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A Temple Arises

This issue of the Newsletter coincides with the beginning of the new Temple at Amaravati. Ajahn Amaro reports on a conversation with Ajahn Sumedho who explains the place of the temple in the Buddhist monastic tradition and its function for the whole Buddhist community.

For the last ten years, many people coming up the drive to Amaravati for the first time have met with a strange experience: "Are we in the right place?", they wonder. "This looks more like an army barracks - it said AMARAVATI at the gate?" Until a stupa was constructed in the middle of the courtyard a year ago, it was only the peaceful atmosphere and the sight of the graceful standing Buddha by the bell-tower that brought the re-assurance that, "Yes, this is indeed a Buddhist monastery..."

In a mendicant tradition though, things always start out by being somewhat rough and ready austere yet uncomplicated. So, even though the monastery has had an oddly military aura all this time, the standard for our way of life is to be grateful; for whatever is offered - however rudimentary it may be as a form of shelter, food or clothing etc. - and we have been joyfully content to make do with whatever was here. This was the standard established by the Lord Buddha in the earliest days of the Sasana and it pertains as much today as it did then.

As time goes by, however, a natural evolution occurs, occasioned usually by the interest of people in hearing and practising the Dhamma. For example, by the end of the Buddha's life he and his disciples had gone from being a small cluster of itinerant samanans, to a vast and well-developed community, with large monasteries dotted around the Middle Country of India; some of them, like the Jetavana at Savatthi, and the Gabled Hall in the Great Wood at Vesali, comprising large complexes of buildings.

In the religious world there always seems to have been a dialogue between the call to simplicity of living on the one hand, and the benefits of settlement and the provision of ample access to spiritual teachings, and

places to learn and practise meditation, on the other.

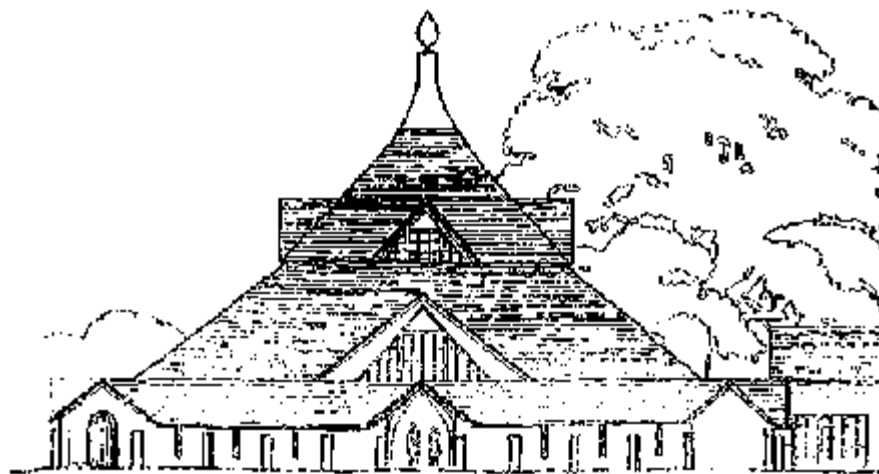
I have seen this same pattern unfold many times in my own experience as a monk - Ven. Ajahn Chah's monastery, Wat Nong Pah Pong, has grown from its inception forty years ago, when there was just Ven. Ajahn Chah with his robes and bowl staying in a forest, to a great spiritual centre, used by many thousands of people as a place of meditation and inspiration. And from that same nucleus have sprung well over a hundred other branch monasteries in Thailand, as well as all of those that have been established around the world. Many of these centres house large numbers of monastics, serve groups of hundreds of people and also act as a force for goodness in the world around – all from the very humblest of beginnings.

Now, to speak in this way is, hopefully, not to give the impression that we are some sort of missionary society, or a spiritual property development corporation. Rather it is to outline the natural efflorescence of the Triple Gem, once it finds fertile ground and starts to settle somewhere. In the religious world there always seems to have been a dialogue between the call to simplicity of living on the one hand, and the benefits of settlement and the provision of ample access to spiritual teachings, and places to learn and practise meditation, on the other. When a healthy balance is struck neither of these two qualities need be compromised, in fact they can benefit each other. If things get out of balance then they can veer off, either into a fixation on austerity and hardship, or, at the other extreme, aiming towards grandiose structures and expansionism simply as ends in themselves.

The Middle Way above and between these two is what we have endeavored to follow in our nurturing of Amaravati over the last ten years, and in particular with regard to the foundation of the new Temple here. Our effort has always been to provide an environment for residents and for visitors that is both inspiring and refreshing to be in, without being wasteful with resources, and to make the place somewhere which is a calm and fertile haven for all.

The essence of our life here is the Path - sila, samadhi and panna - but it has both an inner and an outer aspect to it. A good illustration of these inner and outer qualities that comes to mind is the origin of the word panna - 'temple' itself, and the word 'contemplation' which is derived from it. The former word comes from the Latin Templum, meaning a place for the divination of spiritual insights. Contemplare, the source of the word 'contemplation', means to clearly mark out such an area. Nowadays, in English, when we contemplate

something, it means to clearly mark out a subject for consideration and reflection. The stability of heart that is provided by virtue and self-discipline generates the inner templum, the environment within which panna, reflective wisdom, can develop and be used. This same environment is sustained on an external level by the protective values and life-style of the Buddhist community as a whole; and is particularly exemplified by the monastic enclosure and the spiritual well-being of it's community, derived from the practices of devotion and meditation centered around its main shrine and meditation hall - the Temple.



The inner and the outer thus reflect each other: as the inner refuge of the Triple Gem is cultivated, its development is supported by and is reflected in the environment around it. If purity, radiance and peacefulness are being nurtured within, it helps to be in surroundings which support that. And, if those qualities are indeed our guiding spirit, the way in which we choose to build and maintain our environment will be informed by that same essence.

Just as the Triple Gem is a refuge for everyone who wishes to make use of it, Amaravati is also a place for everyone who sees a value in the qualities it maintains. Many people pass through here, and our aim is for the new Temple to be a sanctuary that symbolises for us all the characteristics of the human heart that are most worthy of cultivating. It is to be a place of purity, radiance and peacefulness. A place which will inspire and encourage the spiritual life and whose spaciousness and dignity will be supportive of all types of spiritual practice. A temple of this nature is a crucible wherein contemplation, serenity and recollection are crystalised and given the chance to realise their full potential in our lives. In short it will be an outward manifestation of the beauty and strength of the Triple Gem.

In Buddhist tradition the monastery is the nucleus of the spiritual life of the whole 'four-fold assembly' - lay people and monastics both male and female - it is everybody's place.

Accordingly we very much hope that all of us who value Amaravati will find some way of joining in and helping with the creation of this sanctuary for us all. When we each play a part in building something, an enduring quality becomes invested in the structure itself; it becomes an expression of our own aspiration and commitment, and resonates that to us. To develop that which is wholesome, and to maintain it in being is a naturally joyous activity, again both in the action and in the recollection of it.

The temple at Amaravati aims to be a blending of all our best efforts and energies, roused with these same wise intentions. It will also reflect, over the decades and centuries to come, the harmony of the elements that we all bring to it. In a similar way the design of the Temple and its cloister aims to bring together a well-balanced blend of styles which respect both their location in the English countryside, and also the Asian ancestry of our Buddhist heritage. The Temple and the courtyard before it are to be constructed principally of wood and brick, with tile roofs throughout. The spire of the main building, the lineaments of the shrine, and also the interior space, however, will bear more of the serene mark of our Thai architectural heritage.

It will be a beautiful and noble structure but, as we go about bringing it all together, it will also be helpful to bear in mind that, from the Buddhist point of view, the means and the end of any endeavour are unified; i.e. the way in which we go about doing something will dictate the nature of the results. If we wish to have a true temple, a sacred space of serenity and joy, then it is up to us to bring these qualities to the process of creating it. If we determine to go about the creation of the building with clarity and calm, and take the trouble to delight in the efforts that are being made and what is being given to it, then we will truly en-joy the whole process - literally 'filling it with joy'. The Temple will then be able to echo this joyful effort to us, and to all the generations down the years.



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Conducting the Orchestra of Form

In May this year the Temple architect, Tom Hancock, took a holiday from the drawing board. During this time, at Harnham, George Sharp talked with him about how his vision of the Temple has evolved.

[George] What are your recollections of the earliest meetings with Ajahn Sumedho and how did the concept of the temple develop?

[Tom] The reason for the form emerging as it has is based on notions I discussed with Ajahn Sumedho; one of which was that the laity and Sangha should somehow have a more convivial relationship inside the building than has been the case in general. The gatherings would generally be quite small in numbers, and in the case of the larger gatherings, the question was how to accomplish that same intimacy without a very long nave for the laity which is usually empty, as in a cathedral. How do you have a building that is always quietly occupied even though you may have very few people in it? And when you have a lot of people it doesn't feel overwhelming? The square seemed to be the very best form for that; not only was it an implicitly interesting form, but also because you can raise roofs on it quite easily, as well as reflecting the square of the Sima area. The supporting structure itself from the earliest days had been a circle which, for reasons of structure and material, developed into an octagon.

Your very first drawings for a temple of some sort were in 1984?

1984 was an attempt to set out an understanding of Amaravati in terms of what was there. That was the first time the suggestion was made to design a Temple based on the idea of the stupa.

It's still that stupa shape isn't it?

Yes, there are strong traditions of using the stupa form as a Temple. But the form we came up with didn't really come out of an historic idea, although some of the earlier designs reflected this by indicating universal forms, i.e. circle, square etc. These geometricals do have a certain precision - you put a nail in the ground and you walk around a string - and you have a circle. Likewise, everything that you hold off the ground, say a nail and a piece of string, forms a right angle to the surface of the earth. So the right angle has an immutable perfection to the human mind.

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the idea of the forest.

The overwhelming idea that Ajahn Sumedho wanted was this meditation space. Clearly there is no 'perfect meditation space', that is impossible to achieve because meditation is a natural, personal experience and has really not much to do with the building. But there are certain

things that are conducive to meditation - the atmosphere, the quietude and so on. He wanted a cave-like feeling, and that was where we really started four years ago. And we went on from there to develop the first design of the interior dome - the central form - which was at first a circle inside the square.

This was the dome inside the pyramid idea?

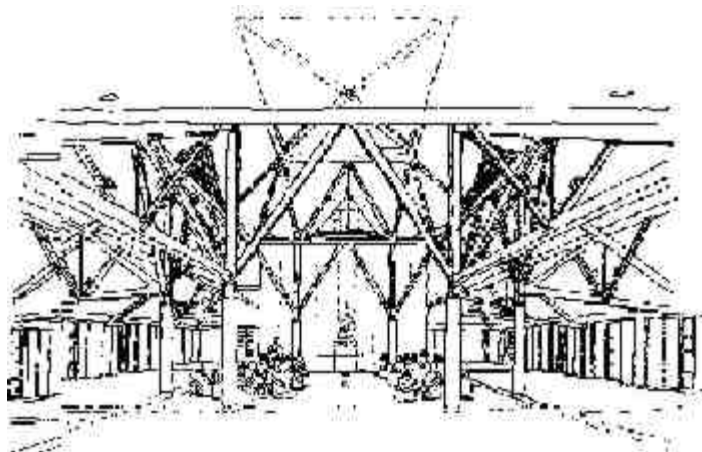
Yes. When you start a building, it is in a sense, conceived of as being perfection in the mind's eye - the perfect idea. However, at some point you have to get your hands on actual materials, and it becomes quite a different thing.

When we started looking at the dome idea, the notion was to have the inner skin of the dome and then the outer skin of the pyramidal roof, which would be tiled. And there was a nice consonance because the sphere fits very well into the pyramid. But the only materials we could think of for the dome were either solid stone, concrete or plaster. When we started to think about how to make the plaster work, the acoustic report came through. This showed that the dome, which initially was about 40 foot in diameter, would be really bad for chanting. I really should have known that but I was so hung up on the perfection of the dome and the pyramid that frankly I didn't think of it.

That kind of testing was gone through on many, many parts of the building. Not only through the choice of materials but also in the way we are putting them together. The main frame of the building is not an accurate material, green oak. (This will be cut from ecologically managed English forests). What we did was to make a trawl of different structural systems. First we looked at oak frame, but we could not make that work. This became transformed into a quasi oak-and-steel composite, which in engineering terms worked well, but in terms of simplicity of construction the idea became complicated. So at this point I had to intervene and design a new structure myself, going back to the eight columned octagonal structure. As soon as I had made a model of it I asked a carpentry firm for comment. And their comments were that they wanted to build this. They're very genuine people so I took it as a compliment.

And the shape of this engineered structure in oak - did that vary from the dome shape? In my mind's eye it is still there. But of course it will be very difficult to read the dome unless you know it was once there. In retrospect, another thing that came out of the oak structure was the idea of the forest. I remember seeing the tudong monks in Thailand living in the forest with their mosquito net arrangement hanging from the branch of a tree. So the idea of the hall being like the forest I can see didn't really come out until the structure of the oak was there. The lower parts are like tree trunks which produce smaller columns, with little branches reaching to the upper levels.

And what is green oak? It is oak that has not been dried or naturally seasoned. If we used seasoned oak it would have been over twice as expensive. Green oak has a long history. Carpenters I have been talking to still understand how oak should be designed as a compression structure, i.e. all the joints are pushing downwards. The oak shrinks, but not in length. So we've chosen a material for a main structure which is imperfect, but we're using it in a way which understands that essential quality of change and plasticity.



Evident cracks will emerge in the oak, and that's part of the process. So immediately we'll get a material which, after a few years, will look like its been there 100 years.

Following from that are the ideas for the floor. It was decided earlier that we'd use underfloor heating based on the experience at Harnham. We have a super-insulated building, and so the floor is an important element in terms of a radiant heat source.

It won't be a brilliantly lit building. We will have side-windows and ventilation at the top of the central open space of the building, and we do that by having four dormers so the light in the 'cave' comes from above; the light from the side windows will be very minimal. Because they're so high above the floor level the changing light throughout the day will be very fine from there; that's the reason I wanted a white floor.

What other factors determine the colour of the stone and the kind of surface required?

We want to use the floor to reflect the light, so we need a very pale tone. I was fortunate enough to know about this Vicenza limestone which my guru, Andrea Palladio, used in the 16th century. He used it for the same reason. He was doing central spaces in churches and palazzi in Italy and he wanted reflective floors to capture light coming from a great height. What I wanted to do at this stage was to use the budget and the building process to provide a shell which is long-lived and which is sensible for the purposes that Ajahn Sumedho set out. That is; a flexibility of layout and use, creating a feeling that is most conducive to meditation and a building which is what you see - what you see is what you get. There is a kind of directness about it.

You are looking forward to having what built by when?

We're able to break it down into very distinct steps: preparation of the site, the laying of the foundations, the construction of the floor slabs, then the oak frames, then the walls going up, then the tiled roof going on with all the sub-structures.

Foundations will be there by the end of July, then there will be a quiet period in August whilst the road is re-built by the highway authority.

The oak frame goes up in September. Like all medieval buildings it will be pre-assembled in the workshop and brought to the site in bits, and then re-assembled to make sure it works. This will all take quite a time because it's a fairly big structure and we have to take very great care in the detailed work. It'll be about 4-5 weeks. This is the structure that carries the entire weight of the pyramid and must withstand the wind.

The structure is capped with a pinnacle which has also gone through a number of stages.

Luang Por wanted some sort of emblem at the top of the building to demonstrate the presence

of the Buddha, and he showed me stupas whose form I've tried to reflect. It's not an exotic import, but a very Hertfordshire-style capping which also, to the Buddhist eye, is legible as a stupa form. At the very tip is a finial in the shape of a flame. Bearing in mind the wind you talked about, the flame is designed to be much stronger as I'd be very concerned that at that height it's going to get a tremendous buffeting.

So Stage 1 is the completion of the main building and surrounding walls. And then later come the vestries and vestibule?

The vestibule is a very important part of the building, which is unusual because if you consider the traditional Asiatic setting, you wouldn't require these things. One of the interesting matters in transforming a building type from one world region to another is to deal with climactic circumstances. Temperature, weather, energy costs - all these things become critically important, particularly to a religion which is by nature abstemious, careful, concerned, thoughtful and mindful about these things.

It's always a balance between the materials you've got, what you actually do and of course the team that puts this together. The men on the site, the quality of their work and how committed they are to it. Right through the entire orchestra as I think of it. As though one is conducting a piece that has already been written and people have seen the score and they think, 'Aah this is wonderful,' but they've not heard the music. You can't hear the music until the building's built!

So what you're saying is that you couldn't really be expected to do that with any real sensitivity until you've got the building up and the interior is more or less finished in general?

Don't forget that Buddhism in Europe is at a very interesting stage. All aspects of the regional shift in terms of the building's design has references to the root region of Theravada Buddhism, but it also has to do with our climate and our views and our culture and our perceptions. We see things differently. And that is very interesting in terms of the main art, in terms of the sculptures and the glass and so on. I'm not saying what it should be, but I'm saying lurking, just out of sight, is a whole genre of work which is going to become more important in the future. So I feel very privileged as the architect of this building to begin this process. Other things will follow. So far the Buddhist art movement in Europe has been quite defensive. It has been using traditions from other regions which in themselves are inherently very beautiful, but very often have degenerated.

Perfection doesn't exist in art. All art is illusion, and architecture - that's an illusion too. It's just a pretty solid looking illusion for the time being! But in terms of what you're doing as an architect you must understand the illusoriness of it because you can make a room appear larger or smaller depending on the light and so on. In fact to make a big space 'read' you have to constrain it. A huge building like St. Peter's in Rome, for example, looks quite small when you're in there, but it's only when you see someone against the base of the columns that you realise it's absolutely vast. And then you take some very small church which would go into the aisle of St. Peter's. It's seems like a very beautiful big space, but it's actually quite small. It's just the illusion that's being created by the structure.

And so art, which is really just marks of things on stone, or wood, or canvas is all illusion and symbol. Analytically speaking, a painting of the Buddha is an illusion on a piece of paper or canvas.



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Renunciation & Devotion: The Stalk and the Fragrance

From a talk given at Ratanagiri on August 6th 1994 by Ajahn Munindo.

When our hearts speak up with the longing for Realisation, and we move on that impulse, what is it that gets in the way? What is it that comes along and starts feeling otherwise? "I thought that I wanted to go on retreat, but now I don't. I thought I wanted to meditate but now I just want to think about going on holiday, or going back to work".

Well, what's doing it? It's 'me' that's doing it. And so this 'me', this 'I' chronically gets in the way. This is an experience we are all familiar with, this 'I' getting in the way of practice.

We often get caught on the personality level. We see the moment of seeing as 'me' seeing and 'my' seeing, and then 'me' feeling and 'my' feeling, 'me' hearing and 'my' hearing, 'me' thinking, 'me' perceiving, 'me' understanding, and 'my' understanding. Eventually there's a perception of some sort of solid 'me' and the consequential 'mine'.

That construction is like a cancer in consciousness: it gobbles up enormous amounts of energy, and the rest of the organism suffers terribly. Our sense of well-being is hardly accessible when we're possessed by our ego-consciousness, this deluded perception of self.

So we should recognize the value of renunciation, in coming to see the 'me' for what it is. If we want to get to that which really matters - the heart of the matter - and realise something, then it does take renunciation.

The Buddha says in the Dhammapada, it is wisdom that encourages us to give up a lesser happiness for a greater happiness.

When I see people making a commitment to renunciation - whether it's for a period of a week, as most of you have been doing, or for a year as an anagarika - there's something very beautiful in that. It's not just a matter of doing something because it's a good thing to do, there are lots of other good things we could be doing. Renunciation is painful, it's disagreeable. We're not going to do it unless we've got some perspective on it. What's behind taking renunciation precepts is a recognition that "I need to do this." It's the heart making a statement; the heart needs to recognize this 'me' for what it is.

It's wisdom that encourages us to make a gesture of renunciation. The heart recognises a need to understand this foreign body that's operating in our psyche, gobbling up all our energy. It's not merely a value judgement saying, 'I shouldn't be selfish.' We want to go beyond that, to achieve that freedom of perspective, that clarity of seeing where we can recognize this imposter that comes in and says, 'I'm responsible for this experience.' We want to see that taking place so that we can actually see through it and not be fooled by it.

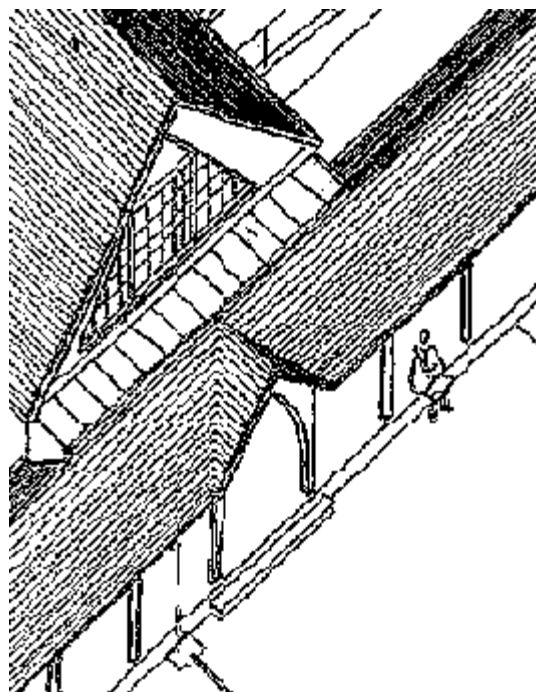
When there's a moment of pleasure, we want to be able to see that as simple pleasure. If we can't see it as simply pleasure, then when there's an awful moment of disappointment and despair and grief, we can't see through that either. It feels like my sadness, my disappointment - it's not anybody else who feels disappointed - it's me! When I feel disappointed, there's definitely an 'I' who feels disappointed, and there's no question about it.

So making a gesture of renunciation is actually a statement of saying that "I'm not going to give this 'I' everything it wants." Not because I think it's bad to have an 'I' and we're just making a value judgement of it. We could do that, and on one level of religious practice I think that's what we do sometimes. It's this issue of whether enjoying pleasure itself is the problem or whether it's our relationship to the pleasure that's the problem.

Someone was asking me the other day while we were looking at the lovely clematis flowers outside, "Is that defilement, those beautiful flowers there?" and I said, "What do you mean, having flowers is having defilement?" Actually, where 'I' comes into the picture, a problem arises because 'I' like the beautiful mauve clematis; then that awful disease clematis-wilt comes along every year and the beautiful things die just like that. And 'I' feel disappointed.

That's where the problem is, the sense of attachment. Where there's attachment, where there's grasping, 'I' is born. We can look at the clematis out there, and it's very beautiful, it's very pleasing and pleasure arises. Does there have to be grasping at that point, where it becomes 'my' pleasure? Because if it does, and somebody rips out the clematis, then there's my pain, there's a problem.

But if we investigate with mindfulness, then pleasure arises and we say, "Aha, that feels good." It does feel good. But if there's simply noticing, simple attention, then we can actually feel this aching, this "I want it to last", this aching feeling of "I want it, I want to have it." That's the 'I', that's the feeling, and if we're mindful, we can watch it, we can notice it being born, we can see it taking place. And with right effort, with careful sensitive effort, we can actually inhibit that reaction from



taking place. We can see it as not necessary. We don't have to add that 'I' through grasping.

As much as we might want to do it, there's something within us that quite naturally knows it's inappropriate to try and grasp life. And so if our wisdom is still alive to some extent, it speaks to us, it encourages us to make gestures of renunciation, to actually go against this grasping tendency, which is 'I'. There's no 'I' outside of that: the 'I' is born in that activity of grasping, that contraction of awareness, that contraction of the heart. That contraction is the birthing process of self. When there isn't that grasping taking place, then there's no self being born. There is just the beautiful clematis, just the pleasure arising.

So if we have this appreciation, we don't have to worry about beautiful things like the clematis. But some things are so beautiful and so pleasant that it is good to stay away from them for a while. Some degrees of intensity of pleasure are such that the pull is too great, and the tendency to get lost is too high. So we make a gesture of renunciation by way of experiment, but not by way of value-judgement.

As the Buddha says in the Dhammapada, it's wisdom that encourages us to give up a lesser happiness for a greater happiness. So if our heart is longing for the sense of sustainable well-being - not at the expense of others, nor of the planet itself, but the well-being that arises in the heart that's living in accordance with the way things are, then it's appropriate that we give up some lesser experiences of well-being, of happiness.

We may have enough wisdom to inspire us to make these gestures of renunciation, but when the renunciation starts to take effect and we begin to see ourselves in our darker as well as brighter capacity, we may start to doubt.

When we start to experience the structures we establish in our consciousness through grasping, and which we experience as me and my way, and my desires, when that grasping is clearly in front of us, what do we do with it?

If we're not agile enough we can get very rigid about our renunciation. I'm a Buddhist: renunciation, I'm going to do it! Determination: I'm going to do it, that's what Buddhists do! If we are too rigid in our resolve and our commitment to renunciation and determination, the energy starts building up, and we tend to break.

We want to look at what's going on with making these resolutions. Often they're coming from a wise place; we need to make gestures of renunciation so as to be able to see ourselves, to see beyond ourselves and not be limited by our selfing mechanisms. But if we're too rigid, it's not going to work. So opportunities like this retreat and places like this monastery are not merely committed to renunciation. That's an important part but it's only one part of it - devotion is equally important.

The principle of devotion is a different quality altogether. Devotion is a manifestation of the heart that's trusting. When we live with a heart of trust, we can feel the devotional spirit. That's a very different feeling from the spirit of renunciation, which is much more assertive. It's like the resilience of an organism, the natural intelligence of a tree or plant. The wild rose bush out there grows thorns for protection, and that's an important part of its being; but it's very different from the wonderful fragrance when the rose bush flowers. The fibre of the honeysuckle is tough and woody, not very pretty, but without the fragrance it wouldn't be honeysuckle. So the fragrance of the holy life or the fragrance of our spiritual life is like the devotional aspect. We can compare the woodiness of the stem to our renunciation and resolve, and the fragrance to our devotion. They're very different aspects, and equally important.

Devotional practice helps us in our agility, it helps us to remember that we can trust. It's trust

that brought us here on retreat. If we didn't trust that there was a higher Truth, or that it was worth making the effort, then we simply wouldn't be here. We got here because there was an element of faith. We do trust to a certain degree.

But we can easily forget to trust. Trust sometimes looks rather weak, and our trusting capacity has been seriously interfered with in our culture. Sadly, it's rare to find honesty these days, and that means that we learn to distrust each other.

When Chithurst House was purchased, the Chairman of the English Sangha Trust agreed to a price with the owner on a handshake, and he stuck by it although someone else later offered him a great deal more money. People are surprised and touched by that because it's not normal any more. What's normal is to be dishonest! There have been times when trusting relationships were more normal than they are these days; and so the capacity for trusting was less interfered with, less distorted than ours is now.

We come to this practice positively disinclined to trust, disinclined to engage with our capacity for having faith, and for drawing on that energy. Although faith and trust in Dhamma, in Truth, in the possibility of realisation has brought us here, we can still lose it if we are not fully conscious of it. So it's particularly important that we engage consciously with this capacity for trusting, for having faith. This is very much what devotion is about - this is the trusting heart.

When we say, "I am the Buddha's servant, the Buddha is my lord and guide, the Buddha is sorrow's destroyer who bestows blessings on me", and the Dhamma: "The Dhamma is sorrow's destroyer, the Dhamma upholds those who uphold it"- what are we saying here? Maybe at first this sort of talk is not very comfortable for us, it doesn't immediately fit. But if we get a little more conscious about it, we start to say to ourselves, "You know, I do believe in Truth." There is awakening. I can be asleep and be having a terrible nightmare that feels very real, and then I awake and see that I'm not in a flood and there are no bombs going off around me. I awaken and I'm so relieved.

So there is the possibility of awakening from this endless condition of always seeking, always hoping that sometime, something's going to turn out to be inherently adequate, and a source of well-being. Now that trust, that quality of trusting is worth lifting up. And so, when we say, "I am the Dhamma's servant, the Dhamma is my lord and guide, the Dhamma is sorrow's destroyer", we're lifting up this quality of trust.

Intuitively, we know there is another place, another dimension, where we do find unity, where we do find peace, and that's what we trust in. That's the potential, that's what has motivated and inspired all religions throughout the ages. That potential, that well-spring of energy within ourselves, is what I believe brings us here. When we're in touch with that potential, we have this other dimension that can sustain us if renunciation practices bring up the structures of self in too painful a way.

This place and our practices here are not merely dedicated to renunciation, but also to devotion. I think that renunciation is easier for us to accept, but it may therefore be more important for us to be open towards what devotion means, and how we can find ways of being more devotional in our practice. I don't mean by that merely being more emotional. Devotional practice without renunciation and without commitment to realisation does become rather pointless and merely emotional.

Remember, it is realisation that is the point. All of us during this week have experienced moments of feeling fed up: "This renunciation business, I don't want to have anything more to do with it!" We've got to be very careful with that, very agile. Maybe we're holding our renunciation resolve too tightly. Or with devotion, maybe you don't like chanting or bowing.

Don't be so quick to judge. These are things that are aimed at reconnecting us. Devotion is reconnecting us with the capacity for simply trusting. Renunciation is putting us in touch with the capacity to receive ourselves, to see ourselves clearly, and to see beyond ourselves. When these capacities are not readily available to us, then spiritual practice is not really possible. The point of these practices is to give us this capacity, so that realisation can take place.



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Growing the Dhamma Tree

One of our long-standing lay supporters describes what motivated her efforts to support the Sangha at Amaravati, and the hopes for the future, symbolised by the construction of a new temple.

"What is it that we Thais can give to England?" I used to ask myself often. Something good and lasting. Something that will keep growing and be a source of goodness and blessings. Having lived in England for a number of years, I felt tremendous gratitude towards the country and its people. I knew that my long stay was soon to come to an end and I wanted to do something before my departure. Then one day as I was looking at Tower Bridge, the answer came: "The teaching of the Buddha, the Sangha."

Back in 1979, there had already been a number of Thai and Sinhalese monks in England for some years, but the Western Sangha was just beginning its first experiment in attempting to settle in the country. When the Thai people heard that a small group of Western monks headed by Luang Por Chah was in London, we could hardly believe it. Would the monks be supported? Who would give them alms food? Who would provide medicines when they are sick? Would English people understand or know that monks cannot ask for things unless they are offered?

It has been an inspiration to see Westerners take to the Buddha's teaching, to see their sincerity and dedication to the practice, to see their love and respect for their teachers.

I watched the transformation of Chithurst from a derelict building to a monastery. As the house was being repaired, the Sangha around Ajahn Sumedho started growing. Their practice inspired confidence, and soon requests to open new places came. First was Harnham, then Devon, then Amaravati opened. This was really a new step in the development of the Sangha. Up to that moment we had seen the transformation of small English houses into Wats (our Thai word for monastery). But Amaravati was different. The growing Sangha needed space for its present and future needs, and a large place was required.

I went to see the Amaravati property with a good friend before it was bought. I liked its spaciousness although it did not look like a Wat, and the buildings looked flimsy and cold for the English winter. Also the place had no chapel or special prayer building that could be converted into a Temple. But . . . one thing at a time. First, the buildings had to be made adequate for living in, then the mortgage had to be repaid, then we will think of the temple.

I returned to Thailand before the official opening of Amaravati in 1985. We raised funds, made videos, printed books for free distribution and sent people on alms-giving ceremonies to present the donations that had been collected.

I followed the developments of the Sangha closely. When I heard Ajahn Sumedho talk of the need for a temple I thought, "Yes. The time was right." Amaravati needed a silent place where the Sangha and lay people could go, at any time, to meditate, be quiet or listen to Dhamma. By supporting the project from Thailand we are helping the Buddhasana to grow in the West, helping the Buddha's words to become reality.



For many Thais it has been an inspiration to see Westerners take to the Buddha's teaching, to see their sincerity and dedication to the practice, to see their love and respect for their teachers, Luang Por Chah and Ajahn Sumedho.

The Sangha in the West is more than a seed now. It has grown into a young tree with tender branches. We want to help it become a full grown tree with many branches and thick foliage where creatures can come for food and shelter.

In the meantime our efforts to keep raising funds to build the temple continue. May the Temple become a lasting symbol of reverence to the Triple Gem and support those who dedicate their lives to practise the Buddha's way.



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Supporting the Project

Krishna Padayachi was one of the chief fundraisers on the day of the Ground Breaking ceremony in May.

For those with a sense of history, making the connection with our predecessors from antiquity is an exhilarating experience. Whether it is Hadrian's Wall, The Great Wall of China, or the Pyramids, the poignant moment that one experiences when considering - "on this very spot a lonely Roman Centurion perhaps stood, as I am standing now," is a moving one; it is a moment to be savoured.

Upabindunipatena udakumbho'pi purati
just as the falling of raindrops, even a water butt is
filled.

The unexpected call from Ajahn Attapemo to attend the planning meetings for the ground breaking ceremony filled me with a sense of awe and humility. The feeling was further reinforced on reading Ajahn Viradhammo's introduction where he reflects on the Amaravati exhibition at the British Museum. The temple project we are embarking on now is something familiar to our ancestors in India. Perhaps the early patrons were of the royal blood but I cannot help feeling that all those connected with the project, be they sculptors, builders, painters, metal workers, were all imbued with the same enthusiasm that we experience today. Perhaps there were fund raisers too -
 "Where is the money to come from?"
 "How to mobilise resources?"
 "How to approach the Anathapindikas of the day?"

At the planning meeting, an idea was mooted to 'sell' some of the Temple posters for donations above a certain amount. But instead, a consensus emerged to provide the opportunity for free giving. I am always overwhelmed by the spontaneous generosity and magnanimity of our supporters, whatever the occasion. Our jobs as official recipients was made easier by the full and enthusiastic participation of all the volunteers and 'backroom' men and women who emptied dana boxes, plied volunteers with numerous cups of coffee to ward off the chill and finally to total up the figures for the day.

The Anumodana certificates, as a formal acknowledgement of generosity, personally signed by Luang Por, were a great hit and were issued for varying amounts, the smallest being 50p and the largest UKL400. A notable feature was the number who made anonymous donations.

The sense of achievement at the end of the day was heightened by the reflection on what might have occurred on a similar occasion, 2500 years ago, perhaps when work on Anathapindika's monastery in Jeta's Grove was started. The ball has been set rolling, slowly but surely and I have no doubt the campaign will gather momentum and our ultimate goal reached.



The Sri Lankan High Commissioner breaking the ground at the epicentre of the Temple; marked by a decorative mandala. He is watched by the Royal Thai Ambassador's representative.

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Sutta Class: Morality, Transformation and Liberation

Ajahn Sucitto,

'When, bhikkhu, inwardly your mind is firm and well-composed, and evil and wrong states which arise and overwhelm the mind find no footing, then, bhikkhu, you must train yourself thus: Through metta shall the release of the mind be effected by me, continuously developed, made a vehicle of, made a basis, exercised, augmented, thoroughly set going.'

[Anguttara VIII (Gradual Sayings - the Eights), 63]

As a footnote to the sutta class on Transgression and Forgiveness in the last issue of the Newsletter, there are some interesting teachings in the suttas concerning freeing the mind from the results of unskillful actions. The quotation above may help to remind us of the close relationship between citta, one of the words that gets translated as 'mind', (although sometimes 'heart' is used and possibly 'awareness' might be more useful) and cetana 'will', 'volition', or 'intention', the aspect of awareness that represents its motivating, aiming activity. Cetana is the cause and the result of the mind's conditioning: the Buddha teaches unequivocally that cetana is kamma. In this he differs radically from the Vedic and Jain sages - and many English-speakers who also understand 'karma' to be a mechanical determinism irrespective of mental intention: 'Anything you do will have its effects on your future.'

If kamma really were just a matter of the effects of physical action, then one's non-harmful actions would far outweigh one's harmful actions, and nobody would go to hell.

The Buddha frequently attacks this view, asserting that what is done with cetana is of great significance; action without determined intention is of little significance. For example in the **Upalisutta** [*Majjhima 56*], in dialogue with the Jain Tapassi, the Buddha states:

I describe mental action as the most reprehensible for the performance of evil action, . . . and not so much bodily action and verbal action.

Tapassi (and later his fellow Jain, Upali) deny this, although later, when questioned, Upali admits that the teacher of the Jains, Nigantha Nataputta, "does not describe what is not willed as greatly reprehensible." The Buddha then catches him out by getting him to admit that 'will'

falls under the heading of mental action kamma. This leads to Upali's transferring his allegiance to the Buddha.

The point is that most people would assume that 'mental action' is thought - a function of mano - mind as a sense organ essentially functioning separately from the 'bodily' senses - rather than the will of the citta that accompanies and morally determines any intended bodily or verbal action.

In the very next sutta 57, **Kukkuravatika** the Buddha tells the ascetics who practise the austerity of behaving respectively like a dog or an ox, that, at best, they will attain a future birth as a dog or an ox. And, worse, that if they imagine that their austerities will confer divine status on them, they are liable to go to hell - such is the kammic result of the perversion of the citta that results from wrong view; itself is the cause and result of ignorant cetana. Now, in more positive terms, the Buddha also teaches that by correcting or transforming the quality of cetana, one will be able to remove the effects of unwholesome kamma and direct the citta to a pleasant abiding, or even to Nibbana.

In the Kindred Sayings (*Samyutta Nikaya*) a sutta entitled '**The Conch**' [*Samyutta 35 - Salayatana Vagga, VIII - (Headmen, 8)*] the Buddha again discusses kamma with a Jain. The Jain says, that according to his teachers, whoever kills, or steals, or commits unwholesome sexual actions, or tells lies, will go to hell; that "according as a man habitually lives, so goes he forth to his destiny."

The Buddha then points out that even one who does commit such deeds spends most of his day and night not doing such things - which is obvious enough, although rarely considered. Therefore, if kamma really were just a matter of the effects of physical action, then one's non-harmful actions would far outweigh one's harmful actions, and nobody would go to hell. The deciding factor is that one who commits unskilful deeds remembers it - it is continually affecting his or her citta. This effect will certainly be strengthened if one follows a teacher who proclaims that the result of unskilful action is hell. Just as in the case of the dog and ox-duty ascetics, the belief in one's mind determines the will, and the will determines the kamma.

This is indeed a powerful reminder of why the Buddha stressed that liberation from views is essential for final liberation. "I . . . do not see any support of views that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. [*Alagaddupamasutta, Majjhima 22*].

Continuing the theme of **The Conch**: the Buddha then explains his teaching on morality, kamma and transformation. He strongly censures the actions that were previously condemned by the Jain, and says that if one has committed such an action one should fully acknowledge it, and in remorse, realise that the action cannot be undone. Because of this, in the future one refrains from such actions, and makes a commitment to refrain from them. "Thus does he get beyond those evil



deeds."

Does this sound too simple? We should not overlook as many do, that abstaining in heart from unskilful action stems from cetana just as surely as acting unskilfully does. So this process of reflection and remorse - as well as seriously considering that the Buddha censures the above-mentioned actions - establishes the citta in skilful cetana, with its consequent results:

By abandoning covetousness, he becomes uncovetous, by abandoning malevolence he becomes one not malevolent of heart. By abandoning perverted view he becomes one of right view . . . self-possessed and concentrated [he] abides suffusing (the world) with a heart full of kindness (metta), compassion (karuna), sympathy (mudita), equanimity (upekkha) that is widespreading, grown great and boundless, free from enmity and peaceful.

In such a way, the transformation of the will can be effected. The significance of such a transformation makes it possible for a mass-murderer like Angulimala to realise arahantship. [*Angulimalasutta, Majjhima 86*] Although the details of his practice are not given, the sutta mentions his sincere repentance, his commitment to a life of harmlessness and renunciation, and significantly, the arising of compassion in his mind at the sight of a woman giving birth to a deformed child.

The suttas teach (*e.g Majjhima 52, Anguttara 8,65; Samyutta XLVI.54*) that the brahmavihara (kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity), if used insightfully, are a vehicle to liberation. Whether this was the case with Angulimala or not, we would surely do well to recognise that they are a natural function of, and aid to, a liberated citta rather than dwell in the kamma-resultant negativity about ourselves and others.

Quotes from the Majjhima Nikaya are taken from Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi's edition, published by Wisdom Publications; quotes from the other Nikayas are from The Pali Text Society's editions.



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In Memory of Luang Por Jun - Pt. 1

Sister Sanghamitta shares some of her memories of Luang Por Jun

Luang Por Jun Intaviro, who passed away on April 2nd in Ubon was an elder disciple and close friend of Ajahn Chah. Since he is my 'spiritual father', and I spent about half of my monastic life in his monasteries, I'd like to share some of my memories of him as an expression of my love and gratitude to him.

Luang Por Jun was born into a Thai farmer's family in Klang Yai village, Khuang Nai district of Ubon province on July 30th in 1922. As a young man he did various jobs. In his teens he went to Ubon and worked for an American missionary and his wife as an 'odd-job-man', he did everything: cooking, gardening, laundry - everything. Of course the missionaries would try to convert him and came quite close to doing so; but then the war came and so they had to leave Ubon and he set up his own laundry.

He was always a 'ladies-man'. When he was in his teens, he lived with a woman whom he called his wife. They had two children. The daughter died and the son is now living as a monk. Afterwards he became a monk for a vassa (rains retreat) or two then dis-robbed but didn't return to his wife, going instead to Bangkok where he was variously employed.

During that period he had a chance to experience and contemplate the glamour and glitter of the world. He began to see how unfair life was, how poor people get taken advantage of and how difficult it was to just stay alive. He became very disillusioned by lay life and so decided to ordain again. This time he made a public determination to remain a bhikkhu for life. None of his old friends believed that he could stick to this commitment, knowing his worldly nature and 'soft spots'.

For his second ordination he went to his home village, where he spent about four years serving his preceptor and helping with building and other such work. In 1957, he was sent off to Ubon

- 1922 Born on July 30th in Bahn Klang Yai, Ubon Rajathani to a farming family.
- 1944 Completed compulsory military service.
- 1947 Entered Sri That monastery, in his home village; passed 2nd level of Dhamma studies.
- 1948 Back to lay life.
- 1952 Second ordination as a monk; passed 3rd level of Dhamma studies.
- 1957 Moved to Klang monastery, Ubon, to prepare for Pali examinations.
- 1960 To Wat Pah Pong monasery to practise meditation, living under Ajahn Chah.
- 1966 Return to Klang Yai to establish Wat Pah Beung Luang, a branch of Wat Pah Pong.
- 1995 Passed away on April 2nd in Ubon.

city to study Pali. But after the second Vassa of intensive study, he was completely disenchanted with this way since it did not seem to bring the results he was looking for. His strong determination began to fade away. Then he met an elder monk who was on his way to Wat Nong Pah Pong to practise in the forest and meditate under the guidance of a good teacher there. Ajahn Jun immediately decided to go along with this elder monk and when he reached Wat Nong Pah Pong, he asked Tan Ajahn Chah who was abbot there, for permission to spend the Vassa and join the community.

Not everyone likes to be told that there is more to be done than believing in rites and rituals, and that reciting panca sila like a parrot, without keeping the precepts in daily life, is of no value.

Tan Ajahn Chah first tested him to see if he was really sincere and willing to give himself fully to the forest practice and standard of Vinaya. As it is with those coming from other monasteries, he was examined in the presence of the other monks and they fully checked out his belongings. Like most of the village or city monks, he used to have money, so first he had to give up everything he had previously bought with his own money, mosquito net, robes etc., and at the end of the examination only his bathing cloth and sabong (lower robe) were left.

The monk in charge of the stores brought him an old shabby robe - but he was quite happy finally to be accepted by Ajahn Chah. During the next several years, he remained at Wat Pah Pong and went on tudong a few times. Eventually he became the assistant abbot in charge of training the young bhikkhus and novices there.

In the year 1966, Ajahn Jun returned to his home village with a few forest monks to set up the second branch monastery of Wat Nong Pah Pong. Now, Wat Nong Pah Pong has more than 135 branches all over the country. But the forest-tradition is not appreciated and respected everywhere in Thailand, since it goes against the mainstream of society. Not everyone likes to be told that there is more to be done than believing in rites and rituals, and that reciting panca sila like a parrot, without keeping the precepts in daily life, is of no value. So, for Ajahn Jun, returning to his home village was a real challenge.

For the first years, there was a lot of contentiousness, and even some resistance from the village monks. A few lay supporters would tell them how strictly the forest bhikkhus kept the Vinaya and of course the village monks did not have the same standard. Conflicts also arose when the lay people reacted to Ajahn Jun's desanas which encouraged them to give up killing, stealing, indulging in drinking, gambling and rites and rituals, like 'lucky money' or asking for lottery numbers. In spite of these difficulties, he managed to bring everything into harmony in his characteristic way. His influence was so deeply felt that now the head monk of the village monastery comes to Wat Pah Beung Kao Luang to give Upasampada (higher ordination) to those who wish to be ordained at the beginning of each Vassa.

All over Thailand, Luang Por Jun became well known, respected and loved for his sincere practice and integrity, by monks and lay people alike. He was

for everyone more than a teacher; he was also a friend, who would continuously push us to understand the True Dhamma in his down-to-earth way. When it came to Vinaya, Luang Por himself had a very strict standard. But even so, he was able to make Vinaya come alive and take on meaning for people, so that the standard could be preserved without a sense of hardness or repression but in a human and creative way. Such was his wisdom.

Luang Por Jun was also very skilled in pointing out the more subtle aspects of one's practice, especially the things which we often overlook. And since he was very attentive and alert as to how everybody was doing during the day, he could adeptly point out our blind spots or weak points without offending or 'hurting' our feelings. Even when what he had to say was painful it came with so much metta, space and encouragement that we could accept it and smile at our imperfections, rather than denying them, or blaming ourselves or others. Everyone could appreciate this kind of gentle 'feed-back' as a sincere way of supporting them to develop the Path.



My first experience at Wat Beung Kao Luang was about eleven years ago. I left the home life in December 1983 and went to Wat Pah Nanachat, where I shaved my head and took the eight precepts. Very soon I became interested in staying with a nuns' community and the opportunity arose to go up to Wat Pah Beung Kao Luang, a remote forest monastery about 55 km from Ubon city. I stayed there for three months with Luang Por Jun and his community. In those days there were about sixteen nuns aged between 13 and 86. The two old ones, over 80, were 'retired' and the two senior nuns who managed the community were about 35.

Luang Por Jun always emphasised communal togetherness. He had an incredible ability and skill to unite people, not only forest and city monks, but also those living within the monastery. He knew just how to encourage us to use communal life as an important part of the practice. Everything was done together; from early morning chanting at 3:30 a.m., the meal, afternoon work, meditation and evening puja. As far as I could observe, it was the same with the monks. They would have periods of hard work; construction, cleaning etc. and everybody would join in and work together with a light and joyful heart.

I remember in the early days, when the nuns made charcoal - quite heavy work. They would saw off large trunks of old trees into pieces with a three-metre long hand-saw and carry them to an igloo-shaped stove, made of clay and mud. I was very keen to be part of everything and

was filled with high ideals about doing things together and about 'equality'. But after half an hour, I would feel completely exhausted, because my body was not used to the hot climate and hard physical work. The nuns would encourage me to go back to the kuti and take a rest, but I would say 'no way' and kept working until I was so exhausted that I had to stop and sit down.

This helped me to look at myself and the situation, to see clearly how I was conditioned by our Western concept about work and 'self'. For us, work and efficiency is more important than the state of one's mind. We are very goal-oriented. We think we have to live up to the mark and be as good and as strong as everyone else. This sense of self is a great source of our suffering. For the Thais, on the other hand, to just BE and do things together joyfully seems to come first. And for them, it is really natural. Their emphasis is much more on the quality of the heart, 'sanuk sabai' (to feel good), than on the result. It was never a matter of time or efficiency. They would certainly not blame me for being weaker than them; they would simply appreciate my good intention to join in, not minding if I did some lighter work or had a rest once in a while. I learnt quite a lot through the daily activities; not having a concept of separation into 'work time' and 'free time,' or 'communal time' and 'personal time'. I would not even try to explain to my Thai sisters about the rota-system that we use in the West, because it is foreign to their way of thinking. Often we would just keep working on something together, independent of time or our personal preferences.

After spending about three months at Wat Pah Beung Kao Luang, I went to Sri Lanka, where I took ordination as a dasa sila mata (a ten precept nun), and returned to Ubon after about two years. In Thailand, the nuns are usually dressed in white robes; there are only very few brown-robed nuns in the North and outside Bangkok. Some of them are disciples of Bodhilac, a monk who was defrocked by the Sangha, so if you appear as a nun in brown robes, people think you're either a monk, or a woman in monk's robes, or they assume you're a disciple of Bodhilac - which brings its own reaction.

But staying with Luang Por and living under his wing was no problem since everyone respected, honoured and trusted him. When curious lay people would ask about my brown robes, he would explain about the Theravada tradition in other countries, such as Sri Lanka or the UK. He was also very keen to take me along for pindapat and always supported me in the practice of 'not having money'.

(to be concluded in the next issue)



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EDITORIAL

The temple: A space for Right Ritual

Ritual is a common feature of religions. As a teaching or training establishes itself, its conventions become familiar, revered, and formed into symbols which convey meaning more vividly than words can. Ritual is symbolic action; it can range from the very simple - such as bowing, chanting, offering incense, and so on - up to very elaborate performances. Even the most down-to-earth people look for some ritual to bless their giving birth, their marriage and the death of those near to them. The ritual enhances awareness of the event and brings about deeper consideration of its significance.

In circumstances that we don't feel a part of, ritual may seem foolish; its impact very much depends on whether one's mind is attuned to interpret and receive the message of the symbols. Such gestures as bowing to a shrine or a person are only meaningful if one can either regard them as symbols in one's own mind of a higher reality, or else relate to the bowing itself as a valid ritual. If, instead of being used to refer to some higher value, a symbol is seen as a literal reality and gets empowered, or a symbolic act is imbued with magical power - the practice has moved into the realm of magic and superstition. Ritual becomes decadent when its elements are carried out without reference to the intention or the mind state of the people participating in it.

The Buddha, although generally dismissive of ritual, did allow a few to be used either for personal reflection (the going for Refuge) or for strengthening the community of the Sangha (Observance day meetings and recitations). However, subsequent to the Parinibbana, Buddhist ritual has developed out of and far beyond these forms. Even in the grass roots movement of forest monasticism, ritual continues to play its part. So we can ask: "What is its relevance to the West?"

Ritual is something that works on an irrational basis and therefore cannot be fully explained. It has the power to stimulate the essential quality of faith, saddha.

Unlike India at the time of the Buddha, our age is not over-saturated with religious ritual. We espouse rationality, and materialist perceptions of function and efficiency rule the day. Yet irrational pursuits - such as sport, entertainment or romance - still carry a lot of charisma and motivating energy. While putting flowers on a shrine may be seen as pointless, kicking a ball into a net certainly isn't. Games are enactments of social and individual ritual; they empower the person or the group, and connect them to a feeling of worth and relevance in the order of things. Unfortunately, the materialist order of things is an unsatisfactory one, and so the irrational cannot always be satisfied by socially acceptable games; then its dark side manifests as delinquent or perverse behaviour. Even at its best, ritual that is purely secular in its aims brings

us only to the point where the power of the individual or the group is emphasised as separate from everything else. But religious ritual takes us further, out of ourselves and into the Absolute. If it is authentic, religious ritual empowers the group or the individual, not in and for themselves but as part of something vast and timeless.

The secular error is to deny that the symbolic, irrational plane exists or that it has any bearing on Ultimate Truth. We may either go along with it in a passive timorous way (not wishing to offend) or reject it as unnecessary formality. However, ritual is something that works on an irrational basis and therefore cannot be fully explained. It has the power to stimulate the essential quality of faith *saddha*, as well as awe and rapture *piti* and gladness *pamojjha*: factors that are complementary to the arousing of the mind to true collectedness and insight. Without these, meditation has to rely on the very ego power that it is aiming to transcend. Although one should be shifting to a higher centre, the ego can't find a higher centre than what it wants or needs or is going to be - none of which is very inspiring or gladdening. While there are other ways to get these spiritual energies going - such as having an inspiring teacher or a powerful reflective mind - the main point of ritual is that it can uplift a lot of people together, with the tremendous benefit of bonding a community.

So, right ritual. Temples or stupas formed an integral part in the monasteries that developed to become the normal establishment of what had hitherto been a peripatetic fellowship. They were the place for the kindling and firing up of spiritual energy in its irrational aspect. The rituals enacted therein would form a powerful focus and reminder of the path, particularly for the lay people who might have less occasion for direct contact with, and immersion into, the vision of the spiritual life. Even the form of the ritual structure had its meaning. Temples, like churches and mosques, reach upward and are structured to have a large proportion of non-functioning space. No matter what their actual size, they have an inner vastness. For a theist, this is an intuition of the Absolute Deity: for a Buddhist, it is a reference to the Unconditioned. In either case, the temple's space silences the mind and engenders the awe that allows us to see things symbolically. Then the ritual can reach the right place within us, and the goodness, the gentleness, or the aspiration that we enact acquires a sacred strength.

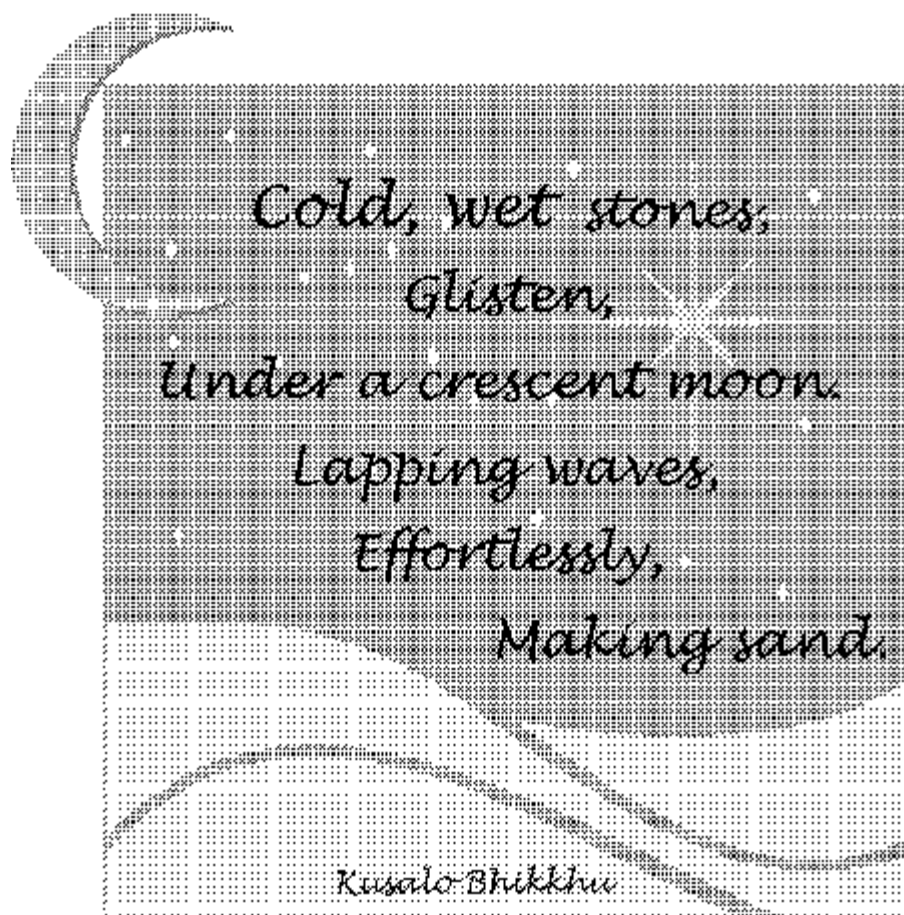
A temple has to be a structure, because space can only be witnessed within the structure that contains it, just as the Law, the conventions, guide us to Ultimate Truth. As we open in the sensitivity of meditation, that defined space may be conducive to the fine balance of open-mindedness and restraint, of freedom and deliberate limitation that stimulates transcendence.

Let's not devalue the grounded pragmatism of our approach. But also let's approach it with a mind of vision. Create the sacred space, raise the temple, and make it work. Whatever size it may be in literal terms, let it be vast inside to reflect on something limitless within us that our conditioned thoughts and perceptions overlook.

Ajahn Sucitto

Amaravati 10th anniversary packs:

A limited number of the commemorative packs produced for the tenth anniversary celebrations are still available. The pack includes reflections from Ajahns Viradhammo and Sucitto, a transcribed talk by Ajahn Sumedho, "Noticing the Space" information on: the Upasika training programme and the Amaravati Support Network and comments on retreats and children's activities. Please send a stamped (65g. - UK = 29p) SAE (big enough to take A5 folder) to Amaravati.



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SIGNS OF CHANGE

Venerable Master Hua:

Just as the Newsletter was going to print, we received word that Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua, Chairman of the Sino-American Buddhist Association and founder of many monasteries and Dharma centres throughout the West Coast of America and Canada, had passed away. He was 77 years old.

The Venerable Master was born in N.East China, took shramanera precepts at the age of 19 and after the upheaval of the Second World War entered the bhikshu Sangha. From an early age, the Master cultivated remarkable determination, practising by his mother's grave for three years without lying down. He maintained this austere practice throughout his life and made it one of the training standards of the monasteries that he founded.



Having received Dharma transmission from the Venerable Master Hsu Yun, he began serving the Sangha in various teaching functions, spending a decade in Hong Kong where he established and supported several temples. It was in 1962 that the Master came to California, speaking no English, but determined to set the Dharma wheel rolling. When conditions were ripe, he undertook detailed sutra instruction (sessions could last for three months or more), gave bhikshu and bhikshuni ordination and established Gold Mountain Monastery in San Francisco.

From this seed, a vigorous growth has taken place. Supporters and disciples of Amaravati will remember Ajahn Sumedho's reports of the Master, and descriptions of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The vows and practices of the Master's disciples give some hint of the Master's own stature: apart from their standard of austere practices, all residents of the monasteries support the full routine of pujas and study, while many are involved with the massive project of translating the entire Chinese Tripitaka and commentaries into English. Bhikshus and bhikshunis have visited Cittaviveka and Amaravati several times. In 1984, we welcomed four bhikshus on their world tour, two of whom had undertaken a two-year 'bowing pilgrimage' from their monastery in Los Angeles to the City in Northern California.

In 1990, the Master himself visited Britain with an entourage of bhikshus and bhikshunis. Members of our Sangha have visited the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas several times and been received with great hospitality; in fact the Master on more than one occasion has offered

facilities for our practice, and even residences for us to establish monasteries, one of his avowed intents being a rapprochement between the Mahayana and Theravada traditions. Ajahn Sumedho, who was visiting the West Coast when the Master passed away, has been invited to the funeral which will be held over July 26th - 28th.

Rains Retreat in California:

As part of the slow but sure development of a Theravadan forest meditation monastery in Northern California, four bhikkhus will spend the Rains Retreat in seclusion at Bell Springs Hermitage, a 170 acre site high in the hills of Mendocino County, 165 miles north of San Francisco.

Such a rural retreat is the ideal environment for the cultivation of formal meditation practice. It is also the very type of situation that is envisaged for the eventual establishment of a permanent forest monastery in Northern California. Since it is not yet possible for the Sangha to commit itself to a long-term establishment, this temporary arrangement for the coming Rains will both provide an alternative retreat location for the monastic community, under the overall guidance of Ajahn Sumedho, and, perhaps more importantly, give the West Coast Buddhist community an opportunity to help support and experience first-hand the pattern of life of Theravadan forest monasteries.

The monks participating in the retreat will be: Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Thanavaro (taking a well-earned respite from his Dhamma work in Italy), Ven. Sugato (who will continue on to New Zealand to take up residence there after the Vassa), and Ven. Khemarato. Along with them will be a small number of lay helpers; some resident for the whole retreat, some for shorter periods. The living conditions on the retreat site will be quite rustic and the land can only support about 10-15 people at any one time due to the small water supply from the local springs. The bhikkhus and the lay helpers on the retreat will all be living in tents, caravans and a couple of 'yurts', so it will be an ideal opportunity to develop formal meditation practice in the simplest of living conditions. It is also significant that the bhikkhus will be solely on retreat for the three months and will not have any teaching duties during this time - the Buddhist community of California being glad to simply support them in their spiritual endeavours.

Further information about the retreat may be obtained Tel. (415) 455-5879.

Jill Osler 'Retires':

Jill Osler writes on her 'retirement' from the Retreat Centre.

Dear Retreatants and Friends,

Many, many thanks for your generosity and kindness in giving me such an amazing gift (UKL 1500) for my sabbatical. It was a complete surprise when it arrived in the post to-day (19th May).

As many of you know, I decided to take a sabbatical because I was about to become a grandmother - I now have a grandson - my house needed a lot of attention after eight years neglect and I wanted a bit of 'space'. In March I did a self retreat in the mountains of Spain and it was then that I realised the benefits of more solitude; I took stock of my age - 60 this May - and knew it was time to stop being so busy. Thus my sabbatical has turned into 'retirement' from being the Retreat Centre Manager. However I shall certainly be around Amaravati, as helper and supporter, as long as I am able and so I very much hope to still be seeing you all.

It has been such a good eight years for me, with the opportunity to be part of the Amaravati community and serving the Retreat Centre. I really have loved loving you all!

I am deeply grateful to the Sangha and lay people for all the help and support I have received. It truly has been a wonderful experience to be the facilitator for all the generosity, skill, time and talent of so many people.

So - THANK YOU everyone - it is so good to feel your warmth and appreciation. I shall use the money you have given me to return to the mountains of Spain for a much longer

period of self-retreat over the next two years which is something I feel will be truly beneficial for me - bodily, spiritually and mentally; and so, thank you once again for making all this possible.

With much love,

Jill

