight, it creates dispassion (nibbida) in the mind.

Nibbida gives rise to a more intense form of dispassion, called viraga. Raga means lust, that which attaches you to the things of the world, or things of the mind: viraga is the giving up of that desire or delight in the things of the mind, or things of the world. The next step up from that is freedom, vimutti - liberation. That's not the last step, actually. Interestingly, the last step after vimutti is the knowledge that one has been released - not the sort of dithering about if one is enlightened or not, but knowing clearly the state of your mind. Like in the suttas, the monks didn't say, 'Well... um. . . yes.. I think I'm enlightened!' The monks who were enlightened just said so. The Buddha just said so: 'There's no more birth, nothing more to be done.'

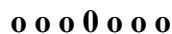


So when it comes down to reality, one does need to do something. One does need to put forth effort into practising - to quietening the mind down: in daily life, and also when one is sitting. If you try, and it doesn't become calm straight away, it's because one is pushing in the wrong places. People say sometimes that they have been trying to calm the mind down to make it peaceful, and it doesn't work - but there is a way to calm the mind down. Just because a person does it wrongly - doesn't know the way to quieten the mind - doesn't mean it doesn't work. One can calm the mind down, but to be able to do that you have to know when to push and when to pull; if you do all pushing and no pulling it doesn't work. You have to know the state of your mind, and also what you are doing. You have to know how much to hold on to the breath - to know when you are holding on too tightly to the point where you become tired and tense. If you find that you can't calm down, investigate the reason why. One of the reasons may be because you haven't invested the time or the effort. How many hours are there in the day, and how many of those hours do we spend sitting watching the breath?

One may be sitting, but how often does one watch the breath? It's quite easy to see the reasons, although it might not be a particularly nice thing to admit or own up to - but there it is. So one tries to be quiet in the day, and in the mind - to quieten down the external activity as well as internal activity, to be peaceful.

To actually practice samatha - to have success in meditation - not only do you need effort but you also need right view, a bit of wisdom or panna. It's panna which teaches quietness, and quietness that teaches panna. The two go together, like friends walking along a path hand in hand. Indeed, you cannot just practise samatha through an effort of will; you have to know where that will is to be directed. If you just direct it haphazardly, it is not strong enough - it's never sustained long enough to have any effect. The will needs to be directed through panna, knowing the right place to push - how much, for how long, and where.

So to say that the practice is just mindfulness is to miss the point: it's the whole Eightfold Path. Sometimes these days samadhi is the poor relation in the Eightfold Path. That's why I'm emphasising it here. The other ones can be overestimated. So it's really good to be honest with oneself, and ask just what is going on: is one's mind quiet, or is it noisy? When you are listening to a talk can you shut up inside, can you be peaceful? Can you listen to words without arguing about them? These are just ways of seeing where one is - then one can do something about it. It's not that hard to quieten the mind down, and it's really worth doing!



Paticcasamuppada is the Buddha's teaching of 'dependent arising'. This teaching occurs in several places in the Sutta Pitaka and describes how suffering is engendered dependent on supportive conditions. The process is initiated by ignorance and wrong views in the mind. In the Upanisa Sutta, the analysis goes further: the Buddha points out that for those who wish to awaken, suffering itself is a supportive condition for the arising of commitment to a spiritual path, and eventually to liberation itself.

The normal formulation is of twelve linking factors; from the twelfth, suffering, the Upanisa Sutta proceeds thus:

"Suffering is the supporting condition for faith, Faith is the supporting condition for joy, Joy is the supporting condition for rapture, Rapture is the supporting condition for tranquillity, Tranquillity is the supporting condition for happiness, Happiness is the supporting condition for concentration, Concentration is the supporting condition for the knowledge and vision of things as they really are, The knowledge and vision of things as they really are is the

supporting condition for disenchantment, Disenchantment is the supporting condition for dispassion, Dispassion is the supporting condition for emancipation, Emancipation is the supporting condition for the knowledge of the destruction of the asavas (the most deeply-rooted obstructive habits)."

Samyutta Nikaya II, 29



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Working with Love; Three reflections Articles: ■ The Life of a Forest Monk; Luang Por Jun ■ Visiting the City of 10,000 Buddhas; Ven Vipassi ■ Amaravati's Child; Sandy Chubb ■ UK Buddhist Education: a Dhammic Perspective ■ Samatha Meditation; Aj Brahmavamso	HOME ■ BACK ISSUES ■
Editorial: ■ California Dreaming; Ven Amaro ■		

California Dreaming

Venerable Amaro, fresh back from his four-month, almost non-stop teaching stint in California, offers a scout's report on the terrain ahead.

I had felt quite positive about the level of interest and support which was shown during my extended visit last summer. However, these last four months that were spent on the West Coast served to dispel any lingering doubts I might have had that the time was not yet ripe for the foundation of a monastery there.

Despite little advertising, there were between forty and sixty people coming along to the evening talks and meditation week-ends that were given around the San Francisco Bay area - roughly double last year's numbers. Furthermore, this interest was not founded merely on the basis of this being 'a new thing', but seemed to come from a deep respect for the place of renunciation, integrity and tradition in spiritual life.

To have so many people respond with such respect and gladness brings a bright glow to the heart.

In many ways, this visit was simply an expanded version of what we did last year. It had a slightly different emphasis, however, in that the centrepiece of the trip was a two-week retreat held on the premises of The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Ven. Sumedho, together with Sisters Thanissara and Abhassara, came from England to lead this, and a third of the sixty retreatants were members of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas community - including the abbot, Ven. Heng Chi. The retreat was followed by a three-day conference entitled 'Sila and the Modern Age', which, in turn, was followed by the ordination ceremonies of a large number of men and women as bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. Another five bhikkhus came from our monasteries in Europe to participate in these events.

During these months, many friendships with Buddhist and other spiritual groups were deepened, and it gave me great delight to have the honour of performing such an ambassadorial role with them. Naturally one feels very positive towards the lifestyle and ethic one has chosen to live by; however, to have so many people respond with such respect and gladness brings a bright glow to the heart. The presence of our community and its values were received by a great variety of people all along the West Coast with an enthusiasm befitting some fabulous elixir. It is not certain how many invitations we will be able to respond to in the

this hovering

in this hovering of emptiness
without surface
contour

future, but there have requests for us to teach on a regular basis at: The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, Green Gulch Zen Center, meditation groups in Vancouver, B.C., Seattle and Portland, Vipassana groups associated with Spirit Rock Meditation Centre, The Esalen Institute and Thai monasteries in San Francisco, Fremont and Los Angeles.

In order to assist the foundation of a monastery in this area, a small committee of lay people has been formed, called 'Sanghapala'. For the last couple of years they have sponsored the visits made by members of this community to teach on the West Coast, and it was they who organised and managed the retreat at The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Their task in hand now is the search for a place in San Francisco which will be suitable to be set up as a vihara. As has been the case in other countries where this community has planted roots, we expect to begin by establishing a small centre in the city. Later it is hoped that a monastery will be developed in the countryside - to offer a more quiet environment to those who wish to live as monastics, as well as for those who wish to experience life in a spiritual community more temporarily.

Since it is scheduled for me to lead a retreat at Amaravati over Easter 1992, I expect to depart for the USA shortly thereafter. It is the nature of all things to be unpredictable; however, "If the Good Lawd is willin' 'n' the creek don't rise" a monastery should be opening in San Francisco around May 1st next year. We will keep you informed of developments.

edge
thought is wandering
in
slowest
of
motion
timelessly through
a mysterious ocean
in this hovering of emptiness
thought is the visit of a stranger

arriving
and leaving
being born
and ceasing

Jacqueline Fitch



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EDITORIAL

Another Normal Day

Assessing the contents of any recent Newsletter, a reader might assume that the greater part of monastic life is spent wandering on foot in this country or overseas, or that it is a sequence of grand occasions liberally bathed with heart-to-heart debate. Far from it. Mostly it is a matter of routine. It is difficult to savour in words the bread and (little) butter of monastic life. A description of a normal day would sound arid: no entertainment, and a full commitment to the duties of the monastery, in which personal relationships are a secondary concern. To say the monastic life consists of morning pujas, chores, alms rounds, a meal, work, tea and evening pujas often without Dhamma talks would have some truth in it. But it would miss out the heart of the experience: the ever-shifting blend of kamma within each person, of inspiration and struggle and much subtler movements, let alone the patterns and vortices of mind stuff that result from a group of ten to fifty individuals 'going forth' with varying degrees of faith and energy. Being in the presence of such an intermeshing presents plenty of grist for the mill. Communally as well as individually we can be touched by the turning of our personal worlds and deepen in accordance.

Monastic life is not fixed in form, nor is it formless. When clearly defined principles of behaviour and intention are set in a situation that is unstable, the effect is kaleidoscopic: fragments of mind/body stuff get tumbled into seemingly random patterns. Any Buddhist monastery exists in a relationship with an indeterminate and fluctuating community of lay people - and that openness stimulates an aspiration to respond to whatever the next moment may bring up. That can be varied. A place like Amaravati, established to accommodate large numbers of visitors for a variety of occasions, registers and responds to the flow of input hour by hour. This is the way it's supposed to be: instability presents a great opportunity to be flexible and give up self-seeking. But it means that if we wish to respond to the flux of life, a lot of personal drives and moods have to be abandoned. Too much engagement on the personal level clogs the flow of compassion; hence the coolness of manner and the group silences. A sacrifice of personality is freely made in order to attune more fully to life.

In unstable circumstances, uncertainty gets plotted
against faith and effort until a mindful line appears.

Moreover, humdrum routines can serve as accommodating frames for some poignant configurations of human behaviour. One day a young woman presents a special food offering on behalf of her mother who committed suicide more than a decade ago; local townspeople touch into their unplumbed depths in the meditation classes; the Vinaya teachers describe the finer points of handling an alms bowl; and meanwhile someone is still taking the bucket of left-overs down to the local farm, and yes, every few days people carry buckets of water out to the newly-planted trees while they settle in. Normal events in a normal week; all rather wonderful

gestures of care and sensitivity that would find difficulty in arising, or in being noticed, in a more stimulated situation.

When I returned to Amaravati from India, the community was different from the one I had left six months previously: new arrivals, disrobings, so-and-so off to Italy, etc. It has continued to fluctuate with new arrivals and departures by the week: during June and July the total number of bhikkhus and nuns was effectively halved by engagements outside the monastery, with most of the remaining senior bhikkhus being relative newcomers to Amaravati. Another significant development is that Luang Por Sumedho has redefined his role at Amaravati as being less connected with the day-to-day activity, to empower the rest of the community with a fuller sense of responsibility. It also allows him to be available in a broader sense to the whole Sangha for spiritual direction. Meanwhile, the nuns community is also undergoing a realignment, having been encouraged by Luang Por to function more autonomously. What these changes of emphasis actually amount to - apart from adding another degree of torque to the kaleidoscope - can't be predicted or defined. In unstable circumstances, uncertainty gets plotted against faith and effort until a mindful line appears.

In its power to avoid dogma, the holy life has always been a beautiful reflection of a Truth that is difficult to define in conceptual terms. Comings, goings, fragmentation and concord, strong, gentle, and even deluded individuals - variability has kept spiritual initiative and spontaneous response alive through the long history of the Sangha. In what it responds to and in what it is, Sangha is an unfolding record of the stuff that gets born in people with their passions, habits and aspirations when they aim to touch Ultimate Truth. It is a reassuringly cool channel - at least in its conventions - for a startling and vibrant experience. That experience, that true life, has its own order; an order that is reminiscent of the wonderful patterns that have been plotted by computing the rhythm of a dripping tap or such apparent chaos as the weather. The same motif recurs the deeper you go into any element of the pattern, though the pattern is ever-changing. What appeared at first to be random is actually operating according to laws that are beyond our conceiving.

And that's the way it is in this human realm. The moment is unique, yet the law is immutable: wherever you go and wherever you're coming from, all conditions are variable and all things are beyond self.

That humbles a few drives and ambitions. But for those who wish to awaken, it means that right here we can insightfully know the qualities of the human world: reflected around a mug of gruel, a silent sitting, or a washing-up session.

Ajahn Sucitto

