



FOREST SANGHA

newsletter

April 1994

2537

Number 28

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The Resolution of Conflict

Virtue and compassion are essentials in the world today if we are to move beyond our differences. Ajahn Jagaro, senior incumbent of Bodhinyana Monastery, Western Australia, discusses how religion can be a vehicle to enable people to move beyond their belief systems towards a commonality of experience.

Nowadays there is a lot of interest in peace, and yet peace is difficult to achieve, both on a personal level and on a social, national and international level. There seem to be so many forces, so many conditions that cause friction and conflict, that this ideal of peace seems to continually evade us. We attain some degree of peace for a little while and then it's gone.

On a personal level, those of us who have been on a meditation retreat and had quite a successful time may then get the idea that: 'Well, maybe I've learned at last how to be peaceful.' Then we go home, and very shortly we 'blow it', as they say, and the peace escapes us and all the irritations and interpersonal tensions, or the feeling of somehow not being treated properly creep in on the mind, making us feel rather disturbed.

Buddhism, of course, is very concerned and interested in peace, and the teachings of the Buddha are guidelines in order to help us achieve peace at every level. In Buddhism we don't set up that conflict: 'Should I develop something within myself or should I help others?' because whatever I develop within myself benefits everybody else. I cannot develop something peaceful and good within myself by exploiting others. So the cultivation of peace is a whole - the path to it involves the external and the internal. We cannot achieve something at the expense of others, ignoring the world and how we are living, and still expect to develop something good within our hearts and minds.

Just the way we speak to each other, gently, and kindly,
giving a hand, helping out, sharing what we've got with
others.

Today we see in our society so many causes of possible friction and conflict between people. We see it in our families. We see it between husband and wife. We see it between groups of people at work, or belonging to some organisation, or living together in a city, in a society or in a country. Differences in appearance - physical differences, mental differences, beliefs, attitudes, preferences - all these can be the basis for conflict or lack of peace between people.

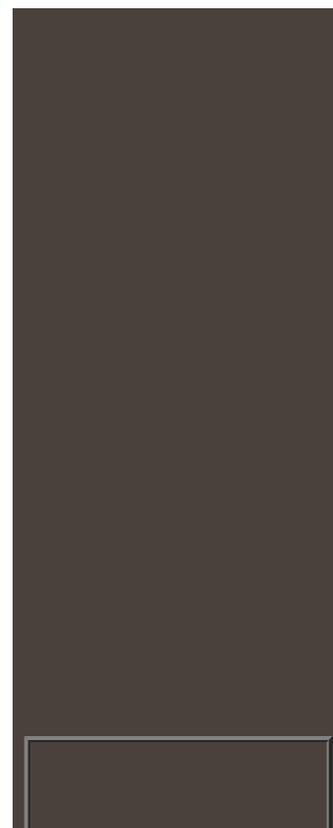
Today we talk about 'the global village' and 'the human family'. So now we can't remain at a very limited tribal level or nationalistic level or individual religious level because that is no longer viable. That sets up too many factions, and factions lead to wars. There is no room for this any longer in the history of humanity because it's too dangerous and destructive to the human quest for peace. Unless we want to degenerate, we'd better open the mind to include the global view that can allow for all the differences that exist, not only in appearance, but also belief and political attitude. Somehow, we have to awaken and open the mind to allow for the variety. We can do it, but there has to be a foundation for trust. Without trust it cannot be possible.

How can people with different views, opinions and beliefs live side by side with trust? Those differences themselves set up the conditions for lack of trust, and yet unless you can allow and live side by side together, how can you accomplish peace and harmony? Therefore, the conditions for trust are so important, in particular the conditions of virtue, wherein we are all committed to goodness, regardless of political persuasion, religious belief, or ethnic background. Whatever the differences, if we are at least committed to this standard called virtue - that we won't exploit, we won't kill, we won't hurt, we won't lie and cheat - if we are committed to this, then there is a basis for trust. At least you can trust that far.

So we are committed to this virtue which is the basis, the first step, to compassion. Not hurting, not killing, not exploiting, not cheating, not lying. If you could manage to be committed to that, it's much better than being committed to all these high-minded ideas about God and heavens and hells and philosophies; much better, because that one agreement, that one commitment to virtue, brings a great deal of harmony, a great deal of peace and trust amongst people. Much more than 'religions' will, if those religions don't have that foundation.

But it's only the start. We need to build on that through goodwill, loving-kindness and compassion - which is the active form of relating. Just the way we speak to each other, gently, and kindly, giving a hand, helping out, sharing what we've got with others. It doesn't matter that they are a different colour, or a different race, or a different belief, a different religion. We can leave that aside for now. We can bring up this ability of the human being to share, to be kind, to be friendly. We can recognise the common humanity.

These two aspects - the passive, refraining from that which is hurtful (virtue); the active, which we call loving-kindness and compassion - this is what will provide the basis for harmony and peace within society and within this world. And that's why these qualities are so important in our society and in the world today. Even though the differences are there, we can live together if we are committed to virtue and compassion, and therefore we are patient, we are giving, we allow failings and differences. If we could instill more virtue and compassion in the minds of our young people today, in our children, our society would be a lot more peaceful and harmonious. We would not need so many locks and double locks, and triple locks and bars, and all the things that we have to have now.



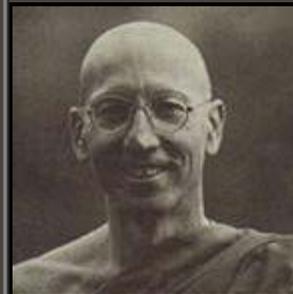
However, there's no doubt about it, the differences are still there. When we relate at this level of virtue and compassion, then, although they are of no great consequence, the differences are still there. And as soon as you move into the intellectual area and start talking, moving away from the heart, from the feeling of compassion, and you move into the realm of intellect, discussion and beliefs, the differences manifest again. This is what happens to anyone. Even if the Dalai Lama has a conversation with the Pope, he is going to disagree on many things.

How is this to be resolved? Does this mean that we just live together being kind to each other but we don't discuss things? If we want to start relating on the intellectual level and sharing at that level and trying to come to an agreement, how do we resolve this?

There are so many ideas and beliefs about God. Somebody gave me a book the other day. It's a book by the sect of another religious group and it analyses every other religion in a very critical way. The person asked me, 'Is what they have written here about Buddhism correct?' And I said, 'No, it's not right,' without even looking at it. And I said, 'If what they wrote there is right, those people would be Buddhists by now!' It's true also that if you really understood Christianity, you would be a Christian. One of the last sentences in the book was something like: 'Obviously the search for enlightenment without God is impossible,' or 'meaningless', or something to that effect. I actually agree with that, but I would use different terminology. I would say that any religion is meaningless unless it has reference to an ultimate reality, an ultimate truth beyond duality, and it offers the means to realise it or to be with it. So yes, the search for enlightenment would be absolutely meaningless if there were not the Unconditioned, the Immortal, the Uncreated - Nibbana, if you wish to use Buddhist terminology. Because that's what enlightenment means: coming to realise that which is beyond mortality, beyond duality, beyond concept and thought, beyond creation. If there wasn't that, there would be no enlightenment. There would be nothing to be enlightened to.

What is the point of a religion if it does not point to something beyond concept and thought? - Because all concept and all thought is a creation of the mind, is mortal and limited. And if one begins to understand this, one then begins to understand how foolish some of the ideas that religions present to people are, because all of those descriptions and ideas are mortal, all limited, all dual. The first images or the first symbols used for God were very crude ones; as the intellect developed, then there was more abstract terminology, still created by man. That's why there is such a variety of symbols and terminologies. That's why there will never be agreement between religions when they just talk and think and try to understand with thinking. Then, of course, the differences remain and those differences will always be potential cause for conflict.

So this is why in Buddhism we stress very much the need for the human being to realise Truth, not to think about Truth; to realise the Unconditioned, not to think about the Unconditioned, because in Buddhism, not only are we very aware of the limitation of the material, physical idols and symbols, we are also critically aware of the limitations of the mental symbols, in other words, of thought itself. Thought is a very, very limited area of human experience. If you want to know the taste of honey, you don't think. You could spend a



Ajahn Jagaro

lifetime thinking about the taste of honey and not know the taste of honey. You've got to stop thinking in order to know the taste of honey.

Also, those areas of human experience which are actually very crucial to our lives don't require so much thinking. Thinking has to stop for that moment in order to allow for the experience of Truth. But because thinking is always there, interfering all the time, we don't experience life. There's continually thought, thought, thought. Every thought is limited in that it is created, it arises and ceases. It's always relative, thought about something. Thought is always relative, thought is always dual, thought is always created, thought is always mortal. All these words mean that thinking cannot either reach or describe the Unconditioned, the Immortal, the Ultimate Reality, the Ultimate Truth. And that is why in Buddhism we stress the need for meditation, because through meditation we begin to experience a different level of consciousness. We begin to see there is something beyond thought, that the mind can be above thought, beyond thought. That is already a very big step towards some broader, grander notion of reality. So that through meditation we train the mind step by step to withdraw from the sensory distractions and to withdraw from the mental dialogues of images and words, to incline towards that peace that is still and silent yet fully awake, fully aware. Aware of what? Aware of that silence, aware of that stillness, aware of that peacefulness. And then we recognise clearly what thought is and how limited it is, and how inept it is in the field of Truth and Absolute Reality.

This is why in Buddhism we say that for insight or realisation of Truth to happen, the mind has to be trained in some degree of concentration and tranquillity, because the realisation of the Unconditioned is not a thought. It can never be done by thought. It's got nothing to do with belief. It is when the mind has attained to a particular level of preparedness, which here, primarily, means the degree of concentration, silence and awareness, that the mind can experience things directly.

This is possible for every human being to do, but they must leave behind all that clutters the mind. And you can see why there is so little understanding between people of different religions because they are all bringing along their whole storehouse of idols. I don't mean they bring their Buddha statue and their various statues along to compare which one is the best, but they all bring their ideas and beliefs, and make comparisons. Obviously there's only going to be differences.

If we speak of a Christian God, it's obviously a very limited God. A Christian God is obviously not a Buddhist one. Or if we said the Buddhist Truth - well that's very limited too. The Buddhist Truth obviously is not the Christian Truth, is it? But the Unconditioned cannot be anybody, it cannot have any limitation, cannot have any shades or colouring. This is why we say the Unconditioned: it means no conditions, no limitations, no colour, no form. Therefore it's not Christian, not Moslem, not Hindu, no-one, but it is something that human beings can realise. And the realisation of this brings true peace, because once this is realised, then all those things that normally cause conflict become meaningless. The purpose of religion is to help facilitate this realisation.

So I think that religion is an extremely valuable thing for humanity if it is used in the right way. All religions begin, at least, by emphasising the virtue and compassion that enable us to live together peacefully. And then if we want to transcend, we have to attain to the Unconditioned and realise it, and religion is supposed to help us. And whether the religion is a good one or not so good, well that depends on how well it points. That's for each person to find out for themselves. I don't think it is for one religion to judge another. It's up to the followers of any religion to validate that religion.

If I want to validate whether Buddhism is a true Path to enlightenment, how can I do it? By

becoming enlightened. I can't validate the Islamic path because I don't know much about it. If someone following that path wants to prove that that is the path to enlightenment, or liberation, or whatever they want to call it, they have to follow it to its limits. Its up to each individual to validate their path by taking it to the limit and realising. In Buddhism this is of crucial importance because, in the end, what have we got? What is our refuge? Unless we have some direct experience of the Unconditioned, then it is very difficult, because all we have is just the conditioned things, all those things that are so variable, in which are so many areas of differences, problems and conflicts.

So for us it is important to train the mind, to become aloof or secluded, to withdraw beyond experience of the six senses and realise that there is still awareness and peace and clarity. That mind is then fit to realise something beyond these conditions, these mortal experiences. And that is how we validate religion - through realising the Unconditioned or the Immortal.



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Child's Play

Venerable Sunnato points out some interesting parallels between the process of rebirth, as described by the Buddha and recent overviews relating to child development.

Part I.

The Buddha's teaching on rebirth is a rich vein of discovery. Some claim that it is a teaching of reincarnation and some that it is a profound psychology describing our individual worlds of perception. What follows is a possible way of approaching this subject, gathering together quotations from recent textbooks in psychology and matching them with certain scriptural passages from the Pali Canon. Remarkably, they form a strong correlation and, at one point, give surprise meaning to one of the more pointed mysteries of the teaching.

Let's begin with the description of a child's early development. From contemporary psychology:

- 'Most people... assume... that the newborn baby's thoughts, feelings, and consciousness resemble, to a certain extent, our own. In reality... even his sensations barely resemble our own. . . He has no mind or emotions as we think of them, merely vague feelings of pleasure and distress... he is conscious of... sensations, but he is unaware that..., sensations represent events that occur in time and space.'

Ref: Maurer, Daphne and Charles. World of the New-born (231 WM), Oxford University Press, 1987.

- 'For the neonate (newborn), sensations from all modalities may combine to produce a "global" experience.'

Ref: Shaffer, David R. Developmental Psychology Theory, Research and Applications (238 DP), Brooks-Cole Publishing Co., Monterey, 1985.

- 'Presumably neonates experience people and events as simple "streams of impressions".' (Innocence/ignorance) (468 DP)
- 'Psychologists are careful to distinguish between sensation and perception ...Perception refers to the interpretation of sensory input.. .' (203 DP)
- 'It is the grouping together of certain features or the isolation of a certain relationship ...These patterns are only some among many possible patterns that could have formed.' (formations)

Ref: Gregory, Richard L., The Oxford Companion To The Mind (429 OM) Oxford University Press.

- 'Apparently the ability to detect and discriminate patterns is innate...' (205 DP)
- 'Infants begin to form mental representations... for patterns and objects.' (238 DP)
- 'The senses begin to "differentiate" during the first year.' (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking) (220 DP)
- 'The fact that we perceive objects from stimuli without even seeming to try is extremely misleading.' (568 OM)'... (the first month), babies scan the boundaries of faces as if they were trying to "construct" a form and/or determine its location in space.' (210 DP) 'Infants older than two months... scan. . . figures as if they were trying to determine what these objects are. Perhaps we are not too far off if we characterise the neonate as a form "constructor" and the older infant

as a form "interpreter". (material form and mental name) (207 DP)

For the newborn there is no baby, no world, no beginning, no ending, no coming, and no going.

- '...children may learn the limits of their bodies during the first four months...' (469 DP) ... infants do not distinguish between the (physical) self and nonself (objects, other people) until four to six months of age [body base: eye, ear, nose, mouth, body].' (507 DP)
- 'Early reaching is truly a hit-or-miss proposition. In contrast, infants older than 20 weeks can extend their arms and make in-flight corrections to guide their hands to the target [co-ordination of sense consciousness (ie. seeing), sense base (ie. eye), and sense object (ie. object of seeing)].' (178 DP)
- '... the infant begins to organize sensory experiences and motor responses into behavioral structures.Responses that occur by chance and prove satisfying [feeling] are now performed over and over for the pleasure [craving] they bring.. they are the first co-ordinated "habits" [clinging] to appear... the pleasure they bring stimulates their repetition [pursuit of pleasure, arising of pleasure, and its inevitable end (repeated)].' (339 DP)

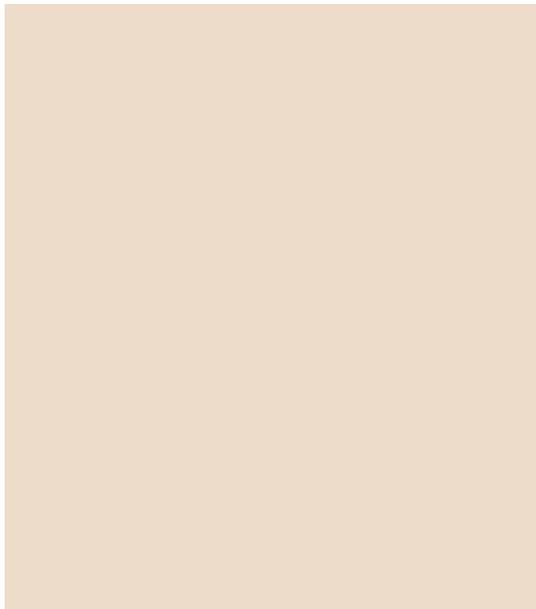
Researchers are saying that when we watch a baby being born into the world this is not what is happening for the baby. For the newborn there is no baby, no world, no beginning, no ending, no coming, and no going. There are only meaningless sensations and the potential to form some interpretation of those sensations. It will take eight months, generally, to create the 'baby' and the 'world' as a basic interpretation. If we take a summary of these observations and align them with the steps of rebirth as described by the Buddha, we find an amazing similarity. The points listed thus far would read:

out of innocence (ignorance) there rises formations: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking; material form and mental name; the body base (eye, ear, nose, mouth, body); co-ordination of sense consciousness, sense base and sense object (eg. seeing, the eye, and object of seeing); feeling; craving; clinging; pursuit of pleasure; the arising of pleasure; and the ending of pleasure.

Compare this to the Buddha's steps of rebirth as noted in the Samyutta-Nikaya XII, 2: Out of ignorance rises formations: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking; name (mentality) and form (materiality); the sense bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind); the arising together of sense consciousness, sense base and sense object (eg. seeing, the eye, and object of seeing); feeling; craving; clinging; being; birth; ageing and death.

The similarity increases if we add a more general view. Once again from recent textbooks:

- 'Initially, the fetus/baby is conscious of a confused profusion of sounds, feelings, tastes and - after birth -of sights... They are as senseless as the patterns of a kaleidoscope.' (194 WN)
- '... the self.. is not there.' (468 DP) he has no mind nor emotions as we think of them... he is unaware that.., sensations represent events that occur in time and space.' (231 WN)
- '... infants. . . form mental representations.. for patterns and objects.' (238 DP)' . . . around eight months... things [objects] exist. .. [then] space. . . time.' (232WN)... . the self.. . arises.' (468 DP)
- '... no longer a kaleidoscope of meaningless sensations. It is a world...' (232 WN)



acquire the concept of a private thinking self that others can't see between the ages of three-and-a-half and five.' (471 DP). . . somewhere between the ages of six and eight children become much more aware of their subjective "inner selves" and will think of this private self as the true self.' (473 DP)... . self as knower.' (470 DP)

Reducing what has been stated we find that the child identifies the actual physical form of the body first. Second, based on that form, a mental description arises. Finally, a much more abstract sense of a self, as formless perceiver (knowing, awareness), develops.

This is also what the Buddha says:

- 'There are three types of self acquired...The first has (physical) form...The second has form and is constituted by mind with all the limbs and faculties...The third is formless and consists in perception.' (Digha-Nikaya 9)

As developments progress:

- 'Twelve to fifteen year-olds face an "identity crisis", in that they are no longer sure who they are and yet must grapple with the question "who will I become?" (475 DP)

A problem also noted by the Buddha.

- 'The untaught ordinary man... gives unreasoned attention in this way: he wonders about himself now in the presently arisen period, "Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Whence has this creature come? Whither is it bound?" (Majjhima-Nikaya 2)

Recent investigators are quick to point out that this structuring is a dependent arising:

- it is important to remember that human development is a holistic process... each of these components of "self" depends in part on changes that are taking place in other areas of development.' (8 DP)

This interdependence is a major element of the Buddha's teaching:

- 'That comes to be when there is this; that arises with the arising of this. That does not come to be when there is not this.'(Majjhima-Nikaya 38)

A development of particular importance in this correlation is the sense of permanence.

Modern research:

- '...One of the more notable achievements of the sensori-motor period is the development of the object concept.. an "object" is something that the child conceives of as having an identity of its own, something that exists independent of his immediate perceptions.' (341 DP)
- 'Between eight and twelve months the baby appears to understand that objects are permanent.. This understanding does not happen suddenly, it develops gradually.. As his understanding develops, more and more things around him...stop materializing and dematerializing, and stay put.. But for everything to stay put takes...a certain amount of memory.' (191-2 WN)
- 'What was a world of motion now becomes. . . permanent, a fixed place of address.' (201 WN)

More simply, in order to have permanence a child needs to remember that even though the sensations of this moment are slightly different from the last they still resemble the last sensations. Instead of focusing on the subtleties of difference present in each moment, the mind starts to remember and relate the similarities. These similarities carry a sense of continuity or permanence.

For the Buddha it was of primary importance to see through this developed perception:

- 'When one understands that (material) form, feeling, perception, (mental) formations and consciousness are impermanent, he possesses the right view.' (Samyutta-Nikaya XX11, 51)

Ultimately, what are these modern observations pointing to?

- 'The usual state of consciousness is characterized by ... a structured frame of reference... which supports, interprets, and gives meaning to all experiences...'
Ref: Tart, Charles T. *Altered States of Conscious: A Book of Readings*. John Wiley and Sons Inc., New York, 1969 (237 AS)
- '...[it] is a... superstructure of ideas or... gestalt of relationships. From its totality are derived various concepts and functions, some of which are... self, world, other people, time, space, logic, purpose, various inhibitions, conscious fears and defences.' (239-40 AS)

Again an echo of past teaching:

- 'Formations? They form the formed, that is why they are called formations. They form (material) form, feeling, perception (mental), formations, and consciousness.' (Samyutta-Nikaya XX11, 79)
- 'I am' is derived from form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.' (Samyutta-Nikaya XX1 1, 79)

Most of us 'construct' a personal view of a self, in a body, as part of an external world, and this carries with it certain side effects. We do not see these 'constructions' as mere interpretations; instead, we believe these views. We believe that 'someone' is 'born'. We believe the notion of permanence. These are notions that can bring great anxiety. What is born must be seen to die at some point. 'Permanence', as a general rule, is at odds with existence, endlessly frustrating. We constantly hope to gain stability or security in the face of certain change.

Psychology:

- 'The first stage of thinking is... how we look at the world: the concepts and perceptions we form. The second stage of thinking is... what we do with the perceptions that have been set up in the first stage.' (429 OM)

The Buddha:

- 'Old action? Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind are old action (already) determined and chosen. . . New action? It is whatever one does now, whether by body, speech, or mind.' (Samyutta-Nikaya XXXV 145)

Why should any of this be of importance? For one simple reason. We do not need to be entrenched in our views, forever bound, nor do we have to suffer the side-effects. We can learn to use these perceptions skilfully without the agony of believing them to be absolute; letting go of conditioned inhibitions, fears and defences, and moving to an increasing state of rest.

'Most of the time... (reality-orientation) is essentially non-conscious and even seemingly "automatic".'

- (238 AS) De-automization ... (is) ... the undoing of automization... by re-investing actions and percepts with attention.' (31 AS)

The Buddha:

- 'This body is not yours or another's, but past action (already) determined and chosen that must be experienced to be seen.' (Samyutta-Nikaya V 145)

We can become aware of our present patterning process and, once aware of it, we can see the delusions of our old patterning.

- 'To the extent that the usual reality-orientation fades ... the greater the possibility... that primitive contents and modes of thought will come into awareness. (247 AS)

The Buddha:

- 'Whatever monks or brahmans recollect their past life in its various modes, they recollect the five categories..(of formations).' (Samyutta-Nikaya XX1 1 79)

And how do we do this?

- 'It is only when we become... absorbed in... reality..., that we begin to approach the disintegration of... the reality-orientation...' (240 AS)

The Buddha:

- 'I entered upon and abode in... onlooking equanimity..., when my concentrated mind was thus purified... I recollected my manifold past life. ..' (Majjhima-Nikaya 36)

In more detail:

- '...contemplative meditation... permits a different perceptual and cognitive experience... permitting the adult to obtain a new, fresh perception of the world by freeing him from a stereotyped organization built up over the years and by allowing... access to fresh materials, to create with them in a new way that represents an advance in mental functioning..., not a regression but rather an undoing of a pattern in order to permit a new and perhaps more advanced experience... Such ...effects point to a capacity..., for alterations in the perception of the world and of the self far greater than what is customarily assumed to be the case for normal people.' (217.18 AS)

The Buddha:

- 'I entered upon and abode in... onlooking equanimity...' (Majjhima-Nikaya 36) with the mind perceiving impermanence, it does not reach for gain, honour or renown with the mind perceiving no mentality-materiality, it is rid of the conceits of "I and mine, this body, and consciousness.'" (AnguttaraNikaya Vii, 46)' ... feelings, thoughts, perceptions still arise in an awakened one but he knows them for what they are...' (Majjhima-Nikaya 123) 'The ending of greed, hatred and delusion is.. . peace... (Samyutta-Nikaya XL1 ii, 1-44)

No matter how esoteric the scriptures become, the Buddha was very clear on one point: we should seek the truths of our life through observing our own experience and live in accordance with those truths. In the interests of healthy inquiry, the correlations noted here are worth some attention. It would be enough to end here but for one other intriguing parallel, which, as I mentioned at the outset, gives a possible meaning to one of is great mysteries... to be continued.

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Images of Sri Lanka

Sister Siripanna and Sister Upekkha visited Sri Lanka for three weeks at the end of last year. This is the first part of Sr.Sripanna's report.

The catalyst for the visit was an invitation for some Amaravati nuns to attend the third International Conference of Buddhist Women organised by Sakyadhita ('Daughters of the Buddha') in Colombo. I was pleased to be asked to go as it seemed a worthwhile event; and I had never been to Asia or experienced a predominantly Buddhist culture before. 'Stay on for a while afterwards,' suggested Ajahn Sumedho, 'or you'll regret it later.' With this agreeable advice, flights were reserved showing two weeks of unplanned time. The prospect of just setting out, with faith that our few needs would be taken care of, was very appealing. Knowing the Sri Lankan reputation for hospitality, I suspected we wouldn't starve.

We left from Heathrow on an icy, grey October morning, descending at dawn the next day to land at Colombo through the sullen cloud of a monsoon downpour. There was just time for a brief glimpse of mud-swollen rivers and palm trees, dark-leaved and glistening wet, before we shuddered down on to the steaming runway. Where was the lyrical tropical sunrise I'd been led to anticipate? Once again, a reminder that life rarely troubles to align itself with one's expectations.

There was a warm welcome from the family of Amaravati regular Nalaka Rajaratna. Then, a dream-like drive to Colombo, adjusting to new sense-impressions: humid warmth and red earth and outrageously extravagant vegetation; a chaos of cyclists and cars, trishaws and trucks, jostling noisily for position on rough roads; streams of pedestrian commuters, and clusters of schoolchildren in immaculate whites; lethargic stray dogs and untethered cows ambling by the roadside lined with small shops and open stalls, and piles of coconut-husks and garbage; and glimpses of unimaginable lives in shacks and courtyards up muddy alleys.

Approaching the conference centre, the streets broadened into tree-lined avenues. Nalaka's sister suddenly raised her hands reverentially in anjali as if responding to a pre-arranged signal. Puzzled, I glanced back to see a huge Buddha-rupa gazing out imperturbably from a roadside shrine - startling reminder that we were now in a Buddhist land.

By the following day more than two hundred delegates had gathered for the five-day conference, with approximately equal numbers of nuns and laywomen (and a few husbands) representing nearly every Asian and European country, the United States and Australia. The broad aims of this and the previous conferences were to further the objectives of Sakyadhita: '... to promote world peace through the practice of the Buddha's teachings; to create a network of communications for Buddhist women throughout the world; to promote harmony and understanding among the various Buddhist traditions to encourage and help educate women as teachers of Buddhadharma and to provide improved facilities for women to study and practise

the teachings.' And further: '... to help establish the Bhikkhuni Sangha where it does not currently exist; to provide support for women who are interested in ordination; and to conduct research on monastic discipline and the role of women in Buddhism.'

Each day would begin with chanting and guided meditation from a different tradition. Talks and discussion-groups followed, on a diverse range of topics: Challenges in Monastic Life Today; Bhikkhuni Ordination - Arguments For and Against Its Revival; Dhamma in Family Life; The Role of Laywomen in Buddhism; Japanese Women Monastics; and Buddhism in Bangladesh. And ... Can Women Attain Nibbana?! It was impressive to observe the consistent humour, compassion, maturity and wisdom of the speakers as various potentially emotive issues were explored.

Buddhist nuns are a rare species in Western countries,
and we can often find ourselves rather isolated within
our own small groups.

The subject-matter would often gravitate towards the concerns of the ninety Dasa sil nana (ten precept nuns) attending. There are approximately 2,500 Dasa sil nana in Sri Lanka. Those we met told us that although there are a few excellent nunneries, in general there is inadequate support and little opportunity to receive good training. In recent years the government has taken some measures to improve this situation. We explored further possibilities. The local laywomen took great interest in these exchanges, many expressing the wish to hear more Dhamma teachings from women. In conclusion, the delegates drew up a resolution calling for a new nuns' training and study centre to be set up in Colombo. The press gave this wide publicity, and before leaving Sri Lanka we heard that several possible properties had already been offered by lay donors.

One afternoon all the foreign delegates were taken to visit the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara, a well-known temple outside Colombo. On arrival, young flower-sellers clustered around bearing blue lotuses which our Sri Lankan hosts generously bought and distributed. As we approached the temple, the Abbot came to welcome us, accompanied by a procession of ceremonial temple drummers. Inside the entrance-hall, the pounding drums were amplified to a mind-stopping roar before abruptly falling quiet. In the powerful silence we were led through various chambers lined with stunning wall-friezes depicting scenes from the Buddha's life. Eventually we found ourselves before a large, seated Buddha-rupa; a gauze curtain gave the figure an air of ethereal mystery. We offered our lotuses to the flower-laden shrine and bowed. The Abbot led us into a further chamber almost entirely filled by a colossal reclining Buddha, overwhelmingly serene, again veiled. I remained for a while, watching as a steady procession of families, young couples and devout old women and men filed in and made offerings - handfuls of scented jasmine or temple flowers, nelum or lotuses. They would usually pause briefly, reciting a Pali gatha (verse) or perhaps asking for good fortune or favour, before moving on. The atmosphere was relaxed, familiar, and yet - because this depth of devotion was so obviously an everyday scene - very moving.

Outside again, we circumambulated the Bodhi tree and finally the large chaitya (stupa). Nearby, racks of oil-lamps shimmered and smoked in the dusk light. Two old women silently offered Sr Upekkha and me some new lamps; we smiled our thanks before adding them to the stands, the surrounding sand stained oil-black by countless offerings. Many people strolled around the chaitya; others sat reciting Suttas, or chanting, or praying, or enjoying some peace at the end of a busy day. We joined them, meditating for a time in the soft evening air.

As the conference continued, I realised that although I appreciated the

formal presentations, perhaps even more valuable was the rare opportunity to meet so many other women - particularly monastics and others committed to community life - practising within many different cultures and traditions. Buddhist nuns are a rare species in Western countries, and we can often find ourselves rather isolated within our own small groups. This occasion was offering a chance to broaden horizons and to draw strength and inspiration from a larger source, sharing information and hard-earned experience.

The hot, humid nights presented us with their own unique brand of sharing as we learned to co-exist with the thirsty local mosquitoes. Our simple room had no nets and, for that matter, no closeable windows. We were provided with sachets of chemical repellent, to be scattered on a small hotplate, but decided against using it in case it killed the mosquitoes - or us. But by the third day I counted thirty-five bites, and rapidly became an enthusiastic convert to 'J. Pickle's Mijex', an evil-smelling liquid repellent which seemed to dissolve everything except (I hoped) human skin. We also gradually grew accustomed to Sri Lanka's answer to Big Ben - a deceptively benign-looking clock on a nearby government building (at first I thought it was being played on a loudspeaker in our room). Its unforgettable electronic chimes - an enigmatic three hours fast - would peal out loudly every fifteen minutes, day and night. We were later to hear slightly less strident variations elsewhere. Curiously, many Sri Lankans love to be aware of the passage of time, though by their own admission they are often not so keen on keeping to it!

During our stay at the Conference Centre, we had many visits from various friends and relatives of supporters back in England. As 'Amaravati Nuns' we were the focus of an astonishing amount of interest and attention; it was obvious that Ajahn Sumedho and the Forest Tradition were widely known. Numerous people also told us of previous visits to



The monumental stupa at Anaradapura, Northern Sri Lanka

Amaravati. We received many offers and invitations: 'Please come to my house for Dana - my relatives are so keen to meet you, and we'd like to learn to meditate.' 'The ground floor of my house is yours - just tell me when you can come.' 'Wherever you want to go, let me know and my driver will take you.' 'If you need anything at all, just phone this number.' It was heart-opening and inspiring to be a channel for so much faith and generosity. Before the conference had finished our 'unscheduled time' had become, as anticipated, a full programme of teaching and travel and visits, and the main difficulty became how to fit so many invitations into the two short remaining weeks.

After the conference, we stayed on for five more days in Colombo. We were invited to establish our base at Ruby Abeysinghe's conveniently central house. Ruby quickly became our indispensable 'Tour Manager.' We spent most of the time offering informal teachings and meditation guidance to a succession of visitors. There was much enthusiasm for the Forest Tradition's direct, contemplative approach. During the conference several local people had told us: 'You know, this is a Buddhist country but hardly anybody actually practises here.' We were to hear this lament again and again during our stay. (They were referring to bhavana, or mind-cultivation - no-one could seriously say that the Sri Lankans were lacking in generosity or devotion.) Our experiences suggested that there was in fact considerable interest in practice - but that many people had been disheartened by theoretical teachings which they found hard to relate to everyday experience. One of our visitors was so struck by our approach that he arranged for us to take part in a televised Dhamma discussion on 'Rupavahini', the national network. Soon there was a further request, to take part in a Woman's Affairs programme' ... about prominent women of your category.' A rapid rise to fame!

Whenever possible, Sr Upekkha and I would take the opportunity to go on almsround. The early-morning city air would already be heavy with humidity as we stepped out through the high gates of Ruby's courtyard and set off in slow silence. Many houses were surrounded by high walls or fences, giving an air of fortification to the narrow lanes; sobering reminder of the fear generated by a war which for years had left no corner of the island safe, and which had provoked a general increase in violent crime. Now the conflict was generally confined to a grim deadlock in the North (the day we left the country, up to five hundred Sinhalese soldiers were killed in an attack on their base). There was quite a prominent military presence in Colombo. In almost every street, groups of soldiers would stand with automatic rifles, guarding vulnerable public buildings and homes, or manning road-blocks. Our limbs would soon loosen in the heat as we walked through a lattice of dazzling sunlight and shade, past gardens with improbable plants, until we came to Galle Road, where on the first day of our stay we had gone in search of an apparently mythical Tourist Information Office. As we stood perplexed, a suited man approached. 'Can I help you?' I explained that we were looking for somewhere that might provide a free map of the city. 'Wait just a minute, please.' He went to his car and returned beaming, holding out his English-language Colombo A to Z. 'For you, please. God bless you!' We parted feeling unsure about whether we had just been offered Buddhist dana or Christian charity, but this spontaneous gesture of kindness had lifted our hearts, and given us a small foretaste of the incredible generosity we were to meet throughout our stay.

As our rounds continued past open shop-fronts and street-stalls, people would respond with intrigued glances, shy smiles... or apparent indifference. In a curious way, this last was the most reassuring as it conveyed a sense of belonging. Here, despite being 'foreigners', we were part of the accepted order of things. It was a novel delight to feel so ordinary for once, rather than - as sometimes in the West - like an alien from a distant planet. We received occasional food-offerings despite not seeking them out (we already had dana invitations for every day of our stay). The sight of samanās walking on traditional almsround is quite rare now in Sri Lanka. Several times we were wistfully told: 'If only our own Sangha would still do this; it gives us such pleasure to make these offerings.' Eventually, feeling outwardly hot but

inwardly peaceful, we would arrive back at the house to be welcomed by Ruby and her household as heroines returning from a perilous mission... to be continued

For those who are interested in making contact with Sakyadhita, the address is: 400 Hobron Lane, #2615 Honolulu, HI 96815.



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Luang Por Chah's Relics

In January Ajahn's Sumedho and Attapemo went to Wat Pah Pong in Thailand and took part in the final ceremonies to enshrine the Phra Atthi Dhatu (relics) of Luang Por Chah. Ajahn Attapemo explains:

It was all done quite beautifully stretching over seven days. Each day there were periods of meditation and Dhamma Talks. On the fourth day, quietly, the abbots from most of the 152 branch monasteries gathered to take the majority of the relics up to the chedi built for the cremation last year. A chamber had been made inside, into which three reliquaries were placed. To add to the blessing gold necklaces, bracelets and rings were draped over the reliquaries. Some ladies were even taking their rings off their fingers to be enshrined for posterity. Later that day this chamber was sealed with a concrete lid and granite cap-stone.

More than 30,000 people had gathered for the occasion

The final ceremony took place on the 16th January exactly two years since Luang Por Chah's death.

His Majesty King Bhumiphol, sent his Chief Privy Officer to lead the ceremony, and sent a royal invitation to Somdet Buddhajahn to give a desana. A bronze and glass stupa nine feet high had been made for the relics, and the Chief Privy Officer took a crystal platter with thirty selected pieces of the relics and placed this into the glass section of the stupa. Somdet Buddhajahn and twenty other important monks invited to honour the occasion led the chanting of 'Jayanto' along with 1200 more monks sitting inside and around the chedi. Outside around the chedi more than 30,000 people had gathered for the occasion.

Along with the relics are the ashes. These were equally divided among the 152 branch monasteries, including a



The King of Thailand anointing Ajahn Chah's body.

small packet for every monk and nun.

Also on that day, Ajahn Liam was
officially appointed as Abbot of Wat
Pah Pong.



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Nourishing the Roots:

- **Touching the Earth - Ajahn Sucitto**
- **The Four-Fold Assembly - Ajahn Amaro**

Finding the right balance between activity and rest is as much of a challenge in the monastery as in the outside world. In the following two articles, Ajahn Sucitto and Ajahn Amaro report on how the communities at Cittaviveka and Amaravati have responded to the changing nature of their situation.

Touching the Earth

Each Christmas Eve at Cittaviveka we try to have a Children's Party. This year, Sister Thanasanti hit upon the idea of using the occasion to gather young families together and involve them in making food offerings to the creatures - birds, badgers, rabbits and mice mainly - who live in the grounds around the main house. So after the offerings had been elaborately prepared into floral mandala patterns, and the stories had been told, and the sounds of the chanting died away, a whole group of monks, nuns, adults, and children made their way out by candlelight to the standing Buddha by the sima. There we offered food to the wildlife and incense to the Buddha. It was a gesture of paying something back.

Cittaviveka arose in 1979 from the wish of the Sangha to establish a forest monastery, and the donation of a forest that was sorely in need of care and attention. While the Sangha were under no obligation to undertake any forestry work, the very nature of the environment illicitly a sense of empathy with the natural surroundings, and the wish to protect the habitat - even to give back to the earth some of the richness that humans have relentlessly stripped from it. Apart from the obvious steps of banning the killing of wildlife in the forest, we have channelled whatever energy and resources are available, under the guidance of our Warden (Mike Holmes), into re-planting native trees and establishing wildlife habitat.

It has also become more apparent over the past few-years how helpful it is to establish a 'contemplative habitat' in the form of kutis in the woods for monks and nuns, not only from this monastery but also from Amaravati - which is only a couple of hours' drive away. This now is quite a priority, and we intend to build two more kutis this year. It helps people to get back to the earth, to reassess the fundamentals and aspirations of their practice and to calm down - just by living with the unhurried and even rhythms of nature. With Nature, everything - birth, growth, degeneration and decay - is just as it is, and in that holistic sense, everything is all right.

When I returned to Chithurst in June of 1992, a few things struck me about the place. I'd been one of the original residents of Chithurst Forest Monastery (as it was then called) in 1979, and seen the community grow and pulse under the energy that gets aroused when there's a cause that requires a lot of easily-definable hard work to do. A lot of the work was simple manual labour which did not require much skill. Everyone could feel that they were offering something useful; so it was buoyant. We rode on that energy for a while; then Harnham began in a similar vein, and when Amaravati was born, some of us went off with Ajahn Sumedho to start the whole process again. However, as the tasks got more refined and cerebral, not everyone could fit them, and people got left out; others just got tired. At times like these, the sense of community tends to fade. So, on arriving here with the label 'abbot' planted on me, I wondered whether that sense of being able to make one's offerings could continue to give a community its 'body'. We needed to find a new growth point or approach to establish the sense of community. As is always the case, that point has to be established as much within one's own mind as in the world outside. So I have been trying to get a more accurate feeling for what my own offering is to the Sangha, rather than trying to make it all go 'my way', or dutifully working myself into the ground. I look at the 'earth-touching' Buddha on our main shrine and wonder: how do you touch this human earth responsively, without getting buried in it?

Constructing the stupa has become an example of how light but powerful the sense of purpose in the Holy Life can be.

It's not difficult to respond to Cittaviveka. The beauty of the natural environment is easy to care for. The house is a tribute to mindful attention and brings up a similar response. Then one notices the simple small sima, ridiculously sited in the open-air as if to defy those of little faith in English weather. Here, for twelve years now, Ajahn Sumedho has presided over the ceremony that gives men the bhikkhu ordination. In this monastery various Ajahns have given their time and their listening ears to newly-ordained monks. There are a lot of Sangha roots here. Venerable Ajahn Chah visited this place and gave it his blessing; Mahasi Sayadaw visited, as did Taung Pulu Sayadaw; Ven Anandamaitreyya established the sima: the list goes on -there's a lot to be grateful for. From that recognition comes the wish to put something back into the ground that the Sangha has arisen from.

One of the ways that we have been continuing to put things back into the place is by planting more trees (about five hundred so far) around the main site. This should provide more habitat - for wildlife and meditators. As the meditation hall is quite small, the easiest solution to overcrowding is to leave it and sit outside: an attractive

prospect on warm summer evenings. To establish another place for meditation, recollection and devotional pujas, we have also begun erecting a stupa in memory of Luang Por Chah within a grove of oak trees. Named the 'Bodhinyana Cetiya' after him, it is a replica of the stupa at Wat Pah Pong.

Using whatever volunteer labour that has been offered, the project has developed slowly. One of the junior monks has helped to co-ordinate a group of supporters to design a series of moulds, and have the form cast in re-constituted stone. A local builder has offered his services throughout the project. A Lay supporter has carved mouldings of gateways and images in the traditional style. An English naturalist has supervised the landscaping of the site, and the nuns have planted wild grass and heather around the grove. People have offered relics, Bodhi leaves, stones, and personal memorabilia to be enshrined in the stupa. The community has offered pujas on the Full and New moons, come rain and howling wind or (rarely) still moonlight. Now, we are thinking that it is feasible to begin the dedication of the stupa on Wesak day (24th May) and conclude by inserting some ashes from Luang Por Chah's cremation on 17th June (his birthday), to which all would be welcome (see Grapevine).

The main point in all this may be in providing an opportunity for a very wholesome energy: not one that entails working to deadlines, or proving that one is 'pulling one's weight'. Constructing the stupa has become an example of how light but powerful the sense of purpose in the Holy Life can be. It certainly doesn't always feel that light to me. The mind clutches at the future and makes it tense. As the abbot of a monastery, it is easy to feel over-burdened and subject to odd projection. Yet throughout this, I recognise how much I receive in terms of other people's trust and the opportunity to practice. What becomes evident is the need to trust oneself, and put aside the notions of getting it 'right' all the time! Touching lightly is surely the right touch, the natural touch in which praise, blame, crises, retreats, progress, delays, ordinations and disroblings are just 'as it is' and holistically 'all right'. To practise that touch is all this life in Dhamma really asks of us.

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The Four-Fold Assembly

■ Touching the Earth - Ajahn Sucitto

Over the course of the last few years, and during last year in particular, the subject has come up of providing a more formalised and supportive training system for committed lay Buddhists. The Teaching has been well established in this country for quite some time now and many lay folk have been practising in a consistent way for ten or fifteen or more years - often considerably longer than the junior nuns and monks.

There is maturity in the community, together with great capability; however, many people have felt, because of being 'only a lay Buddhist', that they lack structures for living that match their commitment to the Path. Also, and perhaps more importantly, by not being a monastic, and thereby a 'professional', many have felt unqualified or unauthorised to guide others spiritually or take on any role of teaching about Buddhism - despite the fact that one might actually have a great deal to offer.

Another situation, somewhat different in nature but evolving in parallel, has been the increasingly obvious need for committed, hands-on help with the administration and running of Amaravati. Curiously enough, despite being the largest of the four monasteries of this community in Britain, it has never developed a circle of local 'helpers.' This has meant that all the duties of maintenance, care and administration have devolved to the resident community. This has been workable to a degree but it has placed a continual strain on the monastic community - thus consistently rendering Amaravati, in the eyes of many, as the least desirable monastery to live in.

It does not need to be this way. The most obvious way of making a difference was to find out who in our wider community would like to help, to organise those people into a well-structured group, and to define areas of work where their skills could best be employed. These two strands of need, when woven together, gave rise to the idea of including a 'lay-people's day' at Amaravati during the week of meetings around Magha Puja this year. After the idea was originally conceived in the summer, it evolved and grew in scope. As the months went by, it became more and more clear that these were not just ideas and matters concerning only a handful of people around Amaravati - this is a nationwide (if not world-wide) community, and these questions of the best methods of mutual support concern us all. It also became apparent that, since a large gathering had never yet been convened centering around the lay community, it was high time that one should happen.

By the time the event hatched, on 5th March, the original list of thirty-five participants had expanded to one hundred and eight. Owing to limitations of space (the Retreat Centre shrine-room), it was not possible to invite or accommodate all those who would have liked to have come. It was painful to not be able to include everyone - especially since many who weren't there would have had valuable contributions to make. However, it was made clear to those present that they should take it upon themselves to disseminate the substance of the meetings to their friends, and, secondly, that this was only the first of many such gatherings, and that all those interested would have the opportunity to participate in the future.



On the day over ninety-five lay people and a dozen monastics, representing different branch monasteries and regional groups, met to explore these and other dimensions of lay practice and the relationship between ordained

and lay Sangha - the 'Four-fold Assembly'. The day began with the taking of refuges and precepts, followed by the welcoming and introductory remarks of Sister Sundara, Medhina Fright and myself. After dividing into small groups of eight or nine, the participants spent the next hour-and-a-half examining the joys and difficulties of practice in lay life. Guided by a facilitator, each group exchanged thoughts and experiences on some suggested topics:

Sila: Are the standards clear? How should they be applied? How far is renunciation appropriate in lay life? Is there a case for another level of training/self-discipline?

Meditation: How formal or informal? What is the relationship between and value of practising styles of meditation from different traditions? What are the values of a daily routine and how do we deal with limited time?

Action: How do we bring Dhamma into the sphere of action? What provision is there for Dhamma-based social facilities, such as education and care of the elderly? Are simplicity and creativity opposed to each other?

Study: Do we ignore the suttas at our peril? How well should we know other faiths and traditions?

Spiritual Friendship: What are the functions of a local Buddhist group? How can we help and learn from each other? Ways of getting in touch. How do we practise Dhamma in relationships, the family, at work and in the wider community? What difficulties arise in relationships with 'non-Buddhists'?

The steady hum of voices flowed from the small group sessions on into the Retreat Centre dining-room as ideas continued to be shared along with a pleasant potluck meal. The focus of the afternoon was introduced by Cohn Ash before the small groups, joined by either a monk or nun, dispersed to ponder the relationship between lay and monastic Sangha. The suggested topics for this session were:

- Why is the Sangha important to us - and vice versa? What form does our relationship with the Sangha now take? Is our focus on Dhamma-Vinaya or on individual monks and nuns? What are the benefits and dangers of relating to an individual member of the Sangha as our teacher? Are monastic rules, conventions and ceremonies a help or a hindrance to the lay-Sangha relationship? How far should the Sangha adapt to Western culture and traditions?
- Is commitment to the Triple Gem primary, and lifestyle - as a lay-person or monastic - secondary? To what extent are lay and monastic forms of practice really different?
- What more might lay people and the Sangha do to support each other? Might lay-people take on more of the day-to-day work at the monasteries? Could there be more of a teaching role for lay-people? Should the Sangha offer more pastoral care? More teaching - or less?
- What expectations do we have of the Sangha, and what expectations does the Sangha have of us?
- Would you welcome the possibility of a closer, more committed and structured connection with the Sangha, as is found in other Buddhist and Christian traditions?

Key points were again collected on poster paper by each group and then mounted on the wall of the shrine room for the plenary session. As could be expected, many fine ideas emerged that were both varied and echoing of each other. These ideas are being collated, and it is hoped that a summary will appear in the next Newsletter, along with some other possibilities for future meetings of a similar kind. There was much agreement on the value of spending a day considering these questions as well as appreciation of the richness provided by contact with like-minded people. It felt true indeed that '... seeking companionship with the wise... this is the greatest blessing.'

Other immediate and practical outcomes of the gathering were that, firstly, about thirty people from all round the country expressed interest in being part of discussions about the formation of a more formalised and committed training structure for lay Buddhists of this tradition; secondly, some twenty people put their names forward as being interested in forming a 'support group' for Amaravati.

Meetings have been arranged at all of the branch monasteries over the next two months to discuss the first of these questions. A circular letter was sent out to all those interested containing a possible outline for the structure of such a form. It was stressed, however, that the suggestion was simply offered as a pattern that would seem suitable from the monastic point of view. The formation of such a system will need to be a communal effort of both the lay and monastic communities and it is to be hoped that we will have many fruitful meetings over the coming year.

We should like to suggest:

- The name of the form could be 'The Upasaka Training.'
- There could be a formal ceremony of commitment to the training.
- There could be a member of the Sangha at each monastery with responsibility for all of those in the vicinity committed to the training. They would be available for counselling/instructing/liasing and co-ordinating events specifically for the Upasakas.

Those who have committed themselves to the training could:

- Undertake to live by the Five Precepts, attending regular gatherings with other Upasakas, either at the Vihara or in their own homes.
- Visit the Vihara and formally take the Precepts at least quarterly.
- Observe the Uposatha days of the full and new moons in some fashion appropriate to their living situation.
- Practise meditation daily.
- Find some time each year to go on retreat.
- Attend at least one festival day or communal gathering at the monastery each year.
- Keep to the training for at least one year after having made the formal commitment.

Anyone who would like to contribute to these discussions or offer any feedback on these proposals should contact me here at Amaravati or contact their local monastery - the first meetings are being held on the following days:

- Devon - 27th March
- Amaravati - 30th April

Harnham - 7th May

- Cittaviveka - 22nd May

Those who are interested in offering their skills and time to help out with Amaravati's needs, Please contact: Ajahn Attapemo at Amaravati.



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Turning the Wheel in the West

In the last of a series of interviews, Ajahn Amaro gives his concluding impressions on the Dharamsala conference.

Question: Was there general agreement on the doctrine within all the differences of the traditions?

Answer: There were no doctrinal differences at all. But there were differences of interpretation on the ethical values. Some people have different interpretations of the third and the fifth Precepts - there were a variety of renderings - 'What the Buddha really meant of course is that you shouldn't get drunk, rather than total abstinence.' When this was brought up His Holiness mentioned that in the Tibetan tradition the limit is set as not more alcohol than will sit on the tip of a blade of kusa grass (i.e. not very much!). Everyone agreed that keeping the Five Precepts was a standard that anyone who is teaching the Buddha-Dhamma should adhere to as a minimum requirement. If you can't keep the Five Precepts what kind of a Buddhist are you really?

We don't behold Buddha as a God - the practice is around one's own psyche. It's not externalised.

Q: Did you find that there's always been an understanding between the people who are practising but that the arguments and debates are more by scholars and academics?

A: Yes. The more you meditate the less these differences can have any real substance. The delegates were all meditation teachers - meditation is the basis of their Buddhist practice. So the natural result is that they were far less likely to hold on blindly to views. It was very encouraging to see that if you don't just talk about Dhamma but actually do it then the conflicts resolve themselves.

Q: The other thing which comes to mind is the question of how Westerners practise with devotion and faith.

A: It wasn't discussed very much. I think that devotion takes different forms, one of these being commitment to what you're doing. We don't behold Buddha as a God - the practice is around one's own psyche. It's not externalised. There was some discussion of moving away from the position of regarding the teacher as a guru - and training yourself to see instead. For Westerners I think there's a long road ahead before we hit the point where we just see an

image of the Buddha and tears come to our eyes. If there is a reaction to a Buddha image it usually has more to do with the aesthetics of it. I think our devotion is demonstrated in the amount of dedication and will that you exert in giving yourself to what you're doing.

Q: At the end of this Conference what discussions were there on how understanding and cooperation could be developed?

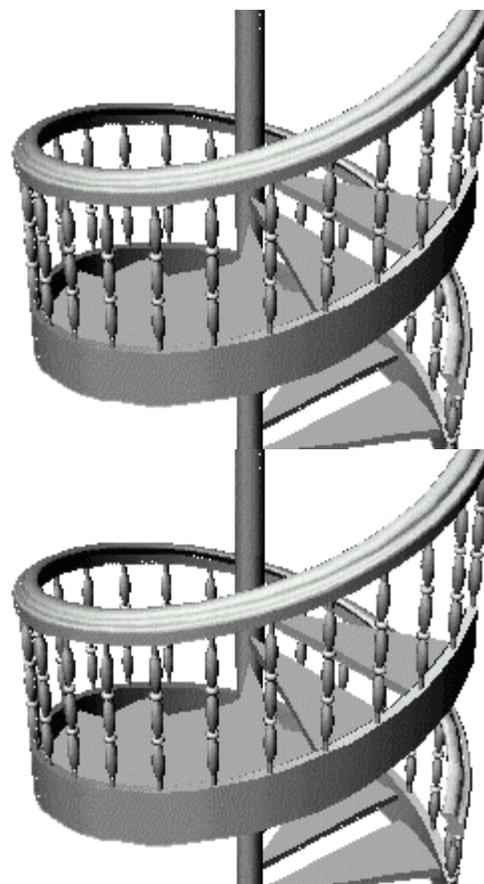
A: Many were extremely enthusiastic about the results of the conference and had high hopes that it would not be an isolated event. Many of these people had come from an anti-institutional background but inexorably, amidst some cries of despair, the group moved towards formulating itself as an organisation. The name 'The Network for Western Buddhists Teachers' was chosen. Various people undertook to help organise similar events in America. They would like to have a conference with either His Holiness - who is very keen to do it again - or someone of similar stature, every year, or at least every other year. There were also ideas about smaller local conferences amongst teachers including a wider field of people. There were thoughts of having a Newsletter once or twice a year just to update people on the various meetings and what's in the air! An immediate result of the Conference was that about ten people undertook to write articles either for their own journals or other Buddhist, New Age and local magazines, as well as some in-house journals such as our own Newsletter. They are also planning to produce a small booklet and then a full-length book about the Conference.

There were also undertakings to help His Holiness set up a training programme for Tibetan Lamas to go to the West, and to offer guidance and help in setting up a nunnery for Western women. There was talk of having a four or five-day Retreat together instead of a conference. So I volunteered Amaravati as a venue.

Q: Could you sum up what you think the historical significance of this meeting is?

A: I'm not saying that it was wrinkle-free - I had unpleasant moments, as I'm sure many others did. However, despite the extremes of viewpoints - between the FWBO, ourselves, and the Zen tradition, for example, and the range of characters and orientations, it was incredibly civilised. I wouldn't equate it with the level of a Great Council but it was certainly significant how harmonious it was. So, on that level I think it was a wonderful sign for the global Buddhist community. As Buddhism gradually reformulates itself out of the cultural trappings of its countries of origin, it bodes well that we met in this way. In centuries to come they may find it hard to believe that we were all able to speak to each other and get along. Right now

Perspective



the prospect is very healthy. With the general turbulence of the world, and the difficulties of holding on to monastic precepts and sustaining a commitment to the Triple Gem, it is always going to take a lot of work to hold everything together, but there was an example here of tremendous cohesiveness and energy. Who knows where it will lead to? The last words of the Dalai Lama at the conference: 'The past is the past. The future is ours. We must make every effort. But if we fail ... it doesn't matter.' There's all this potential for goodness and you can work like crazy to bring it about and make it happen, but if you all get into a tidal wave - LET GO!

Q: How did this experience affect you in terms of your monastic life?

A: It's both deepened my commitment to living as a monk and my appreciation of all the other ways that you can do it. I certainly didn't feel envious of what anybody else had got, but I didn't feel that they were getting it wrong either.



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EDITORIAL

Alone Together

Magha Puja, generally occurring on the full moon of February, is an occasion for gathering. Around that time we have the yearly Sangha meeting in commemoration of the day when 1250 arahants spontaneously came together to see the Buddha in the Bamboo Grove at Rajgir. There he gave this diverse group a synopsis of the teaching that would be universally and timelessly relevant: 'To refrain from all unwholesomeness, to rise up to whatever is wholesome, and to purify the mind: this is the teaching of the Buddhas.' This is the rightly called the Ovada Patimokkha - "the exhortation on what links us together." The process of purifying the mind can make one feel very alone against powerful forces, so an opportunity to re-establish links with other samanasa and lay disciples is indeed welcome. Accordingly, monks, nuns and lay disciples from all our viharas in Europe spent the week after the Magha Puja at Amaravati discussing smaller and greater aspects of our principles and practice.

When the principles that we hold in common form a collection of interrelating images and archetypes, we can rightly call this a myth. Myths are not just interesting stories; they represent a truth about values. Myth has the power to carry principles into a culture - as Christianity has done with its images of self-sacrifice, love and faith - and thereby create both a source of reflection for the individual and a common ground of values for the society. The modern world is so out of touch with lasting values that 'myth' nowadays usually means something that isn't true(!). The only images that are held in that personally-transcending way are of sports heroes and rock stars: images that, at best, represent principles of egocentric glory. We are sorely in need of a renewal of the religious myth that connects us to something benevolent and wise.

There are times when all we can hold onto are symbols
that go beyond words.

In some parts of Asia, Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha still shine brightly in people's minds, but in the West the Triple Gem is barely established as a meaningful archetype. Although people may hold the values of wisdom, truth and skilful practice dear, they can feel ill at ease with the images of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha; this may be the case, despite being committed to the values that they represent. It may be a collective mistrust derived from the use of religious symbols to establish conformity at the expense of intelligence; as a result, Buddhism here attracts inquiring minds rather than devoted hearts. Unfortunately, inquiry alone doesn't have the quality to link people together.

However, sometimes it is when you are on your own that such images can be personally contacted and enriched by the practice. For a Buddhist this is the way it should be; after all, the ground of the practice is that 'aloneness' of the mind that the Buddha praised as viveka. This aloneness is often established in physical solitude (kayaviveka), but more meaningfully becomes the withdrawal of the mind from defilement (cittaviveka), and may reach the

realisation of freedom from the mind's self-forming tendencies (upadhiviveka). In this sequence, we see the way of correct cultivation - first to dispel the hindrances and then to understand and relinquish the self-forming tendencies. For both of these cultivations, religious images that represent the practice can be supportive. The details of techniques and skilful means vary between individuals, and, if attached to as 'the only way', can become sources of egotism and contention. There are times when all we can hold onto are symbols that go beyond words. And this can be the case in our daily lives, especially in relationship to others.

Harmony - internal as well as in the social sense - only arises with a valid myth, and it seems that for Western Buddhists at least, that comes about most readily through the 'aleness' of meditation. Here we encounter Buddha - the peaceful knowing that is based on wholesomeness; Dhamma - the law of change and ownerlessness which all moods and events follow; and Sangha - the human endeavour that establishes its own resolve, because it brings results.

Perhaps the easiest image to relate to externally for people wary of larger-than-life images of a supreme (male) being and reticent about any kind of spiritual law other than 'find out for yourself' is that of the Sangha. Here is the myth of community, of mutual acceptance and welcome that the monastics try to live up to. Even if they offered no other teaching or practice, monasteries and Sangha occasions are worth attending just to re-establish that image in the heart. When those values can be established internally - the myth comes alive. If people can relate to Sangha in the way of living myth, our scattered Buddhist community - twos and threes here and there in places as 'un-Buddhist' as Prestatyn or Palermo - can gather around these images wherever. In terms of outward appearance, Sangha gatherings are few and far between in an average year; however, if we lift up the Triple Gem in our own lives, the occasion for inner harmony and purpose is right here.

Ajahn Sucitto

**The soft sound
of Spring rain
surrounds me.**

**Returning
with joyful abandon
to the Mother.**

To be like spring rain.

Rachael.

Sangha Movements

Some Sangha members will be missing from the U.K. for greater and shorter periods of time this year:

Ajahn Vajiro has left Cittaviveka in order to take up residency as the Senior Incumbent of Bodhinyanarama Monastery, New Zealand. Ajahn Munindo (February to April) and Ajahn Santacttto (April to July) are acting as 'caretaker' abbots at Wat Pah Nanachat while Ajahn Pasanno has a break Venerable Kovido is on pilgrimage in India for six months or so from January. Venerable Sobhano is undertaking a sponsored walk from Mount Athos to Romania, via the troubled regions of Macedonia and Serbia in the first half of the year, and Venerable Mahesi will be on Tudong in Italy until the Vassa. Meanwhile Ajahn Viradhammo will be returning to the U.K. after ten years in New Zealand. He has been invited to take up residence at Amaravati.

Bodhinyana Cetiya

The stupa that is being erected at Cittaviveka in memory of Luang Pot Chah will be dedicated on 17th June, Luang Por's birthday. Between Wesak and 17th June the community at Chithurst will be undertaking a daily meditation and puja by the stupa as part of the dedication. All are welcome to join.

Bhikkhu Ordination

This year's bhikkhu ordination will take place at Cittaviveka monastery on Saturday, 16th July. This year we are also celebrating Luang Par Sumedho's birthday at Cittaviveka on this day, to enable the Sangha to gather before the Vassa begins. He will have reached the milestone of sixty years

