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Boundary of Freedom

In this Dhamma talk, the first to be given in the new temple at Amaravati, Ajahn Sucitto, using the image of space enclosed, points to the use of inner and outer restraint for understanding the nature of mind and our relationship to the whole.

This is the first public Dhamma talk to be given here; then tomorrow there will be the Kathina, people coming together, bringing a sense of delight in the Dhamma as we share our common aims and aspirations. So these are great ways to inaugurate this temple. The temple is also the sima, which means it has a boundary within which we can give full ordinations, that also makes it a special place - it's a consecrated place.

The word, 'temple', itself is from a Latin word for a place that people would regard as holy and within which you would contemplate. So 'temple' and 'contemplate' go together; to contemplate means to stand inside a temple and to observe the movements of nature. That's a very appropriate way to consider what we do here: we observe the world of nature – the things that arise and cease in the mind, the comings and goings - not to be fascinated by them but to observe their pattern. We are trying to see what it (the pattern) shows us. That is going to be different for everybody, people will be watching different things dependent on their own kamma, but the beauty of it is that the flow of the process has a unity - even though it's diverse in form, it has a unity in terms of its meaning. The meaning seen inside a Buddhist temple is that the pattern of nature tends towards Dhamma, towards liberation. Here we really are able to contemplate the movements of nature. This particular building can help us to do that, and we try to fulfill contemplation, through using the Buddha's skillful means. His Dhamma is to create our own temple, our own place of refuge in our hearts, where we can observe what's coming and going, and derive meaning from it.

We can assume that you can just do this by kind of opening up or relaxing or being natural, but actually the process of contemplation is a very fine discipline and it requires boundaries. So then sense restraint has a higher purpose than just something ideological; it's about

sustaining factors that lead to awakening.

I think it's useful just to remember how such a refuge is created. We can assume that you can just do this by kind of opening up or relaxing or being natural, but actually the process of contemplation is a very fine discipline and it requires boundaries. You have to set something up. This takes quite a bit of effort, it takes skill and fundamental practices which should never be discarded. It's a sign of a decline in our value system that some of the basic practices that the Buddha taught don't naturally resonate with us. We resonate to ideas like love, freedom, liberation, enlightenment - but the experience of these is based on sense restraint (samvara) which as an idea may have a slightly choking feel. Another basic standard is hiri-ottappa, which is often translated as a sense of fear of blame, or of doing things that are wrong. Then there is faith (saddha), which people often think is some kind of belief or fuzzy hope. Yet if you consider these terms and understand what they mean, you see how you can't really get by without them.

One thing that causes the destruction of Dhamma is when there's no sense of hiri-ottappa. Hiri-ottappa is regarded as the guardian; if people have no sense of conscience, sensitivity, or concern whether things hurt or affect other people, if there is no realisation that their acts and deeds stain their lives or bless their lives, then there are not going to be any values. If there are no values there's no firmness; if there's no firmness, there's no boundary, no discipline and no sense of aim or purpose. It's just self-interest that prevails. In society you can see that there is a force that continually erodes the sense of hiri-ottappa; it is self-gratification, and it destroys people's sense of personal authority or integrity, they become dissolute with no firmness, sense of purpose or effort or ability to rise up. Sense restraint or samvara is that which enables us to find a balance. This sense of balance may be a better way of considering sense restraint, because there's a puritan, repressive element in the culture and, so when we think of a term like sense restraint, many people interpret this as a fanatical asceticism. Because of this, some people regard Buddhist monasticism as a bit soft. They can think, "Well they've got a car, they've got heating and they have hot showers; What kind of monks are these? What kind of nuns are these? They wear socks! If they were really serious then they'd just be eating dry bread and a bowl of soup, and shivering and freezing and totally joyless - the way a good religious person should be." People who have no intention themselves of ever doing any of these things are able to project such fantasies upon religious orders! However, the Buddha specifically and continually kept refuting that view, stating that practice is not about asceticism, but about balance, finding a balance, knowing a balance.

When you see the way in which samvara or balanced sense restraint is supposed to be sustained, it becomes clearer; there are five factors* that should sustain samvara. One is a sense of one's moral training (the precepts), one is mindfulness, one is insight knowledge, one is patience and one is a sense of persistence - to keep going at it. So that gives a very different flavour of what samvara is about, it means that actually you are using sensory input to establish mindfulness, moral standards and insight. So then sense restraint has a higher purpose than just something ideological - it's about sustaining factors that lead to awakening. Otherwise people can practise various kinds of restraint which aren't necessarily restraint dependent on mindfulness, insight, patience and persistence - they may do it dependent upon guilt or fear or aversion, or things which are directly unwholesome.

The areas in which restraint is to be developed are also significant. There's restraint in terms of the precepts; restraint in terms of one's livelihood - that is; we are not greedy and obsessive in our livelihood, we are not looking to be the top or the supreme power or the richest; restraint in terms of what requisites one uses, one's appetite if you like for the basic necessities of life; and, most significantly, the thing which covers all the rest of it is restraint over what are called indriya.

Indriya literally mean the things that lead or dominate. These are the senses - the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, the sense of touch, and of course the mind. Then there are the psychological factors of mind such as happiness, unhappiness, energy or lack of it. Even things like femininity and masculinity are considered to be things that we may be dominated by; if we're led by femininity then we're women, if we're led by masculinity we're men. So restraint over the indriya means that you're not emphasising, or being obsessed with femininity or masculinity, either in yourself or another person, or any kind of stereotype or archetype. Such identification always leads to an imbalance - to a lack of mindfulness, a lack of insight, a lack of patience, a lack of real fruition - it just creates further conflicts.

As you practise with samvara, with restraint, it actually gets you in touch with what you're really experiencing. All you've got, actually, from day one is sense input: the five external senses and the mind, and everything else is really coming through that. That's what you're in touch with, and whatever your religion, culture or philosophy, you've always got to come back to those sense channels. So if you're developing a sense of balance with them, you're getting right up close to those channels and being responsible for them, witnessing them. You're aware of what they do, you notice when you're being carried away with them or shutting them down, you're aware of trying to find the right balance to be able to be mindful, listen, receive and not be obsessed. You could even summarise practice as just that much, as really skillfully employing this factor of samvara.



Of course as you get to learn about it and feel it out, you find that the beauty of establishing the boundary of sense restraint is that you can drop all the other boundaries. The 'other' boundaries are 'me' and 'you' and are marked with fear and worry, with what 'I' want and pleasure; with death and otherness, known and unknown. Some people are such a mass of boundaries that there's no space left in the temple of their mind. So of course for someone like that it's very difficult to take on the idea of establishing more restraint; already they've used a boundary as part of the process of fragmentation and division and are barely aware of it. So it's important to be clear about what samvara is about, it's not there to divide, to repress, to avoid, but to establish a clear space. It's like these temple walls: you could say they shut other things out, but that isn't their main purpose. Their main purpose is to establish this space which is suitably peaceful for contemplation. And that's what sense restraint's about - it establishes a kind of inner authority.

It's really sad when you see the results of this faculty being so little spoken of or cultivated in the world. There are many people who have no foothold, no authority, no personal dignity, no calm space in themselves, they're just blown around and possessed by whatever particular energy passes through the mind. As restraint gets worn down or ignored by a culture you begin to see the results - a lot of delinquency and motiveless, meaningless violence.

Somebody picks up an automatic rifle and goes down and sprays a shopping mall, wipes out thirty people. Why? They didn't know them; they were just overwhelmed by some kind of fantasy or fear or bitterness. In this century, the number of totalitarian regimes there have been that have just wiped out millions and millions of people, maybe fifty million people or more. That's a lot of people. Somebody gets power and they don't have any balance, so all that power just goes into self; but the self is flawed, paranoid - it needs power. When a mind that has no balance, no ability to experience some sense of inner harmony or harmony with other beings or with the world, it has to seek power and a position; it does this by repudiating everybody else. You can see this pattern occurring: from the level of the spoilt child who has never heard the word 'no', who's never been contained or taught to contain themselves - to the power-mad politician who has got an army behind him and thinks that the word 'no' doesn't apply to them any more. The result of this kammic trend is human bodies that are fitted with sense faculties but not really in the human level of consciousness, in the spiritual sense of the word; just beings possessed by demons, by hungry ghosts, by fear, anger and bitterness. Why? They have sense faculties like everybody else, they have minds, they have happiness and unhappiness like everybody else; they can think, dream and want like everybody else but there's no ability to handle it, so it just takes over and blows them apart. So this matter of sense restraint is a very significant one. Finding the balance makes us human, it makes us value being human and rejoice in it; it enables us to see each other as humans and rejoice in that.

The whole sense of Sangha is that we live within a certain sense of definition and restraint - but it's not a restraint that is supposed to shut people down, or to cause repressive fragmentation. The word, Sangha, means 'assembly', or that which sticks together. So you can use it very specifically - you can say 'Bhikkhu Sangha' or 'Samana Sangha' - or you can talk about the Sangha of the four kinds of disciples of the Buddha: lay women, lay men, the nuns, the monks; or you can talk about it as the company of those who have practised and are firmly committed to practice. In general, it means a kind of bonding and an empathy experience. So the whole aim of Sangha is that within whatever personal discipline, restraint and responsibility we are taking on, we are also learning to let go of the inner boundaries, the 'me' and 'you'; we are trying to learn to share and to listen to each other, to empathise, respect and be sensitive to each other. These things are fundamental.

When we talk about the monastic form then, actually, this is the monastic form; monastic form is sense restraint, sharing and kindness. Mendicancy means that we live in a relationship with lay people; we take dependence, we live in a relationship with each other; we live a life of sense restraint. We live according to Vinaya - that's monastic form, it's just that. Yet often when people talk about monastic form, they say it's about hierarchy; they say it's about being junior or senior. Then you actually begin to see it like that, and use it as something that emphasises divisions, say, between men and women and, 'I want what he or she has got.' The mind is able to throw up smoke screens of resentment and frustration. And something in us creates smoke screens to cloak its own foolishness, its own belief that somehow or another following instinct is going to make me happier or more free. But it doesn't. The instinctive perception creates a separation between 'me' and 'you', 'me' and 'the world', 'me' and 'it'; I am one side of it, and something I want is outside of me so I have to go and get it. Then when I've got it there'll be something else I can want that is outside of me. Pleasure is a boundary. Pain is also a boundary - I don't want, so I have to create a wall to separate myself from it. Basically, the boundary that is continually established is 'self' and 'world', and that self is either trying to find something in the world, trying to establish its own world, or trying to get away from the world; it's neither happy within it nor happy without it.

As meditators, as contemplatives, our practice is to experience how 'the world' and the 'self' arise; what gives rise to the feeling of 'me' as somehow distinctly separate from everything else, and how that supports the experience of the world as something out there. Pleasure and

pain, loss and gain, fear, worry, need and time - all these forces create this in the mind. Yet when you actually experience them in the moment, then it's just this - it's not 'me' in here and 'them' out there - it's just this particular experience of consciousness.

When you feel very self-conscious or frightened, the world takes on a particular characteristic that is hostile, it's threatening; or the self can feel inadequate or guilty or foolish. Or maybe it's the other way round, and the world is delightful, exciting, fascinating, thrilling; it can take on that particular quality, and when it's like that the sense of self is excited, stimulated, bonded to it and we want more of it. You can see that what strengthens the sense of 'the world' and the 'self' is some kind of obsessive passion that takes over - that becomes the indriya; and the boundaries it creates make us feel locked up, shut out or confused. That is the boundary that you are learning to do without; you can work against it. Sense restraint gives you the tools and the facilities to be able to do that - it breeds virtue and mindfulness and insight and patience and right effort.

The other thing about sense restraint and about Sangha is that it's a personal responsibility. This needs to be emphasised, because we tend to feel that such things are expected of us. We can make restraint into socialised behaviour patterns which are supported by approval or disapproval; you get punished or looked down upon if you do this or if you don't do that. You end up feeling that any kind of restraint is something that is enforced by an element of fear or guilt or social disapproval; rather than taking it as a personal responsibility, you see it as something you do when people are watching. But of course if it is like this it is of very little value, because it is not supported by mindfulness or insight.

One can recognise, certainly in religious life, that a good many people practise restraint from that particular angle. Then when the doors are unlocked the sense restraint is abandoned, because it is only there to impress the group or because of the fear of punishment. But when taken personally and responsibly, when we can find balance through it, then we begin to recognise what personal authority really means - as distinct from power. When you have restraint over the indriya and are able to balance them, then you are not possessed by the senses, by moods, by gains and losses, or by some particular aspect of your body or your mind; and being dispossessed of those, then what's left is the joy, the freedom, the gladness of a free mind.



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Cultivating Discernment

Ajahn Lee Dhammadharo was a senior disciple of Ajahn Mun; he passed away in 1961. This extract is taken from Inner Strength, a collection of his teachings translated and compiled by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, who is currently abbot at Wat Metta in California.

Where does discernment come from? You might compare it with learning to become a potter, a tailor or a basket weaver. The teacher will start out by telling you how to make a pot, sew a shirt or weave different patterns, but the proportions and beauty of the object you make will have to depend on your own powers of observation. Suppose you weave a basket and then take a look at its proportions, to see if it's too short or too tall. If it's too short, weave another one a little taller, and then take a good look to see if there's anything that still needs improving, to see if it's too thin or too fat. Then weave another one, better-looking than the last.

As for the mind, when mindfulness and self-awareness
are the causes, a still mind is the result. When
negligence is the cause, a mind distracted and restless is
the result.

Keep this up until you have one that's as beautiful and well-proportioned as possible, one with nothing to criticise from any angle. This last basket you can take as your standard. You can now set yourself up in business. What you've done is to learn from your own actions. As for your earlier efforts, you needn't concern yourself with them any longer. Throw them out. This is a sense of discernment which arises of its own accord, an ingenuity and a sense of judgement which come not from anything your teachers have taught you, but from observing and evaluating on your own the object that you have made.

The same holds true in practising meditation. For discernment to arise, you have to be observant as you keep track of the breath. It is important to gain a sense of how to adjust and improve it so that it's well proportioned throughout the body, and comfortable: in slow and out slow, in fast and out fast, long, short, heavy or refined.





Get so that both the in-breath and the out-breath are comfortable no matter what way you breathe, so that - no matter when - you immediately feel a sense of ease the moment you focus on the breath. When you can do this, physical results will appear: a sense of ease and lightness, open and spacious. The body will be strong, the breath and blood will flow unobstructed and won't form an opening for disease to step in. The body will be healthy and awake.

As for the mind, when mindfulness and self-awareness are the causes, a still mind is the result. When negligence is the cause, a mind distracted and restless is the result. So we must try to make the causes good, in order to give rise to the good results we've referred to. If we use our powers of observation and evaluation in caring for the breath, and are constantly correcting and improving it, we will develop awareness on our own; the fruit of having developed our higher concentration step by step.



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These Brown Robes: These Shaven Heads

On 15th December last year three women requested the Going Forth, pabbajja, from Luang Por Sumedho and were admitted into the Order of Siladhara. Sister Thaniya offers some reflections on this significant event, which took place in the new temple.

The wind stirs and carries the ring of bells into this wood and brick structure resting so deep in Earth. Warm floor below, cool air falling from the windowed pinnacle above, and space; tangible, quivering. Space sanctified. Where the human aspiration to awaken and its physical embodiment can meet. A place to contemplate where the world ends. In which to go forth in faith.

Today, within the boundary of eight great oak pillars, three women bowed and, with the bowls and robes they had been offered by lay friends, went forth from the home life into homelessness. They requested the Ten Precepts and to join the Order of Siladhara, undertaking that training offered here within Luang Por Chah's tradition - making a public commitment to spiritual practice, to morality, to renunciation; this movement to awakening which is the way of Sangha, a sacred jewel.

A precious sign in this world; of sickness, aging and death - there is a path to the transcendence of it.

As they moved through the examination procedure they were held in a field of well-wishing. Theirs and the chanting acarinis' dedication and hours of attention yielding fruit in the smooth, graceful flow of it all. The examination with all the Siladhara community gathered - one for each pillar - made the sense of, 'Going Forth in Faith' sharp. With the nuns' community small, it has to be about something larger than the conventions our minds normally take refuge in. And, though small in number, the extent of the support surrounding it could be felt in the temple with so many having gathered to be part of this.

German, English, Russian, they remind us that the Path transcends culture and gender. That in the place of devotion to the Triple Gem we meet, lending courage and support to each other.

We can reflect on what it takes to 'Go Forth'; that it is to leave home, family (who often don't understand), culture, for some, language and

follow the deepest longing of the heart: and that Luang Por Sumedho, with the Sangha, gives this rare privilege to go forth in this Dhamma and Discipline.

For those of us in robes this was a chance to recollect our aspiration, brighten it, and be gladdened for ourselves and for our newly emerging sisters.

"Venerable Sir,
 I beg for the Going Forth.
 To overcome all suffering,
 and for the purpose of realising
 Nibbana.

Having taken these robes
 let the Venerable Sir
 give me the Going Forth, out
 of compassion."

Their changing of robes from white to brown was the point of casting off the old and coming into the new - with the awe such moments hold. Their return into the temple seemed palpable, even sitting with ones back to them and eyes closed. A precious sign in this world of sickness, aging and death - there is a path to the transcendence of it. Metta, Uttama, Thitamedha: new names add power to the metamorphosis. Today they seemed as angels, and amongst the idyll of flowers and smiles it is easy to forget that spiritual life is hard, though joyous, work. The Buddha said, "Patient endurance is the supreme practice". And they've each shown great capacity for it. This Path asks everything; "ripening in complete relinquishment". Having been anagarikas in the community they have some idea what that tastes like, what spiritual practice takes in terms of self surrender. Yet they choose it. And we gladly welcome them.

I have seen the miseries of pleasure
I have seen the security involved in renouncing them:
so now I will go
I will go into the struggle
This is to my mind delight
This is where my mind finds bliss

Sutta Nipata (424) Pabbajja Sutta



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Young People on Retreat: Impressions

Each year a weekend is set aside in the retreat centre calendar for young people to have a taste of the 'retreat experience'. Here are a few impressions of the weekend from; Ajahn Candasiri, Samanera Sihanado, Claire Halter & Dominic Carroll

Ajahn Candasiri:

Last December 28 people between the ages of 12 and 17 came to Amaravati to spend a weekend on retreat. Some were from Buddhist families and were quite at home in the monastery, having visited regularly for the annual family camp; others from Christian backgrounds were studying RE for their school certificate and had come with a more academic interest in Buddhism.

Having spoken with a number of people who had had experience of guiding retreats for young people it was clear that the usual form of retreat, with sitting and walking meditation and an occasional question and answer session or discussion group would not work so well with this group. However, it did seem suitable to use the basic retreat structure but also to include more active and interactive elements. Above all, it seemed important to make it fun, so that the meditation could be experienced as something enjoyable, rather than the painful dreary grind that it can become if we take it all too seriously.

It seemed that ... the Refuges, Precepts and meditation practice were meaningful and had relevance as a guide and support during the difficult years of growing up and in adult life.

Four of us were 'leaders': Jenna, a qualified teacher who introduced and guided different forms of discussion; Anagarika Richard, who led a role-play drama workshop on the theme of the precepts and facilitated the question and answer session; Sister Jitindriya, who gave instruction in meditation and basic Buddhist practice and introduced various group activities, and myself. Also we were fortunate that a couple of the cooks were able and willing to lead workshops in yoga and tai chi.

First thing each morning all of us would gather in the shrine room for some gentle yoga. This was followed by morning puja, with reflections on the Triple Gem and its use as a refuge in everyday life. In the early part of the day we had times of silence during breakfast and the main meal, while the afternoon tea break and supper were more social times. This balance of talk and quiet seemed to work well; for many, it was an important time of reunion, however it was also clear from the response that the opportunity to be silent together was much appreciated. I was struck by the composure of those who had been before (to the previous young people's retreats or the family camp); one moment there'd be a lively discussion going on, the next a deep sense of stillness and attentive quiet would descend on the group. In the evening, after a full day of many styles of practice, we processed silently out to the candlelit stupa, circumambulated three times and then, chanting together, 'Buddham te jivitam yava

nibbanam saranam gacchami' (to the Buddha I go for Refuge, giving my life to realise Nibbana) each of us made an offering to the simple outdoor shrine.

It was very heartening to see how teenagers were able to respond to the conventions as presented within the form of a retreat, and to receive benefit from the teachings. It seemed that, for at least some of them, the Refuges, Precepts and meditation practice were meaningful and had relevance as a guide and support during the difficult years of growing up and in adult life.

Anagarika Richard: (now Samanera Sihanado)

During December of last year I was lucky enough to be invited to assist on a 'Young Person's Retreat', led by Ajahn Candasiri. I may say 'lucky' now on hindsight, but initially I had some apprehension about working with such an age group. Visions of riotous behaviour, bad attitudes and a general lack of interest were my immediate concerns. I was delighted to find how wrong I could be.

Unlike the normal retreats I had attended, it was clear from the start that a different format than 'sit, walk, sit' would have to be incorporated if everyone's attention was to be sustained throughout the weekend. Through listening attentively to those who had bravely gone before leading previous retreats it was apparent that a variety of activities, suffused with good humour, would be the key to success. To this end, a detailed schedule was created to cover every contingent, from abject boredom to over enthusiasm; this enabled us to begin, at least, feeling as prepared as we could be.

The first thing that struck me was how little was needed to bring forth a response from the retreatants. My previous thoughts of having to drag ideas out of them changed quickly to maybe having to gag a few of them! They appeared open and enthusiastic in a manner that made me re-evaluate my previous forebodings. I was touched by the way people of this age could dedicate a weekend to such a pursuit, sacrificing friends, comfort, TV and parties for a taste of something that is rarely a focus for those in their teenage years - or in fact any age.

The idea of having short meditation sessions, interspersed with interactive events kept everyone on the ball. Through painting, drama, yoga and tai chi, chanting practice, working out- doors and discussion circles, everyone was able to participate in some area and feel a connection with the group as a whole. For me there was a great joy in sitting and watching these activities unfold, witnessing a rainbow of emotions that covered the weekend.

There may be a tendency to underestimate the value of a Young Person's Retreat. 'They are only young.' I thought, 'Probably they just come to socialise. There is way too much going on, and hardly any formal meditation.' It's easy to believe in this, but the amount of interest that was evoked during the discussions and question and answer sessions showed a genuine curiosity both about monastic life and also how to live their own lives skilfully. While meditation to help pre-exam nerves may not be top of the monastic agenda, I saw how



different priorities could reflect new ways to use the teachings. To questions ranging from the familiar themes of head shaving, allowable medicines, rules and precepts to more probing themes, such as the meaning of life, the nuns with a great sense of humour, appropriateness and good grace responded in a fitting manner, clarifying, encouraging, illuminating.



On Saturday evening a circumambulation of the stupa to pay homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha encapsulated for me the homogeneity of the weekend. A clear night sky, candles lighting the way and incense hanging in the air as everyone passed around three times and made their offerings. Together, we stood and chanted a mantra we had worked on earlier that evening, and all thoughts of age and distance from those around me dissolved, as I relaxed into a sense of ease and goodwill, bringing to mind the carols I used to sing as a child - May all beings be at peace.'

And Retreatants:

Claire Halter:

I came to the retreat expecting something similar to the Summer Camp, with added meditation and mindfulness. I was slightly dreading sitting still for so long, and, at first, just filled my head until the bell rang, but as the meditations continued, I found myself preferring to clear my mind or concentrate on a single object or thought. We were guided through several kinds of meditation, discovering which we liked and worked best.

My favourite part of the weekend was probably the last meditation, in the new temple. I felt completely at peace and tranquil, surrounded by others, equally calm and quiet. I realised that now I didn't think meditation was something that had to be done in Buddhism, but instead just appreciated how restful and helpful it was to clear the clutter from your mind.

Dominic Carroll:

If you listen very carefully,
behind the splitter splat,
between each crunch of lunch
and grass-walking,
Talking
On the edge of hearing,
If,
you're listening,
There is a quiet
between the green.



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EDITORIAL

A Question of Balance

For the monasteries in England and Europe these past couple of months have been set aside as a quiet retreat time - a time to focus more intensively on our inner work. The encouragement given during this time is towards cultivating a stiller, quieter space within the heart. For it is only through attention to this that we are able to observe all our skillful and less skillful habits, and to train the mind - making it into a good friend, a good servant, rather than an enemy that can lead us into all kinds of unhappiness.

The emergence from such a period of retreat highlights a dilemma faced by many people - whether living as householders or in a monastic environment. The question it poses regards finding a suitable balance between this essential 'inner work' - which requires periods of withdrawal and seclusion - and our relationship with 'the world', including the responsibilities we have within our respective communities (whether family or monastic Sangha) and also towards the greater whole.

Through patience, gentleness and kindly consideration
we not only care for others, but also we protect our own
hearts.

If our attention and energies are directed only outwards towards our spiritual companions or towards society, it becomes clear sooner or later that even if we expend every ounce of energy right up until the last breath, there will still be more to do - the needs, the suffering of the world 'out there' is endless. We can never make it all all right. If we try, as many of us have to do before the penny finally drops, the result is exhaustion, despair and disillusionment. Eventually we see that actually it's a question of balance; we need to find a way of balancing our 'inner' work and our 'outer' work. We begin to appreciate a basic paradox: that in order to be truly generous, truly of service to others we actually need to be completely 'self-centered'. We need to be able to stay in touch with our own hearts, listening carefully to what they tell us, even while engaged in external activity or interaction. We need to remain attentive to our own needs and to really make sure that these are well taken care of, even if it means disappointing people, letting them down, not living up to the expectations they may have of us (or that we may have of ourselves). This is not at all easy, with the conditioning that most of us have: 'Don't be selfish'.

I am reminded of a simile given by the Buddha of two acrobats. The master said to his pupil, "You watch out for me and I will watch out for you. That way we'll show off our skill successfully and receive our reward." But the pupil contradicted him saying, "But that won't do at all, Master. You should look after yourself, and I'll look after myself, that is how we shall perform successfully." The Buddha then goes on to explain that, in a sense it was the pupil who had got it right; that it is by watching out for ourselves, through the practice of mindfulness, that we look after others, but also when we are mindful in regard to others that is a way of looking

after our own hearts. He further pointed out that we look after ourselves in a way which benefits others by really applying ourselves to the cultivation of the foundations of mindfulness; and that through patience, gentleness and kindly consideration we not only care for others, but also protect our own hearts.

During his lifetime, the Buddha established the fourfold assembly as a social structure which would facilitate the cultivation and maintenance of the qualities of mindfulness and consideration for others. However, whether we go forth as monks or nuns, or live as householders, one thing is clear: it's likely to take time. This practice has to be developed and worked at over a lifetime. Usually things don't just change and fall into place with the first glimmer of insight; we need to do the necessary work of laying the foundation, using the tools and guidance that the Buddha presented. Even though these were presented 2,500 years ago they still work well, having been used over generations by men and women to shape their lives - to enable the ripening of the potential that each one of us has. It waits quietly there in the heart for us to choose to make its cultivation the priority of our lives.

Ajahn Candasiri



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SIGNS OF CHANGE

Sangha Diary

This year's Magha Puja gathering took place at the end of March, with members of the Western monastic communities in England, Switzerland and Italy - even Ajahn Amaro from America - gathered at Amaravati for ten days of meetings, workshops and meditation. Unfortunately we were not able to use the new temple because there were some technical difficulties around the laying of the floor tiles and the job was not completed in time. Over the next months some of the Sangha members will be traveling:

Ajahn Sumedho will be staying at Amaravati until November when he will go to Cambodia and possibly Thailand.

Ajahn Viradhammo, accompanied by Nick Scott will be undertaking a tudong in his native Latvia, leaving on 10th May and returning just in time for the Upasampada on 13th July.

Ajahn Attapemo will be visiting his family in the States for a month in June and early July.

Ajahn Subbato will be leaving the Devon Vihara in the care of the nuns community for two years, while he goes to New Zealand to visit his family and to look after the monastery there allowing **Ajahn Vajiro** to have an extended period of time away.

We have also received news that **Ajahn Pasanno** has arrived safely in California and is well settled in at Abhayagiri, where he will be sharing the senior incumbency with **Ajahn Amaro**.

Venerable Abhinnano (the main newsletter illustrator) will be returning to Thailand in April.

Ajahn (Sister) Sundara is presently practicing in Thailand and has received the blessing of the Sangha to continue her stay there for an indefinite period.

Sister Upekkha will return to Amaravati in August for the second vassa.

Ajahn Siripanna, together with **Sisters Jitindriya** and **Uttama** and **Anagarika Joanne** will be setting off on foot from Amaravati on 1st May, planning to arrive in Devon in time to take over the incumbency of the vihara, now known as Hartridge Buddhist Monastery, on 4th June.

Samanera Ordinations

Over the past couple of years the samanera (ten precept novice) ordination has been introduced for men, as an intermediary stage of training prior to upasampada. This has no doubt caused some confusion for people visiting the monasteries in England since samaneras wear the same robe as bhikkhus but are in effect junior to the siladhara (nuns), who go before them in seating and the collection of almsfood. They also sometimes take on responsibilities in kitchen management, that would not be undertaken by bhikkhus.

Thanissara & Kittisaro

Kittisaro & Thanissara are presently resident teachers at the Buddhist Retreat Centre near Ixopo, South Africa. This 300 acre centre is beautifully situated in the rolling hills of Kwazulu

Natal. It was originally established by Louis & Molly Van Loon and over the last 20 years has supported a growing interest in Buddhism & meditation. While the main ethos of the centre is one of contemplation within a semi-monastic environment, it also explores the way Buddhism, as a culture, can offer a meaningful reflection within our modern life.

Originally both Kittisaro & Thanissara were deeply influenced in their practice of Buddhism through meeting Ajahn Chah. In 1976 Kittisaro left a Rhodes scholarship at Oxford to travel to Thailand to practice at Wat Pah Pong and other branch monasteries in N.E. Thailand. He was ordained with Ajahn Chah and stayed as a monk for 15 years, primarily under the guidance of Ajahn Sumedho. During that time he helped establish the Chithurst & Devon monasteries.

Thanissara met Ajahn Chah in 1977 and travelled to Thailand with the interest in taking the robes, she later was ordained in 1979 at Chithurst and spent 12 years as a nun under the guidance of Ajahn Sumedho. During that time she helped in the early years of Chithurst & Amaravati as well as the early development of the Nuns' Sangha.

Presently Kittisaro & Thanissara are interested in supporting a practice within lay life which can be informed by monasticism and yet meet the demands of modern life. They feel deeply connected to the Buddha's way, and find much joy and challenge in continuing to investigate the teaching and its resonance into all aspects of life. Each year they spend 8 months in South Africa and four months teaching and travelling in Europe and the States.

A Farewell From Ajahn Sobhano

Three bhikkhus - Ajahn Sobhano, Venerables Sunnato and Tissaro - have made the decision to return to lay life; we wish them well.

Ajahn Sobhano writes:

My time in the Sangha has been an invaluable experience that has changed my life beyond recognition. Having joined at the relatively young age of 22, the Sangha provided a family of spiritual friends and leaders that was sorely missing from my mis-spent youth. I never expected or anticipated becoming a monk or to end up playing such a vital part in the community affairs so quickly. With so many recent disrobings of senior Ajahns it was somewhat perplexing to find myself in such a senior position after only ten vassas.

In the last two or three years I was finding myself drawn more towards socially engaged activities which seemed to be leading me away from the monk's life. Spending time outside of the community in Ireland for the past four months gave me an opportunity to reflect on whether I really wanted to continue living as a bhikkhu. This led me to the point where it seemed that the natural next step was to pick up the challenge of returning to lay life.

I very much hope to be able to carry on working in areas where my Dhamma training will be of service to the community. I plan to look for work in the 'voluntary sector' which would include exploring training possibilities in the fields of counselling and facilitation. It is my hope that I will continue to benefit from my association with the Sangha and perhaps even feed back whatever I learn on the 'outside' in to the ordained community as part of the Fourfold Sangha's ongoing evolution in the West.

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to all my spiritual mentors and guides who have borne with my wayward tendencies all these years and to all the loving and devoted lay-supporters without whom none of this would have been possible.

May all beings realise Nibbana.

Dharma School Update

The Dharma School has almost completed its first three academic years. Those first years were the pioneering stage and now the school is moving into a new phase of development.

Geographically we started in one room of a house in central Brighton and now occupy a large detached house on the outskirts, near the South Downs. It is stunningly beautiful, and has been given a new coat of paint, but it is an almost overwhelming responsibility to renovate the 1930s building and soon to replace the roof.

The pupil numbers have grown from the original four to twenty seven last October. Originally they were all five years old but now we have children up to the age of eleven who have transferred from state schools to take advantage of this small nurturing style of education. Inevitably pupils are also leaving us - some to travel abroad, some for financial reasons, some because parents' dreams were not met, and, for the first time two will be moving on to secondary education in local comprehensives. We wish them all well.

There are changes too in the staff. We have launched the school with professional teachers who were willing and able to work for very little pay for a while. They have been supported by volunteer teachers who have given anything from an hour to three days a week of their time. Some of these are now leaving for several different reasons. New staff are being sought to move forward next year and we currently have three promising applicants with funding for low wages until December 1997.

Change is inevitable and uncomfortable but it can be a beautiful butterfly that emerges from an unusual looking chrysalis. The Dharma school must now reassess its financial underpinning – charging small fees and hoping for charitable donations is falling short of the practical needs of the school. It must also reflect on the dream of 'Buddhist Education', finding the middle way between the thrusting 'aim for the stars' approach, and the laid back 'all you need is love' approach.

The school is launched, and it now has to weather the storms and calms of life's sea to make its contribution to those young lives entrusted to its care.

Medhina

