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2535

Number 19

THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Committed to Freedom; Ajahn Thanavaro	HOME ■
Editorial: Aj. Sucitto ■	Articles: ■ Crossing the Green Divide; Sister Candasiri	BACK ISSUES ■
Down Lay-life Way; B. Jackson ■	■ One Day of Practice; Venerable Varado	
Caring for the Earth; Aj. Sucitto ■	■ The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II; Luang Por Jun	Obituary: ■
View from the Hill; Ven. Vipassi ■	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying; Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

Committed to Freedom

Sustaining commitment in whatever field - be it in spiritual life, marriage, or one's profession - is one of the challenges of life. The following two pieces by Ajahn Thanavaro offer different perspectives on how we can give something back to the world through developing the strength that comes from making a commitment to Dhamma.

Understanding our Commitments

Ajahn Thanavaro is senior monk at Santacittarama, our branch monastery in Italy. Here he reflects on the meaning of commitment, both in lay life and within the monastic form, in the light of his twelve years as a Buddhist monk.

Much of the confusion and suffering that we experience is caused by the lack of commitment in our lives. Nowadays, as in the past, people have gone beyond the boundary of their commitment. In other words, their commitment is not in accordance with Truth. Understanding nature is to know the Dhamma, to be the Dhamma, the Truth; this is our true commitment, this is what we are here for.

In the attempt to find happiness, we have sought experience of all kinds in the field of our senses. In our ignorance we have entered a minefield. This ignorance is not new, it is the same old veil that has always obscured the Truth. When directed by the sense of self, consciousness - through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind - dictates the ups and downs of our moods and emotions, and causes the happiness and unhappiness in our lives. No matter how much we suffer, if we do not see this at the root, we will not change. We are like a man who, having entered a minefield, loses his legs and arms and still tries to walk in the wrong direction. This is what identifying with our body and mind is like.

The feeling of 'I' and 'mine', the holding to views and opinions, likes and dislikes, the craving for things, the clinging to sense objects, the following of our emotions, the acting out of our loves and hates, the abiding in doubt, worry and fear - these create the whole mass of

suffering in our minds. We simply don't know the Truth, the Dhamma. We don't know that radiance and peace, the purity of our mind in its true nature. This Truth has to be experienced - here and now, by each one of us individually. It can be discovered if we are willing to understand our suffering - if we are willing to make a commitment.

We must remember clearly that our commitment is to understanding, and we are bound by it, until we are free in Truth alone.

Let's look at what kind of commitment can go into a relationship, for example: between a man and a woman. In life, it is natural for a man and a woman to become a couple. If there is a commitment, they will work to support each other, and grow in care and understanding - their relationship won't be based upon blind passion. They will carefully consider the two aspects of making a commitment. Firstly, the resolution to continue in one's effort to respect that commitment and secondly, the practical responsibility that the commitment entails. Actually, most times people don't even realise that they have made a commitment, they just follow their passions and inspirations - but of course there is much more. As my father puts it: 'After the honeymoon is over, somebody has to clean up and pay the bills!'

So a couple living together needs practical experience of how to run as a unit. Who will do the shopping? How will the accounting be done? Who will work? . . . and so on. Common sense has to be present in their commitment, and also tolerance and forgiveness which will help them in those areas of conflict where they may feel stuck. When a couple is able to surrender to one another, their resistance to life's situations lessens, and they come to feel more united and in harmony, less selfish. In this way, they can be capable of becoming parents as a further step in their development.

Then for the woman, the experience of pregnancy presents an opportunity for even greater commitment. If she is supported in this by her partner, she can joyfully accept the many changes that occur in her body and life. Allowing nature to take its course, she embraces her commitment to motherhood and, at the same time, the new organism forming in her womb is committed to life. A new living being is ready to enter the world for the journey into human existence.

The commitment of the couple to parenthood is what provides the security needed for the child to develop and grow. Wisdom is a key factor for raising a family in a harmonious way: without it, everyone suffers. Through commitment to their children, the parents can develop wisdom. It is important that they should try to maintain their peace of mind, neither worrying continuously, nor assuming that providing everything for their children will prevent them from suffering. Having or not having is not the cause of suffering. Rather, the cause is found in our ignorance of the effect of craving and clinging. Much of the confusion in our society is the result of this ignorance. The confusion within our families and in our relationships with others is at the base of our social maladies.

It is regrettable that so many people fail to acknowledge the responsibility in their lives - because they do not know the nature of their commitments. We must remember clearly that our commitment is to understanding, and we are bound by it, until we are free in Truth alone. Commitment is the preliminary condition for entering the Path of Wisdom; the supportive condition for carrying on the practice of understanding; and the essential condition for the fulfillment of the Path.

As human beings we are very fortunate. We have a psycho-physical organism endowed with a great

capacity of expression. With our body and mind we can work and be creative; with our reflective abilities we can meditate, know our condition and contemplate. This life in the human form should be cherished as more precious than the rarest gem. We don't know how long we have to live. We are not in full control of our body; we would like it to be always healthy, but too many external factors control it. Therefore, we should make good use of our time. We should ask, 'What are my aims? What am I committed to?' - these questions are very important. In my own life, when I asked these questions, they gave rise to a strong feeling of urgency. I wanted to understand what life was all about and live in the right way.

When we ask these questions, we enter the path of learning. Now we can listen, study and practise the Dhamma. This is our top priority, our true commitment which will give us freedom.

For me, my commitment lies in the practice of the Buddha-Dhamma and in the bhikkhu form. The bhikkhu is a religious seeker supported by alms; a wanderer on a spiritual journey, a devotee on a pilgrimage to the interior holy places to be found in one's own mind. Many wonderful and difficult things can happen on this journey, but one should not be afraid of or fascinated by them. Through continuous investigation, we will realise their emptiness, and in that state there will be freedom from the suffering arising from attachment, aversion and ignorance. The life of the bhikkhu may also provide other people with a living example of the religious quest.

In the old days, the admission into the Order was very simple. In fact, the Buddha himself would welcome the new aspirant with the Pali formula: Ehi bhikkhu, svakkhato Dhammo caro brahmacariyam samma dukkhassa antakariyaya. 'Come, bhikkhu, well-expounded is the Dhamma. Live the Holy Life for the complete ending of dukkha.' No doubt, the sense of commitment of those bhikkhus to the Holy Life was enhanced by the fact that it was stated in the presence of a Buddha.

We have a very interesting story in the suttas illustrating this point. On one occasion a bhikkhu expressed the wish to become a universal monarch, in the presence of the Buddha. The Blessed One, having perceived in his mind's eye the wish of this bhikkhu, reprimanded him by saying that because that wish was made in his presence it would become true, but this was regrettable since if he had expressed a much nobler aspiration - for instance, to become a Buddha - this would have also been possible. From this example, we can see that our aspirations expressed in front of a highly realised teacher may be enhanced by the power of realisation of that person.

This is true also for the places of pilgrimage - centres of great spiritual energy that, throughout the centuries, have been visited by innumerable pilgrims who would pay respect to the holy shrines and reassert their religious commitment. Today, as in ancient times, we use celebrations, ceremonies and rituals to create a special occasion, and an atmosphere in which



the statement of our commitment will be empowered by our own clarity and resolution, as well as by the acknowledgement of those present.

Once we have made a commitment, we have to sustain it through our own continuous application - in other words, we have to work at it. Often I am asked what work I do as a Buddhist monk. Well, my commitment lies in the monastic discipline and the teachings of the Buddha, so I feel that my work is to uphold that teaching and discipline. This practice is threefold, comprising morality, concentration and wisdom. For the bhikkhu, there are the 227 Patimokkha rules, wherein morality is cultivated by following a code of ethics demonstrating unsurpassed gentleness and refinement. For a lay Buddhist, there are five basic moral precepts: to refrain from 1) killing, 2) stealing, 3) sexual misconduct, 4) wrong speech (slander and lying) and, 5) the taking of alcohol and intoxicating drugs. These can provide every human being with guidelines drawn on the basis of the profound discovery of the Law of Cause and Effect. The old saying: 'If you do good, you will receive good; if you do bad, you will receive bad,' reflects a universal truth.

Today in our culture, there is the tendency to devalue everything. Much of morality has been surpassed by our desire for self-determinism. We don't want to be told how to behave or what to think. We prefer the free expression our feelings to courtesy and respect. While it is true that we have acquired a greater freedom of expression, unfortunately, through selfishness, this has often given rise to permissive and licentious behaviour. In a sense, we have sought a more responsible and mature position, but we often lack the wisdom to exercise such a freedom of choice. In the process, we have also destroyed many of the points of reference for true discernment.

The practice of virtue and restraint is an expression of our commitment to understanding, in all the areas of our experience. It will facilitate calmness and concentration, preparing the ground for insight and wisdom. Impeccable discipline will be possible if we are mindful of our intentions. Our motivation has to be clear: 'We shall end all ignorance. We don't need to doubt the usefulness of such an effort; when doubt arises, we can see it as another opportunity for a leap of faith. From our courage and determination, a new understanding of the way things are will emerge. Let us not fall by the wayside. Let us continue to be responsible to our commitment, with mindfulness of the way of Dhamma.



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Down Lay-life Way; B. Jackson ■	■ Crossing the Green Divide; Sister	ISSUES ■
Caring for the Earth; Aj. Sucitto ■	Candasiri	
View from the Hill; Ven. Vipassi ■	■ One Day of Practice; Venerable Varado	Obituary: ■
	■ The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II;	
	Luang Por Jun	
	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable	
	Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying;	
	Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

Crossing the Green Divide

Sister Candasiri, having made several teaching visits to Ireland over the past couple of years, offers these reflections on the continuing growth of interest in Dhamma there.

Over many centuries the Emerald Isle has provided a home ground for men and women who have given up their lives to follow a religious calling. No doubt today there are still saints, holy people, living there quietly and earnestly striving for inner and outer peace. However, we tend to hear more often these days about unholy occurrences - notably in the north-eastern corner of the island - designated Northern Ireland, in sharp contradistinction to Eire, or Southern Ireland.

I was extremely surprised when, almost two years ago, I was asked if I would like to lead a retreat in Northern Ireland. 'Fine,' I thought, not realising that this was to be the start of a two-year 'posting'. Ajahn Tiradhammo, then based at Harnham, was the first of our community to go there, responding to Paddy and Linda Boyle's request in 1985. In 1987, with the realisation that the Harnham 'parish' had perhaps become too large, it was suggested that someone from Amaravati be the next regular visitor - so Ajahn Amaro took over. Although much of the teaching was given in the North, interest was also growing among Buddhists south of the border in having teachings from the Theravadin Sangha.

Once over the initial surprise, I was pleased and mildly daunted at the prospect of visiting a country where people were obviously in need of some clarity and kindness: would I be able to come up with the goods? I felt honoured in a humble way to be able to serve in such a situation. I was also apprehensive; one has only to hear of a car bomb or other terrorist act to believe that it is an extremely dangerous place to visit. Ajahn Amaro tried to reassure me, 'Oh, as a Buddhist nun you certainly won't be a target...' I still felt a little bit worried.

Oh, that's a brave hercutt yiou've got therr!

Security checks at the airport were noticeably more rigorous for passengers on flights to Belfast, but there were still unexpected moments of friendliness and humour. When it was my turn to be searched, the woman security officer, looking at my shaven head and brown robes, exclaimed in horror: 'What on earth are you!' And once on the plane, a young man sitting beside me turned to me with a grin and said in a broad Irish accent, 'Oh, that's a brave hercutt yiou've got therr!'

On arriving, one has the feeling that people have simply grown accustomed to the violence, like a constant ache or running sore - one would like it to go away, but what can you do? It's there. Driving in the countryside, there'd be groups of young soldiers, barely out of school, walking in the lanes with all their equipment of war, and we'd be stopped - regularly by armed police or soldiers checking who we were, where we'd come from and where we were going - their interest was not particularly friendly, but on each occasion I felt the inclination to be as helpful as possible, and in my heart I wished them well. In Belfast, on a wintry afternoon, armed soldiers walk among Christmas shoppers; police stations and Court rooms are well barricaded; and each day one hears on the radio news of the latest violence, somewhere in the city. . . . It's there, but what can you do?

As a Buddhist nun, I realised that all I could offer was my practice; the effort to view all experience from the perspective of Dhamma, to live in accordance with that, and to encourage people who are interested to do the same.

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My first meditation retreat was held at Castleward - a large estate owned and maintained by the National Trust. Amid hundreds of acres of glorious woodland, the 'base camp', as it was aptly named, provided shelter -- basic, rather grubby, but definitely adequate. We were grateful. Together we applied ourselves to watching the flow of conditions in Nature. Within, our doubts, fears and anxieties and our obsessional habits of thinking mingled with times of ease, calm and happiness. Externally, there were high winds, lashing rain and snow which were interspersed with warm sunshine, clear, clear night skies and the gently changing light of dawn and dusk. Cultivating refuges in simply watching, knowing how it is moment by moment, a sense of Sangha evolved naturally as we supported each other, both in the stillness and silence, and in the more active aspects of living together: chopping wood for the log fires, the daily cleaning duties and taking care of the cook who invariably took very good care of us.



Driving south to Dublin after that first retreat, we crossed the border which people had made, corrugated iron and barbed wire forming a high fence across the land. A radar station on the top of the hill could, I was told, pick up conversations in cars a hundred yards away. It was interesting to notice that the undercurrents of stress, arising from what are euphemistically referred to as 'the troubles', were strangely absent as soon as we crossed over. The people of Eire speak of what is happening in the North as though it was a million miles away, although I noticed in conversation a distinct reluctance to visit there - especially at night - unless

for some very special reason.

Theravada Buddhists throughout Ireland, while having a definite interest and appreciation for that particular form - many of them have visited Amaravati and Chithurst Monasteries as well as attending retreats given by bhikkhus or siladhara - are also on extremely good terms with Irish Buddhists of other traditions. Marjorie Cross, who is in touch with Theravadins both north and south of the border, is actually a long-standing disciple of Lama Panchen Rimpoche. Her gracious mansion in Cocavan, where he normally resides, provided the perfect venue for an autumn weekend retreat. In Dublin, the meditation group still has signs of its Zen sitting-group origins, and public meetings where I was invited to teach took place at the Tibetan Centre in Inchicore. John O'Neill looks after the centre with great care and devotion; and in 1991 The Wheel - Ireland's first Buddhist magazine, containing news and articles from Buddhists all over Ireland - came into being, thanks to the impressive efforts of his wife, Vawn. Regular visitors to the centre, newcomers, and members of the Theravada meditation group attended on a number of occasions, and I was always made to feel very welcome. Photographs of visiting teachers adorn the walls of the reception area; it was touching to see various members of our Sangha there, alongside His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other eminent Tibetan lamas.

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Currently, the Theravada groups in Ireland are considering establishing their own centre, where they could meet and offer accommodation to visiting Sangha members on a longer-term basis, and perhaps hold retreats. As with all such ventures, much groundwork would be needed. That sense of dis-ease, so prevalent in the North, takes its toll and it seems that there is not much of a reserve of energy for establishing anything new. Just keeping going, meeting regularly, organising the Easter retreat and other teaching visits for monks or nuns is as much as the group in Belfast can manage at present. A waiting time . . . waiting patiently, watching and allowing the way forward to become apparent, as individuals allow their own ideas and preferences to fade, and they consider what can realistically be undertaken for the benefit of all.

I found it a real pleasure to meet people who, while practising their chosen way with integrity, are yet free to acknowledge and be open to the ways of others without a sense of fear, competitiveness or the inclination to convert. One might make an unfavourable comparison with what is happening elsewhere in the religious life of Ireland, but perhaps that would be unfair. The history of strife existing between the Protestants and Catholics is complex, going back hundreds of years. It is also only a part of the common problem of human ignorance, presenting a stark reminder of the harm which is perpetuated when we cling to an identity. On the other hand, when our refuge is in Dhamma, God, the Truth - whatever name we choose - our common humanity comes into focus. Protestant, Catholic, Irish, English, Theravadin, Tibetan are mere labels for a national or religious identity; in the context of life, death, pain and delight, they have no meaning. But who can see that?

Change which happens in accordance with Dhamma is not always obvious - like a plant, it may take a long time of patient cultivation before the blossom appears. However, I found it very heartening to be among people who are simply keeping at it, and to observe the arising of that clarity and compassion which may quietly challenge those positions to which human beings can cling with such tenacity and desperation.

Hatred does not cease by hatred; hatred ceases by love. This is the eternal Law, as it says in the Dhammapada.

May all beings everywhere be free from suffering.



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	Luang Por Jun	
	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable	
	Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying;	
	Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

One Day of Practice

Ven. Varado was one of the bhikkhus invited to spend the three months of Vassa on retreat in Hammer Wood, Chithurst, this year. Here is an account of one of his days on retreat.

Orion, the Huntsman, had marched across the pitch black of the night, and had vanished across the leafy horizon, probably many hours ago. Ursa Minor was high above my head and pointing with eternal faithfulness to Polaris, the Pole Star. Meteorites raced like tracer shells through the constellations, and satellites tracked smooth paths through the vast seas of space.

My alarm clock, having lain patiently all night above my head, bursts into sudden life at 3.30 am. From my sleeping bag, under the open sky, my hand reaches out reluctantly into the cold night air and the buzzing is stopped. Opening my eyes, my first view of the new day is of the infinite cosmos. The light show to end all light shows. Stars beaming through light years of space. And as I listen - nothing. Not a breath of wind. Not a chirp. Not a rustle to be heard. The orchestra of the forest, now, at this early hour, completely still. And how blissful it is to be able to lie for just a few more minutes in the midst of all this.

But the proddings of conscience don't let me lie long; soon I burst forth from the warm cocoon and hurriedly roll my bedding into the forest tipi, stepping gingerly round tree stumps and odd half-burnt pieces of log.

It takes twenty minutes on a good run to reach the monastery, and morning chanting. Racing down steep inclines and down, down to the very depths of the forest. My torch light picks out the bright white domes of toadstools scattered over the forest floor, poking through last year's autumn leaves. And just to stand for a few minutes. Oh! The dark trees are silhouetted high against the starlit sky, and all around the penetrating deep, deep silence. And in that instant even thought stops, suspending for a moment its relentless commentary.

As a teaching it is as old as the hills. In application it
illuminates with mind-bending freshness.

At midday in Captain's Wood [part of Hammer Wood], the burning sun, high in a clear blue sky, beats mercilessly down upon my freshly shaven head. The sweet chestnut coppice all round me has grown to above head height now. Innumerable crickets, large and small,

rejoicing in the high summers day screech out love's message. Chestnut leaves glint and shimmer in the warm breeze.

Sabbe sankhara anicca
Yad aniccam tam dukkham
Yad dukkham tad anatta
Yad anatta tam netam mama,
nesoham asmi, meso attati.

All conditions are impermanent
That which is not permanent is not happiness
That which is not happiness is not a self
That which is not a self, is not me, is not mine,
is not myself.

This ancient enigma goaded me frequently during the retreat. As a teaching it is as old as the hills. In application it illuminates with mind-bending freshness. That which we have unknowingly manipulated and reacted to, turns out to be really nothing. Like a dead leaf. A lost cause.

Around me, birds chatter and chase in and out of the chestnut bushes. Dragonflies on seek-and-destroy missions hum relentlessly up and down, and then swoop suddenly, to land on a rotten branch or a stone, and gently bathe their outstretched wings in the sun.

High overhead and to the south two crows were badgering a kestrel. In appearance crows are so ugly, in flight so completely graceless and their incessant cawing is a brutality in the serenity of the forest. The kestrel seemed hardly to notice his aggressors and, again and again, swept easily out of their reach.

'There is, monks, this one way to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the right path, for the realisation of Nibbana - that is to say the four foundations of mindfulness. What are the four foundations of mindfulness? Here, monks, a monk abides contemplating body-in-body, feeling-in-feeling, mind-in-mind, dhamma-in-dhamma, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world.'

I walk up and down visualising the bony white skeleton; the dull red flesh; the sticky, bright red blood; the green viscous bile; the long tendons in the arms and legs; and in the head a brain the colour and texture of blancmange.

Slowly the light changes, and harsh blue turns slowly red and orange. Blackbirds squabble and screech with great excitement. For them nightfall is some kind of emergency: a hurried scramble to find the best bunk for the night.



Soon dark shapes zigzag silently through the evening sky. Bats! Scooping up the pestering midges. And then owls begin their triumphant hooting, calling each other to secret rendezvous.

Night falls like mortality, dropping like death. Why do I take it so deeply to heart? Reflect! Look at the pain. Each day is impermanent. That which is impermanent is not happiness. That which is not happiness is not me. Ah! That's it! Nothing has changed, but inwardly peace has burst a bubble of despair.

In my tipi two candles burn lopsidedly beside the makeshift shrine. Along the canvas earwigs scour the place for food. Outside, I can hear mice scuttling in dry leaves. Through the moonlit forest, perhaps no-one hears my Bhaddekaratta-gatha*

The past should not be followed after,
The future not desired.
What is past is got rid of and
The future has not come.
But whoever has vision now here,
Now there, of a present thing,
Knowing that it [the vision] is immovable, unshakable,
Let him cultivate it.
Swelter at the task this very day.
Who knows whether he will die tomorrow?
There is no bargaining with the great hosts of Death.
Thus abiding ardently, unwearied day and night,
He indeed is 'Auspicious' called,
Described as a sage at peace.

**From the Bhaddekaratta ('One Day of Practice') Sutta, Middle Length Sayings [vol. III] 131.*



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The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II

This is the continuation of an interview with Phra Indaviro Thera - better known as Luang Por Jun - which began in the last issue of the Newsletter. It was conducted during his visit with us at Amaravati (July 1989-June 1990). Luang Por Jun then returned to Thailand to resume his duties as the spiritual head of several of the forest monasteries started by Ajahn Chah in north-eastern Thailand. At the start of this article, he is continuing a general overview of his life as a monk.

The first few years passed and looking back, I remember that it wasn't until the second Vassa I spent with Ajahn Chah that he pointed out my mistakes by showing me the Vinaya rules I had transgressed. He pointed out very clearly the difference between theory and practice, that only now was I doing the actual practice. You can understand things theoretically, but that isn't the same as practice. During that first year, the lay people there watched me, and formed their own opinions about me. When I first arrived they were betting among themselves to see how long I would last. Some thought I was a village monk used to having a good time and would leave; others thought I would stay and be a good monk. Overhearing these things gave me inspiration to stay, particularly when life was difficult and there were many hardships. I had a very sincere earnestness to stay and practise. I had quite a nice bowl that I was very proud of, and sometimes I would wake up during the night and look at it and hold it. Everything it represented was a great inspiration.

During those early years, I insisted that I not be told any news of my home village so that I could be completely removed from things happening there. Ajahn Chah was keen to give me all of the support he could so that I could stay with him and further my practice. The hardships and difficulties just increased my faith and determination to stay on. I stayed very close to Ajahn Chah during the day, and spent much time in his presence. I was very dependent on his strength for my practice. My faith and pursuit of the practice was unremitting.

I let it be known that I didn't wish to hear any news of my home village, as I realised that getting caught up with things there would inhibit my progress. Then one day a man came to pay respects to Ajahn Chah from my village, and he recognised me. I talked with him, but was very reserved when speaking so as not to get caught up in news from home. Even when I was seriously ill, I asked Ajahn Chah not to send word to my village, even if I died.

You don't think this will kill you, do you? And so what if it does? Go to death. That which is good is still

found, even beyond death.

Luang Por, when was the first time that you went on tudong?

The first time was in my fourth year with Ajahn Chah. He and I went on tudong together in Amphur Bundalik with a group of other monks and novices for about two and a half months. A year later I had another opportunity to go tudong again, this time as the senior monk and leader, with Ajahn Sinowin and Ajahn Toon. We just kept going for five months, not trying to see any other teachers or stay at any particular place. Our determination was to have the opportunity to be on our own and utilise the teaching we had received from Ajahn Chah. We pressed on, feeling quite secure with the practice given to us by Ajahn Chah, and had no doubts. In these five months we visited many provinces, and walked along the Mekong River for a time. My feet became quite swollen and cracked from all the walking.

Luang Por, I'd like to ask about those early days with Ajahn Chah. Please share some of the anecdotes and instructions that he gave you regarding practice and the Vinaya.

One of my strongest memories of Ajahn Chah is his firm emphasis on the Vinaya and the sila. His desanas always pointed out the importance of practising and keeping the sila. He encouraged a sense of honesty and integrity by acknowledging any breach of the discipline and confessing the offence. Ajahn Chah was a great example, because he practised this with us in all that we did. At meal time and chore time his punctuality and his presence created a sense of harmony, because he worked together with us.

So there was a great emphasis on keeping the form, doing the chores, and the daily routine at the monastery?

Yes, that's very true. Ajahn Chah placed a lot of emphasis on keeping the form and the routine.

What about the bhavana and practice of sitting in meditation? Did Ajahn Chah give much instruction and advice on that?

Ajahn Chah led us in meditation instruction and guidance, and would frequently put us to the test. He would tell us to sit inside our kuti, with the doors and windows closed and bundle our robes around us. This was during the hot season, and sometimes he would call us together during the hottest part of the day to meditate in the sala. When we asked him why he wanted us to do these things, he said to help us go against our defilements. During the hottest time of day, we wanted to go and sit in a cool place, and this was Luang Por Chah's way of helping us go against our natural tendency to get away from the cause of suffering - in this case the extreme heat - by going against our desire to keep cool. In the cold season we had to do just the opposite and bear the cold. Ajahn Chah was right there doing it with us. Any time the monks would whimper he would shout at them, 'Just endure! You don't think this will kill you, do you? And so what if it does? Go to death. That which is good is still found, even beyond death.' And we were all very content to do these things. Sometimes after the food had been passed round at the meal, he would get up and give a long desana on greed and desire, while the monks sat there looking into their bowls and salivating.

What was he teaching? What did he say?

He would talk about greed and desire, and the craving for food, giving details of what would happen to the food after we ate it - how it turned into flesh, blood, and bones, and excrement. He would talk about the



pindabaht duties, the correct manner of carrying the almsbowl and receiving food, as well as the distribution of the almsfood at the monastery. Some of us may not have enough, others would eat too much.

Would he do this often, Luang Por?

No, not often. Only two or three times each month. Oh yes in those days we smoked cigarettes. Then Ajahn Chah decided to stop it.

Were you smoking too?

Sure. We all smoked.

Ajahn Chah heard a desana given by Ajahn Pannananda that discouraged smoking. He said if one couldn't let go of a tiny defilement like smoking, how could one be liberated from the big ones? Ajahn Chah contemplated this, and decided to forbid smoking on these grounds, as well as because few other Ajahns in the district smoked. He thought the resources of the laity could be put to better use. It wasn't easy for the local villagers to get cigarettes. In those days, factory-produced cigarettes weren't available and we only had the local hand-made roll-ups. Some of the monks and novices would directly ask the laity for cigarettes without a being asked if they needed anything, and this went against the bhikkhu Vinaya. He could see problems and difficulties arising because of this.

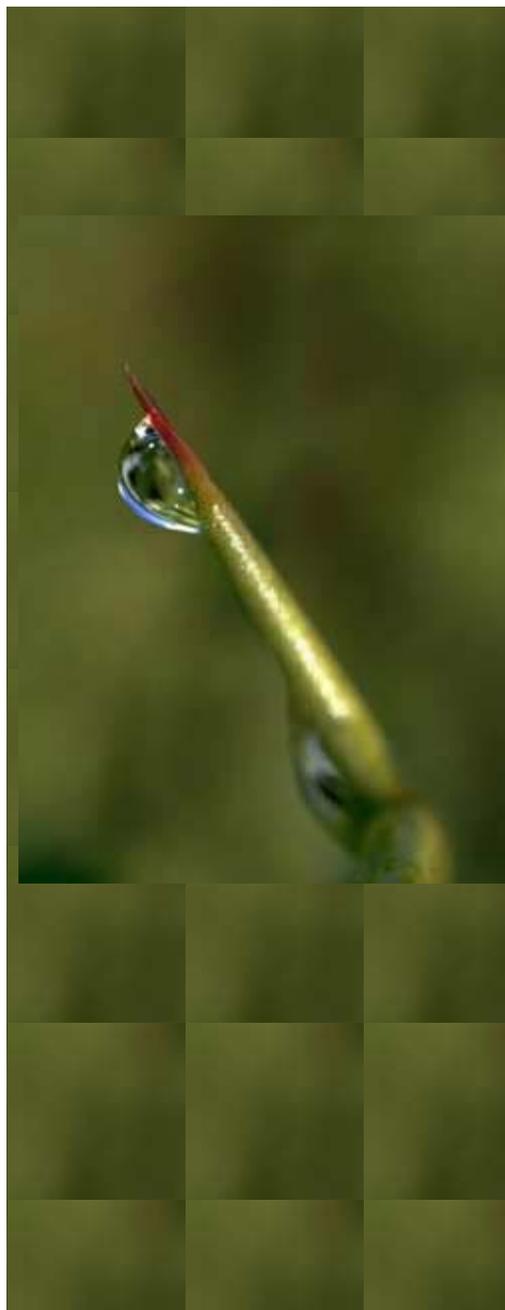
How did you decide to quit? How did the decision come about?

A meeting was called and everyone discussed it. We trusted Luang Por's advice and wanted to do whatever he wished, so the Sangha unanimously gave it up.

What year was this? Was it after you went on tudong by yourself?

Oh yes, I remember smoking when I was on tudong in Chiang Mai province.

This reminds me of the time when I took the other monks on tudong without Ajahn Chah. We met some lay supporters one evening who kindly took us to a good place to stay the night in the forest. They took their leave - to go home to supper - but said they would return later to hear a desana. I was asked to give a talk and told them I would if I was still in the same spot when they returned, or they could call out to me if I had moved. All of us were tired and, to tell the truth, I didn't feel like giving a talk. So we moved to another place, and all of us agreed not to light a fire and keep quiet if the lay supporters came looking for us later. Then I thought, 'When the lay folk return, they're bound to bring some cigarettes, and I'd quite like a smoke to perk me up a bit.' Sure enough, the lay people came along. They began calling for me through the forest, and I broke my agreement with the other monks and called to them, surrendering because of my desire to have a cigarette. Some good came out of it, and after my talk they departed respectfully. Afterwards Ajahn Sinowin came creeping over. 'Did you get any tobacco?' he whispered. We had a smoke together. This is the nature of defilement and



desire.

Before leaving on this tudong Ajahn Chah had told me to be wary of arguments and disagreements among the monks while we were away. Sure enough, we had a disagreement. About a month after we had left the monastery a dispute arose regarding which trail to take. I wanted to go one direction, and Ajahn Sinowin suggested another route; there was no one around to give advice. We continued along the route I had decided, but the other monks were disgruntled because they thought we could get lost or end up at the wrong destination. We finally met someone on the trail, and sure enough it was the wrong route, but the other route the monks suggested was wrong as well. Eventually we found the right trail, but both of us were somber and still steaming from our disagreement.

Throughout the next few days Ajahn Sinowin constantly disagreed about where we should stay, or how long we should rest. Another monk began to move so slowly that we had to leave him behind to catch up later. One day we got separated but found him in the next village the following day. We were happy to find him again, but I rebuked him for being so slow and lagging behind. He didn't reply and became angry. When we returned to Wat Pa Pong, Ajahn Sinowin told Ajahn Chah that he and Ajahn Toon had been on the verge of leaving me and returning to the monastery before the tudong had finished. I never knew this at the time, but at least everyone stayed together throughout the tudong. Luang Por Chah just said that's how it happens, that's how things go.

Luang Por, what was it like the first time you went tudong with Ajahn Chah? What did he advise and instruct about living in the wilds and in the forest? What guidance did he actually give?

Ajahn Chah advised us to stay in ancient burial grounds and cemeteries whilst on tudong - especially places of ancestral burial, where spirits are believed to live. Get permission from the local villagers first, he advised, and don't stay in any place longer than seven days. Don't get attached to any particular place or its villagers. Keep the sila, and be wary of dangers around you. Some places may be haunted by spirits or ghosts, so be careful. And sleep right down on the ground, where your mindfulness and sensitivity is at its best; I found this to be very true. Take care not to destroy plant life, insects or small creatures, and be aware of your surroundings. If you don't have a novice or lay supporter to prepare a place in the forest, do the best you can within the sila. Look around you and make sure there aren't any dead branches overhead that could fall down on you. Stop during the day when it's still light to prepare a place to camp, so you can get a feel for the place where you are resting. Also, you can see things for what they are in daylight, and not create them to be apparitions in the dark. It's important to be sensitive to the people where you are staying. Don't do anything offensive or say anything that may offend the local village monastery. Be mindful of speech - say the appropriate things to the villagers, if they want to hear a talk. Be flexible and receive them graciously.

Often the villagers would ask me what would happen to an arahant's consciousness when he dies. I would quote Ajahn Chah's answer to them, which was an analogy of a candle. 'As long as three conditions exist - the wick, the wax, and matches - the candle continues to burn. The flame can be extinguished and relit, as long as these three things are there. But when all of the wax has been used, and no more matches are available, where does the flame go? This flame is like the consciousness of the arahant.' I used this simile from Luang Por Chah whenever presented with this question. We maintained a sense of deference. Even though Ajahn Chah wasn't with us on tudong, his teachings were, and no matter what I was asked I could give an answer by drawing on what I had learned from my teacher.

Ajahn Chah taught that you could hear a desana of the Buddha under any tree, in any place,

because the teaching of the Buddha would be right there with you. He compared being on tudong to being a soldier who had left his training camp to fight in the open field. We had to be prepared for anything - alert and ready within ourselves. This attentiveness must be maintained wherever we are. Some of the things the Vinaya discipline trains us for never really have the opportunity to manifest within the monastery. It's when we spend time outside the monastery that we are confronted by these things, and must solve them for ourselves.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Committed to Freedom; Ajahn	HOME ■
Editorial: Aj. Sucitto ■	Articles: Thanavaro	BACK
Down Lay-life Way; B. Jackson ■	■ Crossing the Green Divide; Sister	ISSUES ■
Caring for the Earth; Aj. Sucitto ■	Candasiri	
View from the Hill; Ven. Vipassi ■	■ One Day of Practice; Venerable Varado	Obituary: ■
	■ The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II;	
	Luang Por Jun	
	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable	
	Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying;	
	Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

Dhamma Greetings from Switzerland

It has been six months since the welcome move to our new monastic residence in Kandersteg. It is a small and beautiful village at 1200 metres altitude, surrounded by the impressive features of snowcapped mountains, which rise these days into a cloudless sky. Venerable Jayamano shares some of his impressions.

During the summer and winter, thousands of tourists from all over the world are attracted to venture along these mountain tracks to look at the still, turquoise lakes and waterfalls which are fed by the melting glaciers. For over ten thousand years, torrential streams have patiently carved their courses, cutting deep gorges through the rocks. The old glaciers have left their imprint of immense power upon countless layers of rock; crushed into shape, they were later revealed by the retreating of the ice.

A long belt of pine forest stretches along the valley to the 'Unterland', and during spring and summer many wild flowers decorate the alpine meadows. With the picturesque traditional architecture of wooden log houses built upon sturdy natural stone walls, it makes quite a mesmerising visual feast. On the gable ends of the chalet roofs one can often see proverbs born from mountain life. All the typical smells of rural life are present, joined by the symphony of cow bells ringing throughout the valley.

We were asked to sign an agreement at the local community hall that we would immediately evacuate the house on notification of impending doom.

The monastery, fortunately, is situated on the side of the village that is not frequented by tourists. There is only one neighbouring house, about 70 metres away. Although there is hardly any more land to the monastery property than can be used to park a dozen or so cars, the house is surrounded by fields in front and woodland at the back. This provides plenty of space for people to find walking meditation paths.

The house itself is a former hotel and typical chalet. Built in 1905, it provides 22 rooms on three stories. On the ground floor are a large hall (our present shrine room) and a very well-equipped industrial kitchen, larder and laundry. Below is a big basement - which could well

turn into a swimming pool during the spring thaw if the pump should ever fail.

We are in the process of transforming four bedrooms on the attic floor into a shrine room, and there are various small renovation projects which include double glazing all the windows - so we will be kept busy for a few years to come.

One minor 'Buddhist extra' to the house is that it stands in avalanche danger zone I. In 1968 there was an avalanche in which a partially connected restaurant and a separate neighbouring building were swept away by the tremendous pressure of air it created. Records show it to be the third of its kind in several hundred years in this area, so the chances that it might happen again soon are not too likely. Nonetheless, we were asked to sign an agreement at the local community hall that we would immediately evacuate the house on notification of impending doom.

It is encouraging to see how much interest and support has come forth from Thais and Westerners alike - both in helping financially (there is a big bank loan to pay off), and in lending a hand on the work projects. The monthly meditation weekends and longer retreats are well attended.

Venerable Javano, who joined us at the start of Vassa, and Venerable Mahesi, who came recently, bring the community of bhikkhus here up to four. So we are, for the moment, technically a Sangha which can gather for recitations of the Patimokkha training rules each fortnight. Vladam from Yugoslavia and Roget from Switzerland are anagarikas, the first to take the precepts here. It is a conducive environment for monastic training: support with regard to requisites is more than sufficient, and the relationship with locals is friendly and open.

Having recovered from the initial dropped jaw of wonderment at the sneer scale and magnificence of the alpine setting, the rumble of falling rocks, the fiery sunsets which bathe the snow-capped peaks in pink light, and the deep blues of the winter sky, one settles down to the rhythm of monastic routine. The qualities of patience and clear reflection on Dhamma become the basis of fulfilment, over and above the enchantment of sensory experience.

to that distant

posters to raise consciousness
well designed but nonetheless
crystal balls to look away
beyond the present of this day
and sounds to lift your chakras high
what's wrong with your own sea and sky
and now you seem to think you need
the cut of corn within some field
when all you need to do is be
still upon
the silent sea
and there do only need to stay
within the rhythm of its sway
and only do you need to see
that all arisen will
cease to be
and only do you need to ask
who is it in this looking glass
and all you need
is who you are
to take you to
that distant star
and so that distant
distant star
is here where you
already
are

Jacqueline Fitch

THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Committed to Freedom; Ajahn	HOME ■
Editorial: Aj. Sucitto ■	Articles: Thanavaro	BACK
Down Lay-life Way; B. Jackson ■	■ Crossing the Green Divide; Sister	ISSUES ■
Caring for the Earth; Aj. Sucitto ■	Candasiri	
View from the Hill; Ven. Vipassi ■	■ One Day of Practice; Venerable Varado	Obituary: ■
	■ The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II;	
	Luang Por Jun	
	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable	
	Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying;	
	Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

Responding to the Sick and Dying

Barry Durrant - who lives near Chithurst - reports on dialogues on helping the sick and the dying that have been taking place in the monastery.

Byadhi-dhammomhi byadhim anatito,
 I am of the nature to sicken,
 I have not gone beyond sickening.
 Marana-dhammomhi,
 maranam anatito,
 I am of the nature to die,
 I have not gone beyond dying.*

**These lines are part of the Sangha's daily morning chanting.*

To many of us, this timely warning is all too apparent and needs little emphasis! Furthermore, at this time of the year, the beautiful colours of the autumn leaves add an additional reminder of the omnipresence of change and the inevitable end for all conditioned things.

Perhaps it was such subliminal impressions exerting their subtle influences which gave rise, one morning, to a discussion with some bhikkhus on the topic of lay Buddhists visiting those who are sick and/or dying.

The idea not only brings one's own mortality into sharp focus, but raises doubts and fears in the mind as to one's suitability or preparedness for the task.

It was agreed that, however slowly, the climate of opinion in society is changing. People have become more open to the topic of death - be it that inescapable experience which awaits us all, or the misery and stresses of personal bereavement.

Until relatively recently death has been 'shunned', disguised and detached from the living process. Now, however, the especial problems, and conflicts it can occasion through taboo and misconceptions (whether in the dying or their relatives), and the particular needs of all those involved in this quintessential aspect of life are all becoming increasingly recognised.

The Hospice Movement has flourished and prospered in the twin roles of specialist care and education. There are counselling services for the bereaved. Seminars on death and dying are organised, and many books on the subject have been written (for an excellent reading list, see Raft [No. 3], the journal of Buddhist Hospice Trust). Societies such as The Natural Death Centre have been launched, and the hitherto unchallenged procedures and practices of the funeral business are being scrutinised and questioned.

Following these exploratory chats, it was decided to contact all members of those Buddhist groups which looked to Chithurst Monastery for spiritual guidance, and to seek their views and opinions about such visiting. In addition, as some lay Buddhists looking to Amaravati had already had experience in this work, they too were contacted and their views ascertained.

Inevitably, (unless members were already engaged in such social action), the initial reaction tended to be one of caution, anxiety and perhaps rejection. The idea not only brings one's own mortality into sharp focus, but raises doubts and fears in the mind as to one's suitability or preparedness for the task. What could one say? What should one say? Would one's reactions be helpful and appropriate, or would the situation ruthlessly expose one's own vulnerability, insecurity and confusion?

In point of fact, the responses were divisible into two schools of thought. Some members felt the need for specific training in preparation for such an encounter; maybe a guided exploration of this threat to their equipoise and comfort. Others felt that such a situation demanded a spontaneous and intuitive response from a heart unencumbered by outworn views and predetermined expectations; through silent acceptance, allowing the response to another being to come naturally.



The necessary motivation and commitment was seen to be not only supportive to the patient, but also invaluable as a practice for the individual. The Buddha after all had declared, 'If you will not take care of each other, who else, I ask, will do so? Brothers, he who would wait on me, let him wait on the sick.' (Vinaya Pitaka).

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Having learned of these conflicting views, it seemed to be important to offer an opportunity to share and discuss such thoughts, so a meeting was arranged at Chithurst to which all interested parties were invited. Ajahn Anando kindly agreed to take the chair and to offer the necessary spiritual guidance and direction to the debate, which took place on October 26th, and was attended by nineteen members.

The discussion ranged widely and embraced such topics as: 'living wills'; the clinical ethos found in hospices and intensive care units; the need to develop an acute awareness to the needs of the patient, and to avoid the imposition upon them of one's own views and opinions; the value of physical contact as an expression of caring and concern; the evolving attitudes in society towards a greater participation in the daily nursing care, the laying out of the body, and even organising the funeral and disposal of remains.

Ajahn Anando reported the opinion of one doctor who was working in the hospice movement, which was that Buddhists would bring their own particular qualities of serenity and quietude. He also commented that in his view, if someone felt the need for guidance and 'training', then that need should be met, while those without such reservations would be able to enter the relationship spontaneously anyway.

All those present felt the meeting to have been most useful and the likely forerunner in a series devoted to various themes relating to death, dying and bereavement. All interested in these topics are welcome to contact the monastery for information on the times and themes of the discussions.

Readers wishing to obtain further information can write to the following addresses:

- The Buddhist Hospice Trust, P.O. Box 51, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 6TP
- The Natural Death Centre, 20 Heber Road, Cricklewood, London NW2 6AA
- 'Funerals and How to Improve Them', by Dr Tony Walter. Hodder and Stoughton, (58.99)
- The Ananda Network (no relation to Ajahn Anando!); a nationwide network of volunteers who have expressed a willingness to visit and offer companionship to those who are dying or bereaved - particularly, but not exclusively, Buddhists. Networkers are kept in touch with each other through local meetings and the occasional publications, "Ananda Network News" and "Open Heart Communication". Contact: Ananda Network Facilitator, Ray Wills, 5 Grayswood Point, Norley Vale, Roehampton, London SW15 4BT.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Committed to Freedom; Ajahn	HOME ■
Editorial: Aj. Sucitto ■	Articles: Thanavaro	BACK
Down Lay-life Way; B. Jackson ■	■ Crossing the Green Divide; Sister	ISSUES ■
Caring for the Earth; Aj. Sucitto ■	Candasiri	
View from the Hill; Ven. Vipassi ■	■ One Day of Practice; Venerable Varado	Obituary: ■
	■ The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II;	
	Luang Por Jun	
	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable	
	Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying;	
	Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

A Light in Confinement

Recently, a devoted lay meditator who has been a friend and supporter in Thailand became involved in someone else's unskillful kamma. As a result, she finds herself serving a prison sentence in Australia. Despite difficult and oppressive conditions, she remains undaunted in her commitment to practise the teachings of the Buddha in her daily life. She writes this letter from her prison cell.

30-10-91

It is my 10th day in mahamoha naraka - hell of big delusion. I did not have a jury trial but I had to plead guilty. That's what the barrister and lawyer suggested. I'd have to be here many more years if I pleaded not guilty. My letters could prove my innocence but why didn't the lawyer want to get them back? Sometimes I wonder whether they'd been sincere and truthful to me.

I keep the same precepts as you in heart. I think I'd work towards a renunciant's life even after my release. I've suffered so much, I don't want to go back to more suffering but walk on the Dhamma path to end suffering.

It's very difficult to be here, not physically but mentally. The minds here are so confused and muddled. A lot of jealousy, pettiness and anger. Their self-images and mirrors reflect a distorted picture. Hard to understand their speech; it has very little truth in it. They can't relate to goodness and wholesomeness. To be good is a big bad joke, I guess. Their minds refuse to grow up but they keep denying their own stuff and resisting any goodness that might arise. It's so bizarre and pitiful. How I long to be with the good monks and nuns again. Compared to the monastery with its peaceful vibrations, this is real hell. I don't have to go to hell to realise what hell is like.

When the heart and mind is soft, it's easy to have
loving-kindness and compassion for the suffering
beings in this jail.

1-11-91

About one and a half hours ago I was moved from my cell to a protection cell. Relief! That means that I don't have to be with those deluded minds - I can meditate as much as I want here. No duties and no smoke from their cigarettes. Dhamma is strange, isn't it? I'd been pretty sick the last few days - very stressed-out from fear because they used some violence on me.

The officers here are very understanding and the Dhamma always protects those who protect it, right?? I know there are many devas protecting me. Pray for me so I could see my Dhamma teachers again soon. I've an inkling that the golden land of the Buddha's teachings could perhaps receive me as a nun for a few years.

You know, I've so much samvega - urgency to practise. I just want to meditate and meditate. You know the merits that you all transferred to me will see me through all this anicca- dukkham - impermanence and suffering - that I am experiencing. I know Dhamma will help me. I pray for only Dhamma protection and that comes from having a pure mind and heart that is mindful and full of metta-karuna. When the heart and mind is soft, it's easy to have loving-kindness and compassion for the suffering beings in this jail. They are so deluded and so angry. They are caught in a vicious cycle - do bad, be bad and change for the worse. They have very low self-images and hate themselves but they can't see it. You see how they sink deeper and deeper. Once wrong, how difficult to be straight - the mind is so tricky. It can have so much self-deception and hypocrisy.

I don't despise or dislike them. I know they are suffering so much deep down - but I can't help them as I am afraid. Trying to be helpful has given me so much trouble. I can only have compassionate thoughts for them. There's so much suffering in this world - I really don't want to waste my life doing trivial and petty things but to meditate and cultivate a really pure mind and heart and to be released from all sufferings.

Please let go of all. Meditate a lot. Hope you all don't mind transferring some merits over so I could get mokkha (liberation) soon and be united with my venerable teachers and wise ones again. I keep 10 precepts but I have lots of hair; that's also O.K. - the whole cosmos is empty - just have a light heart and mind and be empty. That which is hollow is useful. I write you something from Stonehouse, a Chinese Zen monk who lived a few hundred years ago:

Look for what's real and it's gone,
Wipe out illusions and they increase.
But bhikkhus have a place that's serene.
The moon in the sky shines on
the waves.

Becoming Buddha is easy
But ending illusions is hard.
So many frosted moonlit nights
I've sat and felt the cold before dawn.

Stripped of reason my mind is blank.
Emptied of being my nature is bare.
At night my windows often breathe



white
The moon and stream come right to
the door.

22-11-91

All the photos, cards, leaves, feathers that you all so kindly sent, and the Buddha-rupa in this cell B28, are ittharammana [lovely objects] for those who come to this room. For in future, they might have the opportunity to come into the Buddha Sasana too. However, please do not send me anything any more - I only need one thing, which no one can give me - SATI - mindfulness. Anything external is still dukkha, ultimately. Only sati is sought now. Be happy and peaceful. Lots of gratitude to you all.

Anyone wishing to write letters of support or encouragement, please contact Venerable Samvaro or Sister Medhanandi at Amaravati.



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Committed to Freedom; Ajahn	HOME ■
Editorial: Aj. Sucitto ■	Articles: Thanavaro	BACK
Down Lay-life Way; B. Jackson ■	■ Crossing the Green Divide; Sister	ISSUES ■
Caring for the Earth; Aj. Sucitto ■	Candasiri	
View from the Hill; Ven. Vipassi ■	■ One Day of Practice; Venerable Varado	Obituary: ■
	■ The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II;	
	Luang Por Jun	
	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable	
	Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying;	
	Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

Obituary

Reg McAuliffe (1910-1991)

During the somewhat fraught period of my chairmanship of the English Sangha Trust (ca. 1964), somebody said to me, 'You ought to resign!' I replied, 'Certainly, on two conditions: not under duress, and not till I am sure I can hand over to someone who won't make a worse mess of the job that I have done.'

It was not for several years that I was able to hand over to Reg, a man infinitely better fitted for the job than I was. He was not only a serious Buddhist and a man of great personal charm, he also had what I conspicuously lacked - a good business head and understanding of practical affairs - indispensable qualifications in his job as secretary of a large company.

He was a great support to the Ven. Kapilavaddho in re-building the organisation after the traumas of the '60s. It was not his fault that the Hampstead Vihara had finally to close its doors, but he did much to ensure that the physical and financial assets of the Trust remained intact for the upsurge of the late '70s to justify the seemingly wild optimism shared by a few of us in those apparently arid times.

After his wife's death, Reg lived at Seaford. He was able to pay a brief visit to Amaravati about a year before death, which must have been a gratifying experience for him. His cremation took place at Eastbourne on 17th October, with Sangha participation and attended by his daughter Anne, who now lives in America. May he attain Nibbana.

Maurice Walshe



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ Committed to Freedom; Ajahn	HOME ■
Editorial: Aj. Sucitto ■	Articles: Thanavaro	BACK
Down Lay-life Way; B. Jackson ■	■ Crossing the Green Divide; Sister	ISSUES ■
Caring for the Earth; Aj. Sucitto ■	Candasiri	
View from the Hill; Ven. Vipassi ■	■ One Day of Practice; Venerable Varado	Obituary: ■
	■ The Life of a Forest Monk: Pt II;	
	Luang Por Jun	
	■ Greetings from Switzerland; Venerable	
	Jayamano	
	■ Responding to the Sick and Dying;	
	Barry Durrant	
	■ A Light in Confinement; prison letters	

Caring for the Earth

*Many readers will be aware of the complex problems that currently beset the environment. Recently, a consortium of environmental organisations put together a detailed strategy for a global environmental policy for the next century. This plan, published in a 228-page book called *Caring for the Earth*, was launched in some 65 countries on 21st October this year. Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Sucitto were among those invited to the launch in Westminster.*

Religion, as the principle that encourages the qualities of wisdom and compassion, has always played a part in establishing a balance between humanity and nature, although this aspect of its scope hasn't always come to the fore. Established religions easily become moral stamps for the self-seeking attitudes of the societies that support them. However, an authentic religious spirit dissolves the barriers of material self-interest and provides a common ground. Before we are fishermen, industrialists or housekeepers, we are humans whose bodies depend on the Earth, and who are endowed with love and intelligence.

The many social and environmental crises that face the world, together with the increasingly global nature of human consciousness, is helping to push established religions towards greater vision and interfaith co-operation. In 1986 the Network on Conservation and Religion was established by the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) at Assisi, through an interfaith gathering that included H.H. the Dalai Lama, the Archbishop of Canterbury and H.H. Pope John Paul II. It is now supported by eight major world religions. The function of the Network is to bring awareness of conservation to people in ways that relate it to people's religious faith, and to report on environmental projects that are supported by religions in different parts of the world. Apart from such 'practical' work, one of the features of the Network is that it does attempt to represent a quality of commitment that is not just based on human self-interest. That religions should take on environmental matters is a kind of healing of the split between matter and spirit that has allowed the material world to be used in a heedless and unethical manner. A major world religion can express the aspiration to live in fully human, wise and loving ways, at a level where it becomes politically significant. Governments seem remote and unresponsive, yet it should be remembered that they can be steered by popular opinion.

Notably in the past few years, pressure from environmental bodies brought into awareness the damage to the ozone layer of the atmosphere caused by CFCs (gases present in aerosols and refrigerant gas). When this layer is reduced, harmful quantities of solar radiation penetrate the earth's atmosphere. Increased awareness of this danger led to the Montreal Protocol of 1987,

which is an international agreement to reduce the use of these gases globally.

The general effect of all four speeches was to indicate a more total review of the global situation, including trade, debt, and population growth than is normally presented as of environmental concern.

On a broader front, three international bodies - IUCN (The World Conservation Union), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and WWF (World-Wide Fund for Nature - have been working together for more than a decade to establish a World Conservation Strategy which would provide series of principles to guide more specific environmental action.

'The World Conservation Strategy was published in 1980. It emphasised that humanity, which exists as part of nature, has no future unless nature and natural resources are conserved. It asserted that conservation cannot be achieved without development to alleviate the poverty and misery of hundreds of millions of people. Stressing the interdependence of conservation and development, the World Conservation Strategy first gave currency to the term "sustainable development".' (Caring for the Earth)

Subsequent to the publication of their report in 1980, more than 50 countries have prepared conservation strategies based on it. The Strategy has been reviewed and revised recently to form a more comprehensive plan which takes into account sound economic and ecological factors.

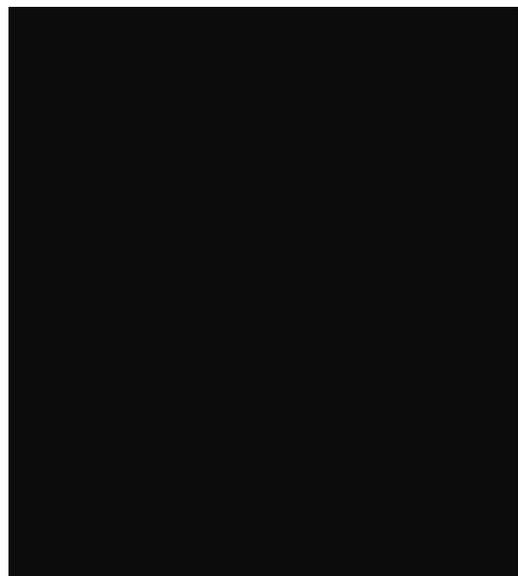
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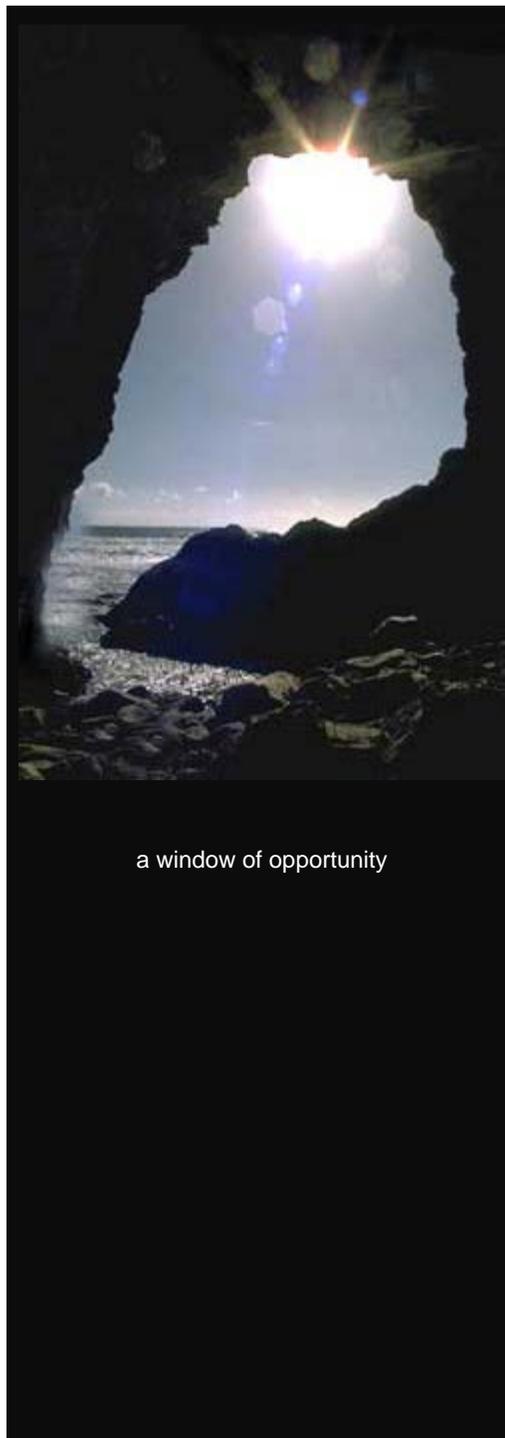
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Caring for the Earth

*Many readers will be aware of the complex problems that currently beset the environment. Recently, a consortium of environmental organisations put together a detailed strategy for a global environmental policy for the next century. This plan, published in a 228-page book called *Caring for the Earth*, was launched in some 65 countries on 21st October this year. Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Sucitto were among those invited to the launch in Westminster.*

Religion, as the principle that encourages the qualities of wisdom and compassion, has always played a part in establishing a balance between humanity and nature, although this aspect of its scope hasn't always come to the fore. Established religions easily become moral stamps for the self-seeking attitudes of the societies that support them. However, an authentic religious spirit dissolves the barriers of material self-interest and provides a common ground. Before we are fishermen, industrialists or housekeepers, we are humans whose bodies depend on the Earth, and who are endowed with love and intelligence.

The many social and environmental crises that face the world, together with the increasingly global nature of human consciousness, is helping to push established religions towards greater vision and interfaith co-operation. In 1986 the Network on Conservation and Religion was established by the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) at Assisi, through an interfaith gathering that included H.H. the Dalai Lama, the Archbishop of Canterbury and H.H. Pope John Paul II. It is now supported by eight major world religions. The function of the Network is to bring awareness of conservation to people in ways that relate it to people's religious faith, and to report on environmental projects that are supported by religions in different parts of the world. Apart from such 'practical' work, one of the features of the Network is that it does attempt to represent a quality of commitment that is not just based on human self-interest. That religions should take on environmental matters is a kind of healing of the split between matter and spirit that has allowed the material world to be used in a heedless and unethical manner. A major world religion can express the aspiration to live in fully human, wise and loving ways, at a level where it becomes politically significant. Governments seem remote and unresponsive, yet it should be remembered that they can be steered by popular opinion.

Notably in the past few years, pressure from environmental bodies brought into awareness the damage to the ozone layer of the atmosphere caused by CFCs (gases present in aerosols and refrigerant gas). When this layer is reduced, harmful quantities of solar radiation penetrate the earth's atmosphere. Increased awareness of this danger led to the Montreal Protocol of 1987,

which is an international agreement to reduce the use of these gases globally.

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On a broader front, three international bodies - IUCN (The World Conservation Union), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and WWF (World-Wide Fund for Nature - have been working together for more than a decade to establish a World Conservation Strategy which would provide series of principles to guide more specific environmental action.

'The World Conservation Strategy was published in 1980. It emphasised that humanity, which exists as part of nature, has no future unless nature and natural resources are conserved. It asserted that conservation cannot be achieved without development to alleviate the poverty and misery of hundreds of millions of people. Stressing the interdependence of conservation and development, the World Conservation Strategy first gave currency to the term "sustainable development".' (Caring for the Earth)

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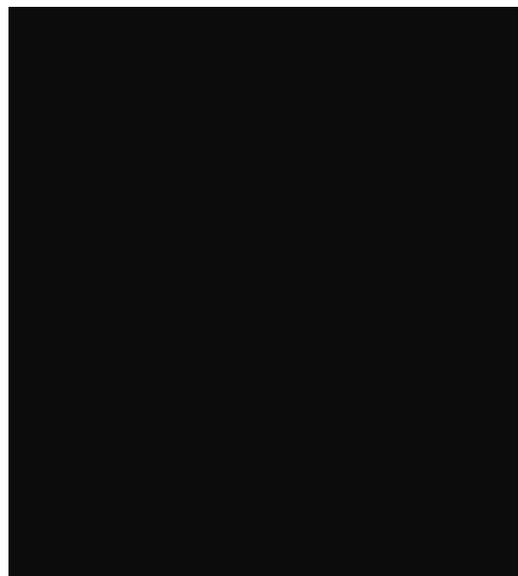
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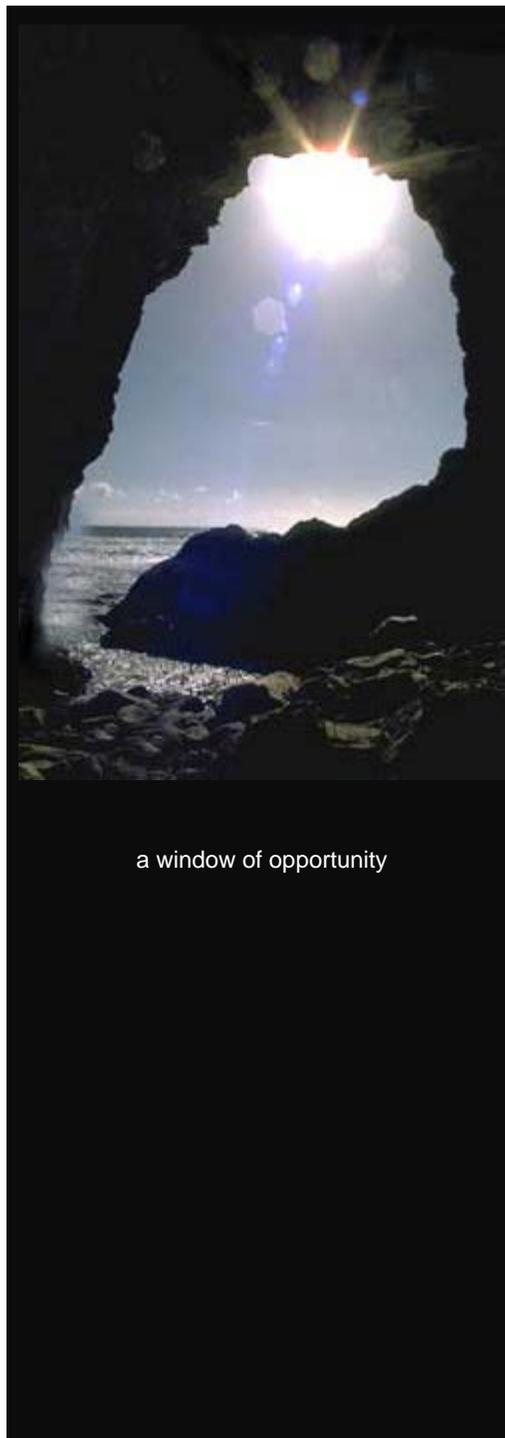
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Down Lay-life Way

Finding a firm foundation among the sinking sands. Barbara Jackson shares her thoughts.

Standing in a rush and push long queue supermarket cash-out? One packet, one tin, one jar at a time; moving to standing with worn out feet waiting, children tired, mind fraught - patient endurance practice. WALKING the crowded pavement to work? Walking where? Nowhere. Just one foot placed in front of the other in a 'one-step-at-a-time' practice. SITTING cramped, squashed by humanity against a beat-music ear-plugged stranger who reduces the mind to nothing more than 'Who is sitting?' practice. LYING DOWN exhausted at the end of the day with intense desire to sleep, but children still shouting, dog barking, phone ringing, wife starts talking brings about a 'go away, the lot of you' practice! A recognisable tread-mill of lay-life - or can it all be opportunities for practice following the Buddha's basic instruction 'standing, walking, sitting or lying down, know yourself.'

Practising the Buddha Way in a speeded up Western society elevates places like the greenhouse, car, garden-shed, compost heap, the toilet, chair beside the sleeping child, from what they seem to be, into sacred corners for mind contemplation. These sorts of places offer momentary silent stillness, or base for on-going practice of 'being in the world but not of it'. Snatched moments of looking as though 'asleep' on the train, even for five minutes, are really being used to cultivate inner peace and stillness among the rattling, jerking, ceaseless thoughts.

In using restraint offered by the Precepts to reverse the
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within us RIGHT NOW

In lay life, a formal sitting time each morning and night can require the stamina of a samurai, physique of Superman and organisation of an airline schedule. But it can all start AND continue with that precious, guard-with-your-life accumulative five minutes' practice throughout the day. A practice of not always knowing where it's all going, sometimes 'why bother?', yet it seems just right to be doing it. Doing what? Merely breathing in and out-anapanasati - mindfulness of breathing - the foundation of mindfulness. Simply taking 'one breath at a time' brings emptiness of mind within which reflection can arise - reflection, a bringer of wisdom.

Conventional aspirations impel us to seek perfection in the perfect place, perfect practice, perfect lay friends and perfect sangha support. Some of the Buddha's perfections, however, are found in subtleties of sila practice, a few precepts pushing us towards a morality largely unacceptable, 'out-dated' and shunned by shimmering images of current popular success. Only five pointers for life, which say: no killing, no taking what is not given, no misuse of sexuality, no speaking wrongly, no use of mind-clouding drink and drugs - often a boring reflection, all thought about before, and met with a 'I don't do these things anyway' attitude.

However, the survival of practice, when going forth daily into worldly seas of samsara, can depend upon application and reflection of the precepts. It is almost a 'mini-asava' practice, restraining energy outflows going into the garden-shed to the 'killer-shelf for bugs and beetles', or killing another's reputation; restraining compulsive collection of leaflets or the mental pull of advertising; guarding against indulgent gossip or easy 'white lies'; drawing back from relationships with a potential to harm another; containing desire for 'drugs' of sense pleasure or thought-diversion techniques. 'Refrain from evil and do good. Purify the mind,' said the Buddha. In using restraint offered by the Precepts to reverse the desire outflow, inner contemplation of how things are within us RIGHT NOW can be effected - and maybe also a little peace of heart and quietude of mind.

Precepts, people, personal relationships offer a mirror for inner qualities needing investigation. Day in and day out, year in and year out, circumstances beyond our control bring inescapable contact with those we would NOT choose to be with - and those we DO choose to be with change. Rather than a lifetime of practice in solitude, the Buddha advocated contact with others as an essential part of the Way. Whilst meeting with others for physical alms-food is not required by lay practisers, it is possible to go forth for alms for the mind. This alms-food is found in every home, street, shop, city-square, market-place, same faces, different faces, teeming with complaining minds, doubting minds, desire minds. Thus, when my mind complains, doubts and desires, it is the same as everyone else's - no different - it has joined one whole mass of complaining, doubting desiring mind, offering food for reflective thought.

Sometimes the office bore is me, sometimes somebody else. 'They', the angry customer is also me; similarly with 'they' who dart through the changing traffic lights - plus the myriad other things I would rather not let myself think about. When this inextricable relationship between us all is realised in the innermost recesses of the mind, no blame can be placed upon another; the quality of forgiveness, requiring me to yield so much of myself, now comes from understanding. When the mirror in someone else irritates me, there is something for me to learn, to burn away a few more of MY imperfections and make space for giving, offering, and reflecting upon the whole scenario of life. Solitary or partnered, with family or with friends, the lay practiser of the Buddha Way can go forth daily for alms for the mind. (To help me



with this: the English translation of the Metta Sutta makes a good 24-hour mantra practice; the Gihiti-Patipatti* on relationships is good to contemplate; and the Christian Anglican marriage service, seen from a Buddhist perspective, is worthy of reflection.)

*'Practice of family life': For example, in the Sigalaka Sutta (Digha Nikaya [III] 31) mentions five ways in which a husband should relate to his wife: 'by honouring her, by not disparaging her, by not being unfaithful to her, by giving authority to her, by providing her with adornments'; and the wife in return, responds 'by properly organising her work, by being kind to the servants, by not being unfaithful, by protecting stores, and by being skilful and diligent in all she has to do'. (Translation from Thus Have I Heard, by M. O'C. Walshe, Wisdom Publications).

Our homes are our viharas, the Triple Gem is our Refuge, right livelihood sustains our practice. From this we can choose to offer a little of what we have to sustain and maintain a living vehicle for the Buddha's Teachings in a vihara/monastery of ordained sangha. This offering can apply to any of the major Buddhist traditions. Mutual dependence between ordained and lay sangha was encouraged by the Buddha, and the example each offers the other is worthy of examination. The presence of lay people who meditate and practise Dhamma, as well as support a Buddhist monastic community, is an innovative aspect of Theravada Buddhism in the West. Is our lay-life practice of the Buddha's Way as we struggle to maintain our diligence, impeccability and endeavour, a sufficiently polished mirror to offer the ordained sangha and society as a whole? Can each one of us find a firm foundation within ourselves, irrespective and independent of personal circumstance, to support a commitment to practise the tangible and intangible teaching expounded by the Buddha? The Buddha said, 'In this fathom-long length of body, with its perceptions and consciousness, is found the world.' May we discover the world within us which is at peace with itself, and be truly grateful for the Buddha's teachings.

Having mused on all this, and having divulged some of the weaknesses in my practice - I also like chocolate croissants at the moment - I really must remember to make a greater effort NOT to talk to my husband just as he is going to sleep!



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EDITORIAL

The Real Thing

Some time ago, a reader wrote asking if we couldn't occasionally put in some news of what was happening to individual bhikkhus and siladhara; having known them as postulants, and seen them go through ordination, there is a personal interest in their welfare. That personal contact is part of what the Sangha offers within the limitations of the monastic conventions. It helps to know that these samanās are individual humans as well as religious icons; their character enriches and breathes life into the form, brings the Dhamma into a three-dimensional living and feeling reality. However, it is always the case that bhikkhus and siladhara get transferred to other monasteries, go overseas, and people lose touch.

Currently Ajahn Chandapalo has just returned from a year's stay in Thailand, during which time he stayed at Wat Pah Nanachat and also in a newly-opened forest hermitage near the Lao border where Ajahn Jayasaro is the senior bhikkhu. Prior to that, he spent some years in Switzerland at the monastery in Konolfingen, before it moved (earlier this year) to Kandersteg. At Kandersteg now with Ajahn Tiradhammo is Ven. Javano (who came over to Britain from Thailand with Luang Por Jun in June of 1989) and Ven. Jayamano; Ven. Mahesi has also just joined the community there after several years at Chithurst.

What else? Ven. Kovido, after abiding for several years with an enervating syndrome called ME (no double-entendre intended), regained his strength, and was invited to Western Australia. Prior to going Down Under to practise with Ajahns Jagaro, Brahmavamsa and the rest of the Sangha at Bodhinyana Monastery, he went on a marathon Harnham-to-Cornwall tudong walk. He appears to have got into his stride - we hear that, after the Vassa, he took a few monks off for another tudong in the hills in the Perth region. Meanwhile, Ven. Nyanaviro has left Devon and gone to Thailand for a while, to be replaced by Ajahn Chandapalo (shades of musical chairs). Nothing much is changing at Harnham - with regard to the nominal identities of the monks at least - which is just fine, as the monastery, with its new Dhamma Hall nearing completion, is in a blossoming stage.

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More temporary movements are that Luang Por Sumedho has gone to Thailand, and is expected back in the middle of February. It seems likely that Sister Candasiri will be moving down to Chithurst. . . . But now we're entering the 'realm of the indefinite future', and people get

annoyed when reports of future activities prove inaccurate. So I'll say not say much about Ajahn Anando's projected tudong walk in France next spring. More roads and trails going somewhere, more dawns and forests and rain and blisters and sunsets and friends and departures. It doesn't come across so well in print.

There are also the appearances of gains and losses in the community. A steady trickle of aspirants have come forward to take the anagarika precepts; some of the previous ones have taken higher ordination, and a number have left the community altogether. A thinning of the postulant population is not unusual or discomfiting - if everybody stayed, one would feel that the lifestyle wasn't challenging enough. Sister Rocana (the second of that name) disrobed after a few months of siladhara life, but as she had not fully adapted to the style of the monasteries in Britain, perhaps this is not so surprising. More poignant are the disrobings of people who have spent many years in the Sangha. Ajahn Pabhakaro left us in the spring, Ven. Bodhinando and Sister Kalayana in the summer, Sisters Thanissara and Satima in the autumn, and this winter Ajahn Kittisaro has indicated his wish to disrobe.

In some cases, people come in expecting something that isn't here, or without fully knowing the tests that the life will put them through. After all, it's not just clear sailing after adjusting to the Eight, Ten, or 227 Precepts; there is still the endless moulding and crafting of the heart through the means of giving up personal freedom. Not being able to determine who you will live with, or to a great extent what you will do in a day, or where you will go, as well as minor things like what you will eat or drink, are all aspects of the giving up. It's not easy. Then again there are the changes one goes through, as hitherto unfathomed areas of the mind or powerful inclinations get revealed through insight. In the reality of the way things are, you can't always apply the simple equations: staying = good; leaving = bad.

People do place a lot of faith in individual monks and nuns, and so can get disappointed in them, or disillusioned with the ideals and practice of the Sangha, when they disrobe. It's all 'good practice' (as they say) when someone leaves, to see whether your faith is dependent on another person's presence - or on your own insights. One would like to think that a monk or a nun had resolved any doubts within their first few years, but reality often refuses to work in terms of rational principles. Any life, the Holy Life included, is a totally subjective experience. The convictions that arise within it are not always accessible to someone else. We can conform as an act of faith, or out of the wish not to upset or disappoint anyone, but that's hardly the grounds for a life of insight. In the long run, the freedom to leave can be seen to be a precious one, and it helps to define the grounds that commitment should rest upon. The Buddha wanted to encourage virtue, insight and wisdom - not a monastic order per se. If monastics recollect that they can leave, even after twenty years, it helps them to examine their motivation and thereby strengthen their practice.

After all, shouldn't we encourage people to take personal responsibility for their commitment? To get back to the starting point of this article, the authenticity and subjectivity of the life, the fact that it is lived by human individuals, is one of its sources of inspiration. Meanwhile (from the monasteries' perspective) another sad note: David Babski, our typesetter/publications manager has run out of visas and H.M. Government will no longer grant an extension. So he will be returning to the United States in the New Year. As David has become largely responsible for the conversion of the Sangha's words into published form, it is not clear how we will continue to publish Newsletters and other material. If nothing from the Sangha comes through your letterbox in April, be assured that we're still alive and trying.

As yet there is still the opportunity to express our gratitude to David for all his diligent (and monetarily uncompensated) work. And also to those leaving the monastic life, for the support, encouragement and companionship over the years. May they all receive the blessings of their practice! It certainly wasn't always easy, but it was the real thing. Long may it continue to be so.

