



FOREST SANGHA newsletter

January 1988

2530

Number 3

THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

Wood Hammered at Chithurst

When Britain was hit by a hurricane in the middle of October, West Sussex was right on target. Ajahn Anando describes some of the storm's effects.

That evening I looked at the barometer -- it was right at the bottom. I thought: "Either it needs adjusting, or we're really in for a storm". I went to sleep. Two hours later I woke up -- the kuti was moving!

...Everything was vibrating in the house. Mahesi had the window open -- it faces West and the wind was coming from the South-west. His description was: "We woke up and the room was alive, it was heaving:" He rushed to the window to close it as it was blown from its hinges, and he caught it just as it fell. Everyone was awake, there was just so much noise...

When it became light it was still quite windy. I walked around to see. I had feelings that the big cedar in the corner of the walled garden would go, and I was just very pleased that the wind was from the South-west. It fell into the garden: had the winds come from the other direction, the Southeast, then it would have fallen towards the house. I think it would have stopped at the ground floor! Half the bhikkhu Sangha would either be in hospital, or ashes spread about the grounds. Venerable Thanuttamo was living in the garden kuti -- he left after the third tree crashed down. Eight trees have fallen there: it looks like a bomb went off.

We spent the morning with chainsaws, tractor and trailer, cutting our way out -- just to the entrance of the monastery. Then all the rest of the day, from right after the meal until it was dark, we spent clearing our way down to the nuns' cottage.

With the loss of many oaks, we gathered up quite a number of acorns and have started a little tree nursery.

We have all of the necessary materials....

There were about eight trees down on the lane, enormous ones: we have enough firewood for the next five years. The following day we finished clearing, or widening, the roadway from the monastery out to the main road.

It will take months to clear all of the grounds. With the large oaks that have blown down, we'll trim them and either leave them in place or move them to one side -- they can be planked later on. So it's quite likely that when we get around to rebuilding the coach-house there will be a lot of oak panelling in there!

We lost about a hundred tiles from the house and some gutters were broken. We're very fortunate because we have people who can repair things like that -- and we have a supply of tiles. None of us thought very much about it, but on the day after the storm Anagarika Nick went up and replaced almost all of the tiles.

Of course we didn't have any electricity or telephone. The telephone was down for ten days and the electricity, strangely enough, came on for the afternoon of the Kathina.

With the loss of many oaks, we gathered up quite a number of acorns and have started a little tree nursery. We have all of the necessary materials because of the Wild Flower Project. Once the acorns have sprouted and grown to a height of just a few inches, they can then be planted directly into the forest with one of those tree guards, so it isn't the somewhat laborious procedure that one has to follow with wild flowers. There seems to be a real willingness to help, because it's rather sad to see so many beautiful trees down.

We have "Forest Days" on the last Sunday of each month and a planting already scheduled for the first three weeks of December -- only a small plantation, 250 trees.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

Serpentine, Western Australia

We don't hear so much from the Sangha at Bodhinyana Monastery, Western Australia; so when Chris Banks, who has stayed there from time to time, sent us a brief letter, we asked her to write a little more.

As the warm red sun sets in the Western sky, through the thick bush it is common to see the gentle kangaroos with their "joeys" quietly hopping down to the dam to drink, unafraid of the orange-robed monks walking to the meditation hall for the evening sit. This quiet scene can slow you down after a busy day labouring on a building site or teaching in the city.

In November the Sangha will be bidding farewell to Venerable Brahmavamso, who, along with Ajahn Jagaro, has worked tirelessly to establish Bodhinyana Monastery at Serpentine. Venerable Brahmavamso has coordinated and worked on every building programme at the monastery and always seems to have a trowel in one hand, hammer and nails in the other! Also he cheerfully teaches, on a regular basis at the Buddhist Society, schools, colleges and local prisons. At the monastery, he has taken on the responsibilities of teaching the Vinaya to all. He will be "holidaying" in England, visiting his family and monasteries before returning to us next winter -- we hope. En route to England he will be visiting the NE of Thailand with Venerable Thanavaro. During his absence, the hard working Sangha will hopefully build a number of much needed brick kutis (to keep out the heat!). Also, the enormous task of finishing the large sala lies ahead now the Rains Retreat is over.

Being opposite a park and only ten minutes from the city of Perth, we feel it is a real gem!

The Sangha is truly grateful to receive Ajahn Sumedho for a three-week stay at Bodhinyana Monastery in November. The Sangha will be in complete retreat for these precious three weeks, but shortly after Ajahn Sumedho's arrival in November, our new city centre will be officially opened. The Governor Of Western Australia (our Queen's representative!) and many leaders of our state will be present -- along with many more local Dhamma friends. The new centre at 18 Nanson Way Nallamara 6061 was purchased from the Anglican Church in June. It comprises a large church hall with an extended kitchen, toilet block, noticeboard area and even an extra room at the rear for visiting nuns.

The house next door has four bedrooms for the monks, an office for the Buddhist Society Committee, a growing library, and a family room off the kitchen. The

band of willing workers, using a lot of elbow-grease and paint, have decorated and carpeted the new hall and house in less than six week-ends! Being opposite a park and only ten minutes from the city of Perth, we feel it is a real gem! The hall is used every Friday night for meditation and Dhamma talks and again on Saturday afternoon and evening.

A year has passed, since the arrival of Ajahn Gunhah and Venerable Jundee. (Ajahn Gunhah is a cousin of Ajahn Chah.) These two very peaceful Thai monks have had a wonderful calming effect on the Sangha and lay visitors. Although not actively teaching, their impeccable quiet manner is ' an example to all of us of how the Buddha must have behaved.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

Looking for the Sweet One

The following teaching is adapted from a Friday night Dhamma talk by Ajahn Jagaro at the Perth Vihara on 7th June, 1985, in a response to the question "What is happiness"?

Happiness is something close to the heart of everybody. We all want to be happy. Happiness in the normal sense means that you always get what you want, when and how you want it. This is very difficult because so many things are beyond our control. The weather, one's appearance, health, relationships, one's meditation, so many things we cannot control. One's striving for worldly happiness seems constantly hindered. Where is this happiness? How can we possibly be happy when everything is in this state of uncertainty and constant change. We may spend all our lives seeking for it and finding disappointment. If you are a fortunate person with good conditioning and positive states of mind you may be happy most of the time. However there is always the opposite, when things are not as you want them to be, when the mind doesn't do what you want it to do, when people are not as you want them to be, and naturally the opposite emotions and feelings, which we call unhappiness, will arise. Unhappiness has to be there as long as there is happiness.

Even when you are getting what you want, maybe you can be ninety per cent happy, but still there is that ten per cent at the back of the mind

It is like Nasrudin, the wise man who acted like a fool, or maybe he was a fool who acted like a wise man. He was sitting with this big bag of little red chillies, -- very hot! Tears are streaming down his face and he is panting and crying and eating chillies. An old friend comes by and asks "Nasrudin, what are you doing there eating all those really hot chillies?" Nasrudin, between gasps for air and wiping away his tears and blowing his nose, managed to say "I'm looking for the sweet one."

And so we continually look for the sweet one, continually seek happiness in the conditioned, and we haven't found a sweet one yet. Even when you are getting what you want, maybe you can be ninety per cent happy, but still there is that ten per cent at the back of the mind that's a little bit concerned, a little bit afraid, a little bit possessive. Underneath you know it can't last! That nagging fear leads us to a spiritual path, to seek an alternative source of happiness.

In Buddhism we are striving for a different sort of happiness. Do you think there can be a happiness and a joy in the mind which is self contained, independent of all conditions and perceptions, completely independent of

anything whatsoever. This is the happiness of the Buddha. This is Nibbana, the happiness of Enlightenment and nonattachment, the happiness of no limitations, the happiness of no self.

When you stop having an invested interest in conditions and results, you are not burdened by anything. When one is not burdened, the mind is at peace, it is naturally joyful and happy. The Buddha was a shining example of this happiness. From my own experience of having met many great meditation Masters they share this quality of inner tranquillity, despite the inability to control conditions and events.

When I went to live with Ajahn Chah at first I was amazed and then I was quite upset to see how he ran his monastery. I expected him to have a really tight control over everything, keep the monks- in line, keep the lay people out of the way, have a regular timetable. But Ajahn Chah didn't do anything like that at all. Things would continually change in the monastery, sometimes we would meditate in the morning, sometimes we would chant, then for a month or so we would do a lot of formal practice, then we would work, continually flowing with the conditions. I began to realise that Ajahn Chah didn't go out of his way to control and regulate conditions. Everybody wanted him to have a timetable and he just never kept to them, he never turned people away. If they didn't come then he was perfectly happy to be alone. He didn't bother to control events, yet if I have ever met a joyful happy person it was Venerable Ajahn Chah. Not because he was always laughing, although he did laugh a lot, but he just had this joy about him, whatever he was doing. He wasn't seeking anything from anybody, wasn't trying to control things in order to be happy.



In Buddhism we are interested in freedom, the freedom of non-attachment. We carry around an immense burden of attachment to everything we consider me and mine, like a big heavy stone on our shoulders. When a wise person points out to us that we could throw off this burden we regard them with suspicion. "Throw it off? Then I wouldn't have anything left! I couldn't do that!" Thinking they will bring us happiness we continue to lug around our personal investments and self interests, this great big heavy burden! The Buddha taught that nothing is worth attaching to. Do not attach to anything, that will bring true peace and happiness. Reflect on the process of what we call suffering. What it really is. How it arises. Only then can one begin to appreciate what attachment really is, what the result of attachment is and begin to glimpse the idea and Possible results of non-attachment.

Attachment is something we create in the mind. When we let go we begin to experience the silent empty mind. This still, peaceful mind can be found when sitting in meditation. Is it possible to bring it also into our daily lives? Can we live as ordinary people with this non-attachment? There is one vital factor needed if we wish to live skillfully and that factor is mindful awareness. This factor of knowing, of being present is essential if we wish to go beyond our continual stream of thinking, projecting, analyzing and reacting. It is difficult, isn't it? Without awareness we are locked into a stale conditioning, like a monkey with its paw

stuck in the biscuit jar, all it has to do to become free is let go but this is just what it won't do. Actually non-attachment is not something you have to do, all you have to do is stop attaching. This is natural for the enlightened mind, and it is awareness which makes this a real possibility in our lives.

The Buddha taught a path, gave us a method of skilful means. Meditation is the tool to help us with the process of being present, of seeing attachment and tensions arising, of knowing when to relax and let go. The practice of meditation is very highly emphasized. The more you become aware the more you can begin to experience true peace and happiness. No need to have anything else, no need to achieve anything.

Through Enlightenment you gain nothing at all, all you do is get rid of the extras, you just put down your rock. Life is still life, there are still relationships and there is still action. The big difference is that one is perfectly at peace and there is a real and lasting happiness. So we should all make an effort with our practice. Without meditation life is very difficult, progress on the spiritual path is very hard. I once knew a German who even at that time had been a monk for fifteen years and I asked him "Do you still meditate?" and he said "Yes, I meditate regularly, I don't think it is possible to lead a spiritual life without meditation". I have always remembered that and I have always reflected on how true it is. Without the ability to calm the mind, without the ability to clear the mind, without the ability to sustain awareness and reflect and observe the nature of the mind and body, it is not possible to develop in the spiritual direction -the ultimate direction which enables us to let go, to stop seeking happiness from anything or anybody.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

Wish You Were Here

Everybody has their own notion of the ideal place and the ideal practice. Here is Venerable Sumano's.

This Phansa I've found the best way-place in the whole world. It is a Wat deep in the back country of Thailand... On one side we are walled in by a series of rugged, steep foothills; on another side by a wide and deep lake. As the sun rises behind the sala, we can just catch a glimpse of the lone village on the other side. The few fishermen never venture near this side for fear of the ghosts who are known to swamp boats and also haunt the forest on the back side of the Wat.

(Phansa: Rains Retreat, or Vassa in Thai.)

This peculiar entanglement of vegetation appears never to have been traversed. Each of the huge trees has grown in a rather deformed manner. Probably because of the challenge and conflict for space in this almost prehistoric environment, some have gone lop-sided, others concave; and all have knotty "faces" which appear animated on the days fog comes in off the lake. The extent of the forest can only be estimated by some clues and the "feel" of it: I guess it to be 15-20 miles. The sounds of tigers in the night carry over long distances and indicate sufficient territory for more than just a few of them.

... many of the samanans are seen only occasionally leaving their shelters -- when lack of nutrition requires they go to the village for alms.

On one side of the lake is a desert about 2 km across at its narrowest point. At dawn we cross that expanse to reach the small village for alms. Here we receive a few spoonfuls of rice and some wild vegetables, then the food is taken back to the Wat by the village boys, they alternate in order to gain the merit of carrying several bowls back for the monks.

There has been rain every day about 20 minutes of hard rain in the early morning. The morning, consequently, opens fresh and clear. Of the insects, it is only the butterflies who call our attention. There are 50 many of them that we need to be careful not to step on any as we walk on our meditation paths. The temperature is a stable 76 degrees F in the day and 72 degrees at night.

Of course, there is a powerful strain of malaria (ultra-malaria I call it). At this

juncture there are between 12-14 of us; we began the retreat with 20. The exact number cannot be determined as many of the samanās are seen only occasionally leaving their shelters -- when lack of nutrition requires they go to the village for alms. The Abbot comes out only fortnightly to cross the desert, bathe, and preside over the recitation of the rules of conduct. Somehow he has managed to maintain a constant weight of 35 kilos.

Aside from the rare malaria mosquito which is hardly ever seen, the other species of mosquitos are content just to bite each other - for the sport of it, I suppose.

For the few who choose to keep the Phansa schedule, the morning bell goes at 1.15 am for chanting and sitting. The 3-4 monks living under their umbrellas adjacent to the Sala maintain the schedule and leave after the 30 minutes required to haul water, dust and sweep. Everything is completed by 5.20, a few moments before the first light.

The meal of the day and the washing up of the bowls is a 15 minute process; after which those who ate in the sala sit two-and-a-half hours together before resuming the normal sitting and walking schedule. The last sitting is finished at 11 pm.

There is no one to ask about posting a letter. It never came up and no one has spoken for the past six weeks or longer. However, tomorrow marks the mid-point of -the retreat and four of the six families from the village will enter the Wat for their only opportunity of offering a meal during the retreat season. While the two remaining families watch over the bit of garden and few coconut trees which support their lives, the others will offer handwoven mats, and perhaps a box of soap powder to replace the one that ran out last month. Bar soap and toothpaste seem adequate enough. So, I will leave this for them at the staircase to the sala, possibly it will pass through many hands on its way to Bangkok for posting and then onward.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

Kathina 1987

With three Kathina Ceremonies being held within our monasteries it is pretty clear that people are finding more in this ancient custom than supplying a monk with some cloth. Here are a couple of viewpoints from Sister Candasiri and Upasika Susilo.

There is something impersonal, immensely powerful and miraculous about the unfolding of Dhamma as it touches the hearts of human beings. Year by year, we can observe this coming about through the vehicle of Sangha, which provides a container and channel for our human energies. By contrast, a few days before the Amaravati Kathina, we witnessed the untamed energy of nature, manifesting in the strongest gale in recorded history. Bringing much of the country to a standstill, it reminded us of the precariousness of our human existence.

The Kathina season is a time of reunion. During the week prior to the ceremony, bhikkhus who had spent the Rains in other monasteries began to arrive at Amaravati: bowing to pay respects, and exchanging greetings and gentle enquiries as to each other's welfare. The days were spent in quiet, purposeful activities -- tidying up, raking up leaves and twigs blown down in the storm. Lay friends began to arrive and on the evening before Kathina, the kitchen took on a particularly festive air. People gathered and began the serious business of preparing the meal which two or three hundred people were to share the following day. Bright faces and an unmistakable sense of joy pervaded the monastery.

On the morning of the ceremony, members of the monastic community and their guests rose early, and met as usual for morning chanting. Then at gruel time, we thought about what needed to be done in preparation for the events of the day. There were important messages about who should sit where, and when it was all going to happen: "Maybe someone should ring a bell!" . . .

Perhaps the best gift we can give our dear ones is to wish that their hearts be peaceful.

The Dhamma Hall was prepared as the dining place for the monks and nuns: neat rows of mats, a water jug and spitoon to one side. The big bell sounded, members of the Sangha assembled, (Although the community had swelled considerably at this time, everybody knew exactly where to sit.) The lay people came in -- many of them: "Please come and sit well forward. Don't be shy!" They bowed, the formal request was made, and each one solemnly avowed the Eight Precepts for the day -- a very special moment. Paritta chanting followed; blessings for all present, and also for absent friends and relatives. Perhaps the best gift we can give our dear ones is to wish that their hearts be peaceful . . . Then a long line of robed figures

with bared heads and feet, the customary signs of humility, filed silently past heavily laden trestle tables to receive alms food -- from old people, young people, big people, little people, Asians and Westerners. It was far more than we could eat -- enough to sustain the body for many days, rather than just one. More important than having exactly the right amount was being available to receive such offerings freely given, and the more one held back from saying: "Just a little, please", the more glad and serene one felt. Sometimes, with our Western conditioning efficient and economical to the last -- it takes us a little while to learn the ways of the heart.

The Kathina at Amaravati was billed as an "All Supporters' Kathina". Upasaka Susilo, with others Of the Bedford Group, had undertaken to offer the Kathina Cloth and to help in coordinating the offering of general requisites to the community. If, at any stage he had felt uncertain as to what it would involve, he soon found that there was nothing to worry about: the Sri Lankan, Thai, Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese communities were all - as one friend put it -- "right behind him". This was touchingly evident as the offering was made amidst a sea of clearly delighted faces gathered in the Sala -- both from far corners of the globe and from just down the road. People shared in the gladness of giving, in doing something good together. There was no prize, no reward or personal recognition, but simply the natural arising of happiness in a pure heart.

In his short address, Ajahn Sumedho encouraged us all to make good use of our situation and the opportunities which life presents us with, and stressed that the teaching is something that we can all make use of; it doesn't make any difference who we are, or where we come from -- all of us can meet in Dhamma.

The Chithurst Kathina, a week later required a great deal more preparation. The "mini-hurricane" had dealt a much more severe blow in Sussex than in Hertfordshire, so the week preceding the Kathina was taken up with preparations of a more strenuous nature. Extra help was drafted in, and from dawn until dusk the air was filled with the rasping whine of chain saws and the scent of wood smoke. The sun shone, and a couple of days before the ceremony the marquee was brought out and Ajahn Tiradhammo's voice could be heard: ". . . a little more to the left, and . . . pull . . . hold it", Fifteen pairs of hands pulled and held it, while others hammered in pegs and tied down the guy ropes . . . it was up! Then the interior design team moved in, and with coloured lanterns, carpets, banks of flowers, and streamers, set the scene for the Kathina Ceremony.

Sunday morning saw a triple circumambulation of the marquee by friends bearing gifts. The Kathina cloth was held aloft, and a large tape recorder provided a



background of Cambodian folk music. Behind the scenes, a rather tired-looking representative from the Electricity Board was still struggling with damaged cable at the top of a pole, while his companions below tried to sustain a measure of equanimity as cheerful passers-by enquired kindly as to their progress. (The final connection was made in the afternoon, just in time for the bhikkhus to plug in the machine and begin sewing the robe.)

With Mr Tan Nam as MC, no one was in any doubt as to how to proceed, he led the requests for the Precepts and the Paritta chanting and later on, directed his friends Mr and Mrs Moeng Phok in the offering of the Kathina Cloth to the Bhikkhu Sangha. This time Ajahn Sumedho expressed his intention to remain in Britain for the whole of 1988, and to devote more time to training the monks and nuns. He said that he felt a bit like the "Johnny Appleseed" of Buddhism; for ten years he has been scattering seeds far and wide, but now it is time to tend the young trees which have taken root. Young trees, given suitable conditions grow to maturity and bear fruit -- and that means more seeds, many more!

The day ended, our friends returned to their homes, the many gifts which had been offered were stored away and at nine o'clock in the evening, the freshly-sewn Kathina robe was presented to Ajahn Anando at a formal meeting of the Bhikkhu Sangha

An archaic custom? A dusty old tradition? They say that the proof of the pudding is in the eating . . . It tasted all right to me!

Susilo (Tony Cook) offered the Kathina cloth at Amaravati this year, assisted by Thai, Laotian, Cambodian and Sri Lankan friends. When he stopped in at Amaravati the other week, we asked him for a few comments.

I didn't actually see the Kathina Ceremony last year, but it seemed like a nice idea, so I went up and asked Tan Ajahn and offered. He said that he wanted to make it an international event, which was fine. There was a lot of moral support. I talked about it with the Bedfordshire Buddhist Group, and put a letter out in order to let people know what was happening. Mudita let the Thais know; Ruki let the Sri Lankans know; Tan Nam let the Cambodians know and Paw Puoy let the Laotians know. The jungle telegraph seemed to swing into operation.

It seemed like a nice thing to do, I didn't think about why. When I'd volunteered, I'd lumbered myself and that was it; I just did it. It was a very good teaching -- I learned a lot about suffering in the months beforehand! "What's going to happen? What have I got to do?" I wondered what I'd let myself in for. The idea of just letting something happen I found very difficult. This was something else I had to learn -- and it worked

Originally we were going to have a meeting about six months beforehand to see what needed doing, but in fact everything just seemed to come together in the last three weeks. Money came in from individuals and groups. I met a lot of nice people and I had a lot of encouragement from people, which was very valuable. Someone said to me quite early on in the planning stages: "Get the cloth and let everybody know -- that's all you've got to do, it will happen!" And it did. It seemed alien to our Western view where you have to plan things down to the last detail- just to actually let something happen is something else. I'll apply that to other aspects of my life as well, I think. . . .

The offering of the Kathina cloth has already been booked for the next two years at Amaravati and for 1988 at Chithurst. However, as the Comments above make clear, that's just a part of it, and there are still plenty of opportunities to participate.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

Off the Beaten Track

Venerable Kovido reports on happenings at Devon Vihara

Well, there has been quite a lot happening at Devon Vihara in the last couple of months. Despite the fact that Odle Cottage is in the middle of nowhere, at the end of a potholed road, it is quite a busy place.

So it was rather nice at the beginning of September to have the chance to slow down and shut up for a period of formal retreat. The fact that on 10 of the 12 days various lay-people gave up their time to come and offer us beautifully prepared food was a source of inspiration and gratitude for us all. Also helpful was Ajahn Kittisaro's guidance during the retreat. I would find it difficult to recall some of the "profound" insights that arose but it certainly shifted my attitude towards meditation and retreats.

After that we moved on to Supanno and Pasadaka's wedding blessing. It was quite amazing how a few pieces of material, wood and brick were able to transform that rather nondescript patch of lawn into a suitable venue for such an occasion. The other piece of magic was the marquee which was somehow able to expand the space to accommodate 60 people, 4 trestle tables and 2 shrines, with room to spare. Then after the people went away, the shrines were dismantled, the "magic tent" broken down. and the little patch of grass and Ajahn's Kuti reappeared.

... there was a willingness and openness to explore each other's traditions.

A week later 65 people came to share a meal and offer their skills on the Skills Offering day. The Vihara and grounds became a hive of activity as curtains were sewn and put up. the garden, trimmed and manicured, stones dug up and moved down the road. It was far more that we could, do in a month and done in such a harmonious and joyful way!

During September Ajahn Kittisaro started a new course of treatment -- and as a result during October was able to visit six different spiritual centres. He went to a Hindu ashram in Wales; to the Life Foundation in Birmingham, to Harnham Vihara for their first Kathina, to Hillfield Friary for an interfaith workshop, to Amaravati for the Kathina and a Theras' meeting, and to the Forest Hermitage for a weekend retreat of Buddhist Prison Chaplains.

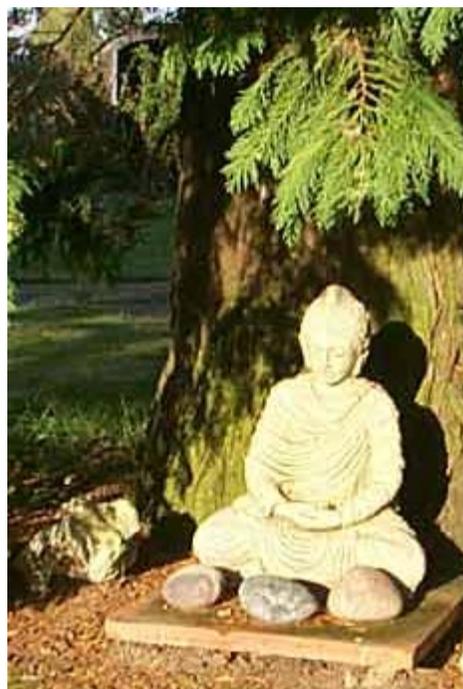
The impression of these visits was perhaps encapsulated in a meeting at Odle Cottage with Father John, a Russian Orthodox Priest, arranged by our good friend Mrs Lee. Although the outward forms seemed so different -- a married Orthodox priest and a celibate Buddhist monk

-- and the language and teachings seemingly contradictory, there was a willingness and openness to explore each other's traditions. As the discussion progressed and they started to talk about the experiences and qualities needed for the religious life, then the disparities fell away and there was a feeling of standing on the same ground.

During Ajahn Kittisaro's extensive travel and teaching engagements monastic life at Devon Vihara continued under Venerable Attapemo's skilful guidance. The routine of chanting, meditation, alms-round and work, which to those at the Vihara can become so mundane, is also the life force at the centre of the Vihara from which all these other things can emerge. In terms of work -- a few yards were added to "the road", the outside bathroom was smartened up, the well repointed, and the carpark levelled and drained -- amongst other things.

Various supporters invited the community for dana at their houses and others came to offer dana at the Vihara. These were opportunities to get to know some of the good people who make our monastic life possible.

Other such opportunities have been the fortnightly discussion group which continues with some lively exchanges of ideas and experiences which we have found helpful -- or confusing -- in our daily lives. This gave us a chance to see that often what we think is "The Way" or "Right View" is in fact one of many viewpoints, each of which can equally be a skilful means or a source of suffering, depending on the way it is used.



So that is just about it -- or almost. Yesterday, a baby blessing of Terry and Sue's daughter Fern; today a Trust meeting and another Skills Support day. Tomorrow, the Discussion Group, and the builder, comes to extend the Shrine Room.

Sometimes people say to us "Aren't you running away from the Real World?" Far from it. I don't think I have ever met so many people in my life and the curious fact is that they are all so nice. But even so, I am becoming more and more grateful for this conventional structure, with its formal meetings and meditation periods. I can see how easy it is to get overwhelmed by all the incredible important things that need to be done -- and how necessary it is at the end of the day to put aside our separate affairs and convene for the evening meeting, to chant, to bow, to sit together and for a while, in Ajahn Kittisaro's words "to stop rearranging the furniture and let the world end".

Extract from an interview with Ajahn Kittisaro from the booklet Buddhist Advice. copies of this booklet are available at the Devon Vihara.

My teacher [Ajahn Chah] said: "Regardless of time and place the whole practice of Dhamma (truth) comes to completion at the place where there is no thing, nothing. It is the place of surrender, of emptiness, of laying down the burden". We find this very useful for

contemplation, because many times we get very overwhelmed by the notion of time, the idea that we are getting somewhere, that we're becoming more and more pure, more holy, so that then we can go to Heaven, or then we can go to Nibbana, or then we can be happy. One of the fundamental principles Of the Buddhist teaching is that the Truth is always present (Akaliko Dhamma).

It's not bound in time. By putting Truth off into the future, you never get there. That's what we call endless rebirth in Buddhism, When you wake up to the present, there will still be that thought in the mind. "I want to get something then", but you're aware of that thought for what it is. You see it as a thought about time arising and passing; and being at peace with the thought as thought, the heart knows how things are. It's laying down the burden of delusion, of imagining, and bringing us back to the present. Time, the notion of tomorrow, yesterday, is something we create with our thought, but tomorrow and yesterday arise and pass away in this present moment now. The essence of religion, "religio", means to re-link, to point to that which brings you back to the source of things, to completion, to God, to the oneness, to the "coolness" (Nibbana).

In schools there is a tendency to approach Buddhism through the Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Are there any pre-requisites for the "normal" Buddhist, rather than a monastic tradition, that should be approached prior to looking at that?

You always start with generosity. When a being imagines itself to be separate, there's this habit to hold -- and to imagine by holding we're going to be happy. The whole nature of life is not to stand still; the whole nature of life is to breathe in and out, the heart beats, the blood flows, food comes in and out, the water element coming in and out. The whole essence of life is movement; and yet a mind that doesn't understand that still imagines that by maintaining and keeping it's going to be more secure, more happy. That's a fundamental mistake. The first thing the Buddha teaches, especially to children, is a very profound thing, to learn to share, to offer. It is beautiful, in Thailand, to think that children are just brought up that way. They get something and immediately they want to offer it around. It's just instinctive with them. It's very humbling. We see a lot of selfishness, of grasping in our hearts; and this is where it helps to realise "It's not mine". So much of our monastic life revolves around offering, sharing, "how can I be of help to others?", listening, offering of time, and things like that.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

New-Born

Sister Viveka was one of the women who took the ten-precept ordination at Amaravati in July. During her first Vassa as a siladhara she offered these reflections on the Going Forth.

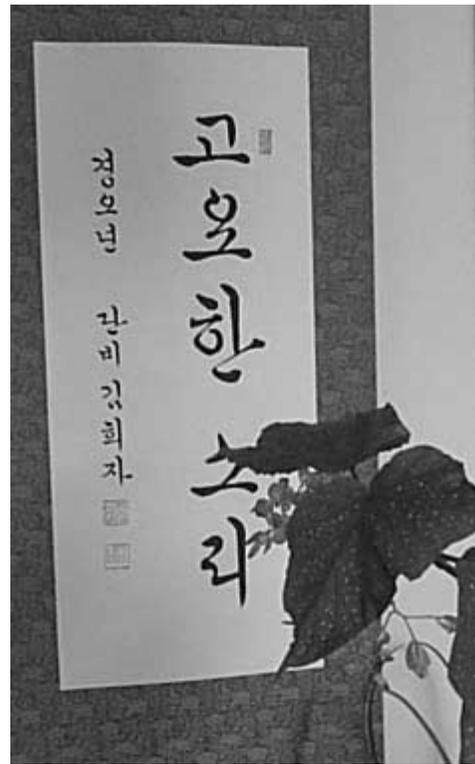
It is only 2 months since I took the Going Forth as a nun, yet life in a brown robe is certainly very different from that of an anagarika. The hustle and bustle of cooking, driving, serving, endless washing, suddenly dissolves and develops another momentum. One is no longer running ahead of oneself in a frantic battle to ensure that the material environment is OK, because control over that material plane has been relinquished. Surrender is the most constant invitation, and in numerous situations the only possibility. The monastic form, the numerous rules of deportment and behaviour are there keeping watch, checking throughout the day and helping to centre and still the restless, confused, fiery energies of an untrained mind. I must admit, a few purifying fires have raged through during my two years as an anagarika, and although there is plenty more to burn away, the preliminary flamer have made it possible to live in what can seem like a pretty tight box. (Of course there is a sense, perhaps the best word is "faith", a kind of intuitive knowledge that the box is an illusion.) Allowing oneself to be locked in also leads to the eventual discovery that the box isn't really there at all, and the freedom to gaze at the marvellous.

Now I own nothing. I have no control over providing my body with its needs for survival.

Going Forth has been the most, perhaps the only, truly wondrous experience of my life. That is not to say that life has been devoid of experiences many of which would conventionally be labelled exciting, stimulating, fascinating or even fulfilling. But looking back, everything which I did or relationship I had, left behind it the same energy with which it was approached: there was always something more to want. Now I own nothing. I have no control over providing my body with its needs for survival. Living entirely dependent on the goodness and generosity inherent in people, the joy and gratitude which fills me when someone offers me a cup of rice gruel in the morning is something I could not have imagined. Being encouraged to approach each situation with a mind of renunciation, no longer expecting to get what you want, seems to bring with it that very sense of fulfillment, of nothing more to seek, which had been so often missed.

Joy comes in many ways: walking with our empty alms-bowls to receive offerings of food for our meal,

bald as new born babies and almost as helpless, is one of the most beautiful moments of the day. Greeting the softness of the air at 4.25 am to walk to the Sala for morning puja is another precious time. I am becoming more aware of the unique quality of Sangha: the beings who have surrendered themselves to this way of life so that it has continued for 2,500 years. For those who have started their training before me; who are now guiding, supporting, correcting and inspiring all of us who are young and insecure in this life as ,samanas, I feel a growing sense of gratitude and love. Sometimes it is hard to believe that all this has happened; that I should have found such a fine and wholly good way to live, in the most unexpected place.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

Amaravati Summer Camp

"Family Days" first started in 1985, with the intention of helping the family unit -- especially children -- to come closer to the teachings of the Buddha-Dhamma and the community of Sangha. At first they were of an experimental nature, but in response to the interest shown they have developed and are now a firmly established part of life at Amaravati.

Several summer camps, both weekend and longer, have been successfully organised for families and in addition "Rainbows", a children's Dhamma magazine with a page for parents, has been published regularly at Amaravati. This has been very well received both among families and in schools.

Unfortunately, owing to increased pressure from family commitments, Medhina, who has written this account of the 1987 Summer Camp, has had to resign as the co-ordinator for family activities. Brenda Popplewell has kindly undertaken to replace her in organising next year's family activities. For further information contact "Amaravati Family Events", Amaravati.

There was a minor disturbance in the cosmos last August, when about fifty children and their parents converged on Amaravati. Gradually congregating from Wednesday until the following Monday, beings of all ages arrived from different parts of country. They came from as far away as Devon and Yorkshire, and across from Belfast; they came from different Buddhist traditions -- Theravadin, Tibetan and Zen -- with different backgrounds and ways of life, including single parents and extended families, and with a variety of expectations: yet for six days these differences dissolved as they merged into the annual community gathering known as "the Family Camp".

The camp-site filled with tents occupied by families large and small. Those without access to a canvas home were made comfortable in the rooms and dormitories of the adjacent Retreat Centre --miraculously just big enough for the number of families in need.

"What did they do for six days with so many children?" you might ask.

"Keep busy and learn a lot" is the short answer; but better than that was the joy, the sharing and inspiration that seemed to blossom out of the many activities available to all age-groups.

All these activities were taking place in a benevolent, non-competitive environment, encouraging the children to incline towards kindness, co-operation and sharing.

From the beginning, children were engrossed in creating a play to illustrate the life of the

Buddha. Everyone involved worked closely together to script, costume, rehearse and produce this grand project, which involved every child who wanted to take part.

One family came to the camp armed with the know-how and materials to make a full-sized Chinese Dragon -- the type that dances in the streets at Chinese New Year; some members became absorbed in its creation for three days. At the same time, those in the cookery group were baking special treats to offer to monks and nuns on pindabaht (alms-round).

Some children liked to join in the Morning and Evening Chanting, and in the guided meditation sessions. Art and craft workshops; crochet and embroidery on the lawn; wood-gathering expeditions; walks and play filled out the days. All these activities were taking place in a benevolent, non-competitive environment, encouraging the children to incline towards kindness, co-operation and sharing.

For many parents, the opportunities offered by the Camp provided an oasis in the desert of life in a modern materialistic society. There was the rare chance to meet with so many Dhamma-friends (practising within the form of family life); and variously-sized groups could be seen discussing anything from the workings of a motor-car, to the Meaning of Life and The Universe.

There were many opportunities for contact with the monastic community: Morning Puja in the Retreat Centre at 7.30 am; daily Dhamma reflections; meditation classes and discussions with Ajahn Sumedho or with monks and nuns; Evening Chanting with the main community in the Sala and afterwards, informal talk around the camp-fire.



Community living -- a novelty for most -- brought its own insights and joys. All shared in the practical nitty-gritty of cooking, cleaning and childcare. The monastic backdrop provided a constant reminder to use the ordinariness of these activities -- as much as any of the classes and events -- as an opportunity for cultivating the heart, so allowing the spirit of Buddha-Dhamma to transform the mundane into the wonderful.

By Sunday, dress-rehearsals for the play had reached a furious crescendo; later that evening the great golden Buddha-rupa in the Dhamma Hall witnessed a tear or two, when the children performed "The Earth is my Witness" -- in the artless way that only children can manage. Then followed the "Empowerment" of the Dragon -- magically brought to life when a monk ceremonially painted in the edges, and nine children climbed inside. It lurched determinedly out to the Stupa to the accompaniment of cacophonous percussion, all this designed to rout Mara and any of his lurking hordes. Even if Mara didn't get the message, the neighbours

surely did!

After all the excitement of the Sunday, on the final day everyone went out on a ramble through the surrounding countryside. It was a marvellously grounding exercise in preparation for returning home; the picnic that day on Hudnall Common provided a memorable picture of Sangha and lay friends sitting together with nature and sharing a few moments Of their lives on this earth.

The culmination and one of the most treasured memories of the camp was the blessing ceremony conducted by Ajahn Sumedho and the monastic community. The children began the proceedings by offering carefully-prepared trays of flowers, incense, candles and colourful paintings to the monks and nuns. A special offering, expressing the gratitude of the families, was given to Ajahn Sumedho: a "Cat Cake" made by the children.

The ceremony consisted of auspicious chanting and the symbolic sprinkling of holy water on those participating -- giving the children the go-ahead to respond with squeals and excited laughter. A long thread - used to encircle the gathering -- was divided up, everyone taking a length to tie on someone else's wrist. This was to be worn for as long as possible, as a reminder of the wonderful spirit of communion between those present.

The ceremony came to a reluctant end with Ajahn Sumedho addressing the children: "I think you've been blessed enough now, don't you?"

"NO-O-Oooooo!" came the enthusiastic response.

The Ajahn smiled. . . The camp had been a great success.



THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Wood Hammered at Chithurst; Ajahn Anando
Articles: ■ Serpentine, Western Australia; Chris Banks
 ■ Looking for the Sweet One; Ajahn Jagaro
 ■ Wish You Were Here; Venerable Sumano
 ■ Kathina 1987; Sister Candasiri & Upasika Susilo
 ■ Off the Beaten Track; Venerable Kovido
 ■ New-Born; Sister Viveka
 ■ Amaravati Summer Camp; Medhina
Editorial: ■ The Way the Wind Blows; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

EDITORIAL

The Way the Wind Blows

For most people, New Year begins on January 1st but for us the seasons are not so closely tethered. The end of Vassa in October is something of a reference point, but radical changes occur at their own time, the old drops away, and the new situation arises with its own inevitability. Like the hurricane that blew through in October's third week, life changes are unpredictable and immeasurable. You view them afterwards, marvel at what survived, puzzle over what went down and proceed with a sense of wonder.

It was the first Vassa for four new bhikkhus and two new siladhara, and the presence of new aspiration and commitment is always a rejuvenation for the Sangha as a whole. It was also the first Vassa in Britain for two Thai bhikkhus from Wat Sanghatahn, and Venerable Kassapo from Wat Pah Nanachat. There were the losses too: Sister Rocana passed way in New Delhi in March, Venerable Bodhinando went to New Zealand in the spring, Venerable Thitapanno left for Thailand in December; and two bhikkhus disrobed. However Ajahn Sumedho, reviewing the gear at the English Sangha Trust's AGM, seemed pleasantly surprised by the way the wind has blown:

With Sangha you have people committed to the life style
of Dhamma-Vinaya, and then within that country you
have the opportunity to make that commitment.

I want to express my appreciation for the past decade because it has been a very inspiring time for me. To see the growth of the Sangha in this country is something that really touches my heart. I didn't expect it. I didn't think it would grow to the extent it has in ten years. . . . There are men and women of all ages, of all nationalities coming to study, to practise and to take the precepts; and these people are benefitting from their life here in a way that proclaims the validity and truth of the Dhamma.... Sometimes they feel like failures or they go through disillusionment, but their intention is not coming from emotion or inspiration, but from deliberation. It's a deliberate choice to live in a way in which they can realize that goal of liberation from all ignorance.

One of the more recent developments has been a studied overhaul of the Sangha's administration. The Theras (senior bhikkhus) used to meet occasionally to talk things over, but this year has seen the formalization of a Thera Council to give guidance to the Trust. At Amaravati a nucleus of lay administrators has been established to implement decisions and manage works, accounts, retreats and publications. In characteristic "jump in at the deep end"

fashion, their first job will be to run Amaravati during the January-March monastic retreat, aided by the people who've decided to come and help out.

Tan Ajahn also spoke of future developments overseas: meditation groups that have been associated with the teaching of this sangha seem to be moving out of the "retreat" mode into the "advance" of a deeper commitment. The Swiss vihara is due to open in May, and there have been invitations to set up viharas in the USA. Commented Ajahn Sumedho: There is an awakening to the need for Sangha; and this is quite different from a meditation retreat. With Sangha you have people committed to the life style of Dhamma-Vinaya, and then within that country you have the opportunity to make that commitment.

"When you've got a big fire on your hands, you'd better call for the Fire Brigade" was the way that some of our future American supporters put it when they stopped over in the summer. Next year, Ajahn Sumedho will be teaching in California in March, and Ajahn Sucitto in Massachusetts in May: before long it seems likely that the tickets will be one-way.

This year the wild flowers were planted at Chithurst, and trees in Hammer Wood; another few yards of the road to the Devon Vihara were paved; the construction of further living quarters at Harnham got off to a good start; and at Amaravati it was plenty of everything. Now another year borne along by Dhamma sheds its busy-ness. The skies darken early; monks and nuns swell visibly with winter clothing; hammers, saws, and lawnmowers enter their final stage of activity before the winter retreat: time to be still. May your New Year be as pleasant as the world will allow; and as peaceful as your practice can make it.

Ajahn Sucitto

Swing

These pine trees teach us
to gently sway in hard times
patient with our growth.

Quieting this mind
to hear only sweet silence

that is our being.

Joseph Ciarlo

