



FOREST SANGHA newsletter

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Number 2

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Settling in at Stokes Valley

The following letter comes from Ajahn Viradhammo, who was asked to establish a forest monastery in New Zealand in 1984. He's been there with Venerable Thanavaro for three years; recently they were joined by Venerable Bodhinando. This Vassa has been their first in the monastery that they have been building in Stokes Valley, near Wellington.

Greetings good friends in the Dhamma,

It is the middle of June, and the weather for the past week, since my return from Thailand has been magnificent -- bright and sunny during the days with temperatures in the mid 50's, and nights that have been clear and cold with temperatures just above freezing. Venerable Thanavaro, Venerable Bodhinando and Anagarika Peter are working on our fourth kuti, about 200 metres up the hill from where I am presently sitting. About an hour ago, I almost knocked Anagarika Tony Bell (from Northumberland) off a ladder, as I opened the door to a room he is wallpapering. He is working in the main building, which is about 100 metres down the hill from where I am presently writing this article. Bodhinyanarama is all up or down, which gives us a strong incentive not to forget things here and there.

It has been over two years since Venerable Thanavaro and I left the UK for New Zealand, to help with the establishment of a forest monastery here in Stokes Valley. Much good work has been done during this time, both on the personal level of individual practice, and on the communal level of Sangha, laity and the monastery construction. All the facilities that are needed for training bhikkhus in Dhamma-Vinaya are now available, and this coming Vassa will be our first chance to set up a "Rains Retreat" schedule, similar to that of more established monasteries in the U.K. and Thailand. Both Venerable Thanavaro and I make regular visits to Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North and Wellington, to offer Dhamma instruction to Buddhist groups centred in those cities. Our original sponsoring committees in both Wellington and Auckland continue to be very generous and supportive, and as winter approaches (it never snows in Stokes Valley), our cloth cupboard has filled up with woolly

socks. The diligent members of our association have organised a roster for our mid-day meals, so that the anagarikas need not do any cooking and can either participate fully in monastic retreats, or concentrate on the building work that is so vital to this new monastery.

This interdependent relationship between the monastic and lay communities is being introduced into New Zealand.

Local Community

Our contact with the community at large is still very limited, but has been growing steadily. Stokes Valley is a quiet suburb, about 30 minutes drive from the City of Wellington. It has a population of about 11,000, among whom only 10% would attend one of the five churches in the valley. We are on the upper edge of this suburb and beyond our property, the valley continues to slope steeply upwards to a high ridge easily visible from the monastery. On three sides neighbouring our property one looks onto the lush green of native bush, interspersed with tall pine trees. On the fourth side, spread below the monastery, is the town of Stokes Valley where we go for our alms round. The people of this quiet suburb are proud of their valley, and there is a sense of community among them. For instance, I have heard it said that families wishing to sell their homes, because of changing personal needs, often choose to move within the valley rather than out of the valley. We have had a chance to enter into this sense of community through such groups as the Lions and Rotary Clubs who have invited us as guest speakers, and also through the Association of Christian Ministers who have very graciously invited us into the valley and wished us well. One of our lay friends, who lives locally, was saying last night that she has some claim to fame among her neighbours, because she goes to the monastery to meditate. People say to her, "you've been up there?!" in somewhat envious and amazed tones. Many people are curious, but most people are shy. It appears that in time, our monastery and the Buddhist relationship between the Sangha and laity will be accepted into the life of Stokes Valley, and that we in our turn should be able to make a wholesome contribution to the well-being of these friendly people.

Thinking back over the events of the past years, one feels that much has been learned, and that the establishment of a branch monastery is in itself an art form. But it is not just a monastery that is being founded. Rather, it is a particular social structure that is taking root in this fresh soil. In a Buddhist country such as Thailand, one can take the cultural milieu for granted, because the establishment of a monastery is relatively straight forward. In Thailand, I have never been mistaken for Gandhi, Krishna or a skin-head, and most people understand how a bhikkhu functions in society. Any wrong views, concerning the monk and his connection with the laity, that have arisen over the ages because of superstition or corruption, can be corrected because the sincere and honest bhikkhu still has a lot of authority in the society. But outside of traditional Buddhist cultures, the bhikkhu and



his position in society is unknown. It should be remembered that the bhikkhu is not a hermit, but because of his dependence on the laity for the basic requisites of life, he is very much a part of a larger social structure. It is this interdependent relationship between the monastic and lay communities that is being introduced into New Zealand.

Broadening the Scope

With the example and hard work of our Thai, Burmese, Sri Lankan and Lao supporters, those of our friends who are not from Buddhist backgrounds are beginning to understand the form and structure of this ancient tradition and, in turn, are finding their own place within this wonderful form. As people begin to hear of our presence, Bodhinyanarama is becoming the physical focus for a broader association of like-minded beings. From these small beginnings, one can see how profound changes in society are in fact possible -- changes which are based on our individual practice of the Buddha's teaching, and our collective efforts to give what we can to the health and sanity of our social environment.

Best wishes from all of us here at Bodhinyanarama to Sangha and friends in the U.K.
With metta,
Bhikkhu Viradhammo



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Roots of the Forest

Ajahn Sucitto continues his introduction to the forest monasteries of the Isan.

My introduction to the forest monasteries was at night. We had landed at Ubon early in the evening, been driven to Wat Pah Pong to pay respects to Luang Por Chah and then taken back to Wat Pah Nanachat, the monastery specifically established for Western bhikkhus. Having trained so long in the West with these monasteries' way of practice presented as the constant standard, I found myself entering them with a tingling expectation, a mixture of eagerness, awe and uncertainty. What austerities, what challenges lay ahead. I should have known better.

Anyway, I was not prepared for night in the forest. It is black. Faintly glimmering sandy trails wander off into the darkness to the huts scattered in the forest, and you try to follow one with a torch. Of course, the old-timers will tell you of the days before torches and trails, when bhikkhus proceeded through the forest with no other guidance than the Karaniya Metta Sutta, but the hazards haven't changed. There are still plenty of snakes about; and large aggressive centipedes can deliver a painful nip that will have you laid up for a while. More frequently encountered are dangling vines and newly-spun spiders' webs, or the roots that jut up through the sand like the knuckles of some malevolent troll for the unsuspecting tenderfoot to mash their toes upon. So you walk attentively focussed on a beam of light. My bhikkhu guide took me past a few simple huts (or kutis) to a newer one at the edge of the monastery, unlocked its padlocked door, pushed back the wooden shutters, and with a few remarks padded off into the night.

Darkness has already swallowed up the familiar, and
 the long mysterious night invites you to meditate.

Wat Pah Nanachat

Wat Pah Nanachat's kutis are quite simple. They are all a plank construction with large roofs to provide shade and a good run-off for water in the Rains. They stand on legs, to elevate one from the path of forest pigs and out of the densest flying zone of the mosquitoes; while with the more lofty kutis the space underneath is a cooler place for sitting than inside. The furnishings are a rush mat, a candle or oil-lamp and matches, a pillow for the head, and a rope to hang one's robes upon; the accoutrements are a spitoon and a kettle, a soft broom for sweeping the room, and a coarse one for sweeping the paths. It's all you need; nothing to distract the mind, and not much to have to look after. As soon as you enter such a dwelling, you want to sit and meditate for a while -- especially when the cool night is mosquito-free and the ghosts are quiet.

Having been advised to come to the sala at dawn, I had the pleasure of a private sitting early in the morning. Trying to find the sala in the half-light via the unfamiliar trails was a minor

challenge, but after some fumbling around, the navigational aids established themselves in my mind -- the trailing vine here; the large water urn there; a derelict kuti visible through the trees; a fork in the path. Light comes around 5 a.m. and daily routines establish another set of norms: the morning puja in the sala, announced by the bell at 3 a.m.; walking or sitting meditation until 5:30; the morning sweep-up; the alms round (pindabaht); the meal; the afternoon chores; the evening bath and drink; and the evening puja. Then people leave the sala for their kutis. Darkness has already swallowed up the familiar, and the long mysterious night invites you to meditate.

The daily routine in a monastery, East or West, provides reference points on how to cooperate and enter a non-verbal communion with the Sangha. People who can't adapt get disgruntled and leave monasteries where they find the routine doesn't fit their style of practice -- a surprising reaction for someone familiar with the difficulties of practice outside of a meditation monastery, but indicative of the human mind's remarkable endeavours to find fault with the way things are. Actually you have a lot of space to contemplate how much rest you need, how you spend your time, and what kind of effort you sustain through unexciting days. The Ajahns vary the routines to encourage a clearer view of where suffering actually is. Sometimes there's more work, sometimes more group meditation, sometimes not much of anything. If you get the point, you see that dukkha follows its own routines. But Ajahn Sumedho and I didn't settle into anything at Nanachat; on the first day we went along with the routine to the point where the Sangha paid their daily visit to Ajahn Chah's kuti, and then we moved over to Wat Pah Pong.

Wat Pah Pong

After visiting Luang Por again -- whose kuti is outside the wall that bounds the original monastery -- we entered the monastery proper over a side wall. The elements were the same: A couple of bhikkhus guiding us; darkness gathering and hastening our paces; and attention fixed on the ground ahead. An astute lodgings officer had given me a kuti very close to the sala, with mosquito screens and its own bathing facility underneath. Well, such a luxury at Wat Pah Pong was a surprise. Furthermore, an evening drink was being served in the long dining hall adjoining the sala. Of course, as anyone will tell you, it's not like the old days when Luang Por gently remonstrated with a lay devotee who brought ice to the monastery, that such a luxury might spoil the monks. The day when coffee first came to Pah Pong is a noted historical event, and even now the choice of drinks in the poorer branches can be rain-water or well-water. Things change. I went over to the dining hall and, surveying the long wooden benches that ran down either side of the building, sat myself in a position that I hoped was not too presumptuous.



But the evening drink is an informal occasion-- "Tam sabai!" (relax) is the phrase that indicates that it's not necessary to wear the upper robe or sit in a formal posture. Huge kettles floated down the line of monks; with tiny novices attached to the handles; and in their wake enamelled dishes with 'medicines' -- the bitter laxative fruits of the North-East. It is a quiet time, and unlike British 'tea-time', there's no tradition of lay people attending for an informal

chat. Where the long informal conversations take place is traditionally in or under the Ajahn's kuti, or nowadays in a sala outside of the monastery proper where Ajahn Liam receives guests. We went there after tea. There was a lot of gentle humour between Ajahn Liam and Ajahn Sumedho; but I missed out on everything except Ajahn Liam's quiet conviviality and the sharpness of his mind.

Living Images

Ajahn Liam's been in charge of Wat Pah Pong for five or six years now, at least to the extent that anyone could be in charge of the myths, mystique and devotional energies that surround Pah Pong and Ajahn Chah. Luang Por is a constant reference point as the standard for correct practice throughout 80 monasteries and thousands of lay people. Luang Por still oversees the monastery through the many images that gaze at the visitor and the resident with unwavering eye. A portrait (a reproduction of the painting at Chithurst) presides at the head of the line in the dining hall, and another stands opposite a portrait of Ajahn Mun in the sala. There his seat, with kettle and spittoon beside it still occupies the central place before the shrine. It's not just a cult, but a sign of the continuity of the tradition, and the respect for the Master as an embodiment of the practice. Meanwhile Ajahn Liam guides the Sangha and adds his own insights to the storehouse of the Dhamma-Vinaya that supports the holy life.

It's not like the old days, but Wat Pah Pong doesn't pretend to be; it manifests constant change. A morning wandering around the monastery verifies that. At one end of the dining hall is a small unused building that was the original meeting place for the small group of bhikkus with Ajahn Chah in the early days. Some way off to the side is the mango tree where Ajahn Chah first placed his mosquito net umbrella on arriving in this haunted forest 33 years ago. Now a tiger, symbol of the tudong bhikkhu, pauses there, turned into concrete, wide-eyed and harmless. A dozen metres away, another image sums up the development: it is an effigy of Luang Por rendered in flawless detail, sitting underneath the kuti where he received guests during the prime of his teaching career. It's less awesome than the Master in past or present condition, yet close enough to still convey the comforting presence of a wise man. In between these two images is a condensed history of Wat Pah Pong: the primitive old kutis; an array of ancient sima stones from the Cambodian border; and the new Uposatha Hall. Stylistically, this building is an innovation -- with its pointed upswept arched roofs hanging over a polished marble floor, the only connection it made in my mind is with the Sydney Opera House. Luang Por visited it for a couple of years before his decline. Now terrecotta murals depicting scenes from his his life hang on the walls; and at the feet of a standing Buddha, a bronze figure of the Master gazes out towards the dining hall, the new sala (the first cement building in the monastery) and the still unfinished three-storey building at the very entrance to the monastery. This will be the Ajahn Chah museum.

Heart-practice

It has become customary to erect these pipitapahn to contain the relics, the biographies and the books, and the sparse personal effects of forest masters when they die. Inside this one, more terracotta murals of Luang Por's life tower over the emptiness. So this is the latest phase: Wat Pah Pong as a pilgrimage centre. The critical faculties can mutter that such extravagance contradicts the exemplary austerity of the Master himself, but the heart knows that these are tokens of the faith and the love that sustains a spiritual tradition. One should approach such places from the heart, not with the memory or the eye. Looking backwards or looking outwards, the mind is overstimulated. Images and perceptions collide: USAF fuel tanks (now water reservoirs) from the Vietnam era; Dhamma poems hanging off the trees; the main gate, a replica of the the Oaken Holt gate that impressed Luang Por when he visited Britain; a bell tower festooned with graceful Thai temple plasterwork; rickety kutis; and looking up at the

ultra-modern Uposatha Hall, a large blue pottery owl in the style of the Isan. Notions of the old and the new are obviously not to be clung to.

And then one notices the calm of the forest -- no wind to rattle the dead leaves; no voices where forty monks and novices, and as many nuns pass their days; in the afternoons the rhythmic rustle of the sweeping chore; in the evening the absorptive trill of the insects. You contemplate the trees that punctuate the mind's monologue with their ordinariness, their suchness, and you settle into practice.



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Letter from Chithurst

Part of a letter written by the Abbot, Ajahn Anando, to his mother in the United States.

July 5th was our annual ordination ceremony. We were very fortunate that for two weeks prior to the ceremony we were blessed with beautiful warm, sunny weather which offered us the opportunity to do all the things that one tends to procrastinate about but which need to be done in order to prepare the grounds for the ceremony. Everyone in the community worked with a feeling of purpose and willingness; it seemed we all realised the importance of the occasion, and that every effort added to the sense of celebration. I think the ordination ceremony can be seen in such a way -- there's a going forth, a dying in one sense, a dying of old habits and ways. Yet one is also being accepted, welcomed into a new situation in the community.

The grounds were looking so beautiful that I asked one of our neighbours and friends if I shouldn't enter the monastery in the "Better Monasteries and Gardens Competition". Laughingly she said, "Oh yes, please. I'm sure you'd be first".

This meditative life is so exquisite, it becomes glaringly obvious that to be of service is the *raison d'etre*.

About 200 people came for the ordination, friends and family of the newly ordained people. Even Venerable Anigho's parents came from New Zealand -- offered his robes and sat quietly during the ordination, watching this very ancient ritual of leaving behind the old and embracing something new.

The four recently ordained monks will be staying at Chithurst at least until the end of the year, and we will have an opportunity to go through the Vinaya -- the monastic rule -- in some detail, particularly now during the retreat season.

I am on retreat with half the community down at the cottage near the woods. This meditative life is so exquisite, it becomes glaringly obvious that to be of service is the *raison d'etre*, and the seemingly paradoxical aspect is that it brings such joy. Service, of course, doesn't necessarily mean being in the market place; although, as you know very well, there is a time and place and need for such activity. I suppose what I'm thinking about could be called "service of the heart", which is a quality of being which is open, accepting, available and giving. It is a turning away from selfseeking concerns to maintain the image or mask of *numero uno*.

I have been exploring the world of devotion and feelings, which are very much intertwined. The inspired mind can be a way to tap the fount of our spirituality, and flood the mindheart-body with feelings of blissful surrender to nothingness. We limit ourselves so miserably by

the unfortunate habit of grabbing hold of notions of self as the good, bad, right, wrong, jealous, loving, wonderful, terrible, sinful, pure one; spinning with manic speed and wondering, only briefly, why we feel dizzy -- our minds find no rest. It can be so hard to truly let go, for when it comes down to it we are faced with the awesome knowledge that we have to be a Buddha-Christ, to be utterly free. The heresy, if any, in not having the trust in one's innate goodness/wisdom to dare to simply be.

It would be delightful to have you visit. After years of serene elegance, Chithurst is once again a building site. We have taken down the main staircase because it has dry rot; something we knew since moving in. To see the main hall littered with broken plaster, scaffolding up to the ceiling, to smell the pungent stench of dry rot treatment fluid in the air, with power tools here and there, brings back nostalgic feelings of the good old days at Chithurst when long hours of heavy building work was the norm. Black, sweet tea for breakfast was the fuel and slumping through the evening meditation (if you were not still working) was the result.



It would indeed be wonderful to see you again. Please bring some work clothesI'm teasing. If you were coming, September would be a wonderful time. We have a project on which I refer to as the wildflower project and which Ajahn Munindo refers to as the weed project. However, it was started some time ago and the idea is to gradually reintroduce meadowland in the fields around Chithurst House. We began first by consulting with a long-time friend and supporter, Nick Scott, who, after some investigation, gave us a list of the types of flowers that would have grown in the fields at Chithurst prior to their being cultivated and modern grass seed sown. He suggested as a test that we plant out in seed trays 50,000 seeds, expecting that we would ' have 25% to 30% germination success rate. And at that time, one of the anagarikas, Viveka, was at Chithurst, and I asked her to take responsibility for the wildflower project which she very capably did. When I returned in April, after accompanying Ajahn Sumedho on his trip around the world, I found that we had a great many more flowers than expected. Instead of 25% to 30%, we had 90% and when I asked Viveka what she had done to be so successful, she smiled and said, "I chanted mantras as I was planting them out". Do you think we should let the local nursery know about this secret?

So we now have about 42,00 flowers to plant out in the south-facing field towards the South Downs. If you think any of the family would like to come with you to plant out the flowers, we could, of course happily accommodate all of you. . . .



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Tudong in the Lakes

Ajahn Sumedho, accompanied by Venerable Amaro and Nick Scott, went on a nine-day walk in the Lake District at the end of June this year. Here are some of Venerable Amaro's notes on the long wet hike:

Rock-hewn bridges, human constructions, enter disuse and pursue their cycle-of change. Now green fronds emerge from between the stones, ivy clammers and moss distends across the wall. This is not nature reclaiming but our participation, the human element in the flow of change. Layers of sandstone now are split, and swirling ferns appear. As yesterday, for a moment we were the Lune -- no river apart -- sediment formed upon our feet as wee, wee fishes explored our toes, planted in the cool running water. The inner and outer landscapes we contemplate: complexity and stability are twinned' in nature, and the stable heart is that which can accommodate all conditions in harmony.

"There is only one mind," as the Ajahn put it, "and it is the ultimate simplicity which contains all complexity."

A day of nature reserves and conservation areas bring these thoughts to mind; conservation being the sustenance of the great complexity for the blessing and benefit of all.

We arrived at Manjushri quite waterlogged. Nick is now busy masterminding the laundering of clothes -the tents are hanging, the Ajahn rests alone, and we are in the dry and protective embrace of thoughtful welcome.

As forest bhikkhus we were in our element, like woodland creatures, and we perched ourselves between the mossy rocks and spread the mats to take our meal.

Living with the Wet

Yesterday, as we headed down from Hutton Roof crags, we talked much of living with the wetness.

"You can see the entry of self," the Ajahn said: 'My sleeping-bag is wet, my socks and my robe', the worrying mind goes on. But then this is simply the way things are, and when that is seen then there is no suffering; water in a sleeping-bag, so what?"

We were on our way to meet Arthur and Brenda of the Preston group. There was persistent drizzle. On the way, I mentioned to Nick that it would be deeply appreciated if he would stop constantly underestimating our distances. His optimism would always trim about a third off all the miles and time he had to reckon, which made the journey seem longer and longer all

the time.

An hour and a half late again (this had become a daily occurrence), we met up and then drove to the Gaitbarrows Reserve. After a little search we found a yew-grotto and strung our tent up to make a silver awning. As forest bhikkhus we were in our element, like woodland creatures, and we perched ourselves between the mossy rocks and spread the mats to take our meal. Little was said. Amidst the offerings of shelter, food and medicine there passed good feeling and the strength of kind support. We were damp and chilled, and we faced another long trek that afternoon.

Arthur and Brenda remained unquelled and walked with us for the afternoon. We beat through the bushes of flawswaier Reserve, and rainsoaked, we arrived in Silvrprdale. There was a sad feeling brought on by the sight of narrow-minded human ways, as we passed through some estates and farms around there. Nick described it as the: 'If it isn't a sheep or a blade of grass, kill it' attitude. Disease-free pig-pens, dead moles on a fence, a field of bullocks who rushed across to see us, all these brought a feeling of frustration and incompleteness, of an unkindness put upon the earth.

Happiness is a Dry Blanket

We arrived at Silverdale station (an hour and a half late), and found a shelter on the platform there. There was a wondering moment, as we found that the next train across; the estuary left far too late for us to reach our campsite.

"I wonder what happens now?"

Nick disappeared to see if he could find the house of some of his friends, who lived somewhere in the village. It was a moment of suspense. Somehow, however, the wonderful can always be discovered, in the midst of any situation.

"A beautiful smell pervades your clothing", said Arthur, "juniper -- just like Tibetan incense." Nick reappeared with the broad grin of success, and we were invited into the home of the Clothier family . . . Four generations were gathered round a fire in their sitting room on this Sunday afternoon. We apologised for our invasion, and were presented in return with tea and warmth and commiserations about the rain. The rain!

After an hour or two, Arthur opted to drive us out to the edge of the reserve where we hoped to camp. I watched out of the windows of the car as we sped along -- the hike of light miles or so in this sheeting rain, hard work we would have had with it. And off we went to Roundsea Woods.



It was still raining when we reached the promontory, and found a spot to camp-beneath little oaks, Chinese and gnarly, low cloud and drizzle on the bay. It rained all night, but nonetheless we had to push to leave early. Everything the Ajahn and I had was waterlogged by now, so Nick shared out his last dry socks. We borrowed the veranda of an empty cottage as a shelter while we brewed some tea and dried our boots. Heaven was then a few dry feet in which to shake your tent out, a dry place to sit and watch the rain. A breeze-block public toilet became a palace for a while as we paused to adjust our gear and rest our packs.

These are the ways the mind instinctively reacts but, looking closely, what is wetness anyway? A feeling in the skin, unknown by the water, it has no name or expression for it's own nature. Water on skin, in cloth, on the ground -in grey rain it is tolerated; in a hot shower it is loved; appreciated in laundry, yet rejected in your boots.

Right Direction

As we have been journeying I have tried to attune to the ways of the Ajahn.

"I can't be bothered with trying to set the world straight -- it's just endless. You just have to go in the right direction yourself, and there will be some who follow and some who don't."

In turning to the ways of the Teacher, personality is seen to arise and be highlighted by the emptiness of his mirror. The self emerges like a spare part, accompanied by shadows of error and ineptitude. A moment of embarrassment dissolves, however, when the light is allowed to shine forth. The person has no owner, it appears for social convention only, a big red 'I' standing all alone.

Profound hospitality has met us at Manjushri; Roy Tyson, the director, has been attentive, respectful, sensitive and sincere. He introduced us to the resident teacher, Geshe Konchog Tsewang, who greeted us warmly -- no English, but no problem. At last the clouds have gone and the late sky has now dimmed to ultra-violet and aquamarine. It is late now, and the day has been long; I bid you all good-night.



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Desana: 'Keeping the Breath in Mind'

Ajahn Lee Dhammadharo was one of the disciples of Venerable Ajahn Mun. He was perhaps the first master to come out of the forests and lonely places to establish a monastery of his own, where he taught meditation to lay people and Sangha alike. This monastery was Wat Asokaram, quite close to Bangkok. Ajahn Lee was a gifted speaker, and many volumes of his sermons are still at Wat Asokaram in unpublished form.

Venerable Thanissaro has contributed greatly to the available teachings of the forest masters by translating selections of Ajahn Lee's sermons into English, and having them printed for free distribution. From time to time, we receive packages of these at Amaravati -- so just ask if you're visiting as to what we might have in stock. Here is a small section from the book, 'Keeping the Breath in Mind'

We all want nothing but goodness, but if you can't tell what's good from what's defiled, you can sit and meditate 'til your dying day and never find nibbana at all. If, however, you can set your mind and keep your mind on what you're doing, it's not all that hard. Nibbana is really a simple matter, because it's always there. It never changes. The affairs of the world are what's hard, because they're always changing and uncertain. Once you've done something, you have to keep looking after it. But you don't have to keep looking after nibbana at all. Once you've realized it, you can let go. Keep on realizing, keep on letting go -- like a person eating rice who, after he's put rice in his mouth, keeps spitting it out. What this means is that you keep on doing good, but you don't claim it as your own. Do good, then spit it out. This is viraga-dhamma: disengagement.

For most people in the world, once they've done something, it's theirs. And thus they have to keep on looking after it. If they're not careful, it will either get stolen or else wear out on its own: they're headed for disappointment. Like a person who swallows his rice: after he's eaten he'll have to digest it. After he's digested it, he'll be hungry again, so he'll have to eat some more and digest some more. The day will never come when he's had enough. But with nibbana, you don't have to swaliow. You can eat your rice and then spit it out. You can do good and let it go.

That's where nibbana is. Like a person without any money' How will thieves be able to rob him?

Nibbana doesn't lie far away: It's right on our lips, right at the tip of our nose. But we keep groping around, and never find it. If you're really serious about finding purity, set your mind on meditation and on nothing else. As for whatever else may come your way, you can say, 'No thanks.' Pleasure? 'No thanks.' Pain? 'No thanks.' Goodness? 'No thanks.' Evil? 'No thanks.' Attainment? 'No thanks.' Nibbana? 'No thanks.' If it's 'no thanks' to everything, what will you have left? You won't need to have anything left. That's where nibbana is. Like a person without any money' How will thieves be able to rob him? If you get money and try to hold on to it, you're going to get killed. If this thief doesn't get you, that one will. Carry around what's yours until you're completely weighed down. You'll never get away.

In this world we have to live with both good and evil. A person who has developed disengagement is filled with goodness, and knows evil fully, but doesn't hold on to either, doesn't claim either as his or her own. Such a person puts them aside and lets them go, and so can travel light and easy. Nibbana isn't that difficult a matter. In the Buddha's time, some people became arahants while going on their almsround, some while urinating, some while watching farmers ploughing a field. What's difficult about the highest good lies in the beginning, in laying the groundwork -- being constantly mindful at all times. But if you can keep at it, you're bound to succeed in the end.



THIS ISSUE

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Articles: ■ Roots of the Forest; Ajahn Sucitto, (part II)
 ■ Letter from Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
 ■ Tudong in the Lakes; Venerable Amaro's notes
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EDITORIAL

Meditation and Prayer

In August of this year, Ajahn Sumedho was one of the invited speakers at the United, World Religions Conference being held in the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in California. (They don't do things by halves in the States.) He called from there to give the Sangha at Amaravati notice of a Harmonic Convergence -- an auspicious line-up of planets -- that was being recognised by many spiritual groups in the West as a time for meditation and prayer. So in Britain, we followed suit in our own fashion. Although it seemed quite normal for us, it was uplifting to consider how many people might be inclining their minds towards peace at such a time. But what about the rest of the time? Sustaining that inclination towards peaceful co-existence and co-operation is a daily effort against the pull of selfishness, and it needs some encouragement.

Sustaining that inclination towards peaceful co-existence
and co-operation is a daily effort against the pull of
selfishness - and it needs some encouragement.

Buddhist customs serve as reminders of such themes. After Vassa, comes the Kathina Ceremony, an occasion that typifies the harmonising of the household and monastic lifestyles to support the Holy Life. It's a time for harmonic convergence throughout the Buddhist world; and it establishes our intentions as householders or mendicants to support and set an example to each other. So you are invited to take the opportunity that occurs to participate in this 2,500-year-old ceremony at your nearest monastery.

Meanwhile, another convergence of sorts: Herein a gathering of letters, articles and notes to remind you of the Sangha's presence in the world. For the next Issue, please send material to 'Newsletter' Amaravati, by November 20th.

Ajahn Sucitto

