



FOREST SANGHA

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THIS ISSUE

Cover: ■ Suffering Should Be Welcomed; Luang Por Sumedho
Articles: ■ Reading the Heart; Upasika Kee Nanayon
■ Mudita: Shared Enjoyment; Ajahn Sucitto
■ Reflections; Ajahn Pannasaro
■ Mt. Kailash; Luang Por Sumedho
Editorial: ■ Nourishing our Hearts; Sister Thaniya

HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

Suffering Should Be Welcomed

From a Dhamma Talk given by Luang Por Sumedho during the Vassa at Amaravati, 2001; Intended for inclusion in a proposed book of his teaching, Intuitive Awareness.

One of the epithets for the Buddha we chant is lokavidu, knower of the world. We can see this is a quality of the Buddha. But it is also a way of reflecting on the world, the situation that we are experiencing now; that is to reflect on life as it is experienced rather than describing how life should be. If we're just rationalists then we have theories about how things should be. But in reflective awareness we're noticing how things are.

With breathing, we're not saying you should breathe a certain way, that there's some standard of breathing that is ideal, but rather that breathing is like this. We can begin to notice the fact that the human body - this body that we're in with its eyes, ears, nose, tongue, the body itself - is sensitive and 'sensitivity is like this.' Then we look inward. What is it like just being sensitive? We're now noticing what it is to feel, to see, to hear, to smell, to taste or touch, to think, to remember. We can have ideas about being sensitive, or we can try and make ourselves insensitive because we see it as a sign of weakness, but right now we're not placing any judgement on sensitivity rather noticing 'it's like this'.

This is very important to recognise and to know - that the world is the world. Having a human body is a continuous experience of being irritated. Consciousness is in a human body which is made up of the four elements, earth, water, fire and air, from birth to death. From the time you are born, the moment you're out of your mother's womb, you start screaming. And impingements keep coming to this sensitive form until it dies. I encourage you to contemplate this rather than to judge it according to whatever ideals you might have. This is then called the state of awakened awareness. To wake up means to know the world as it is; it's not a judging of the world. When we are coming from ideals, usually quite high standards of 'if everything were perfect...' then we have ideas of how countries should be, governments should be, our parents, partners or whatever should be. But this realm's perfection doesn't lie in taking

conditioned experience to some kind of ideal.

Notice how irritating it is just to be able to see, hear, taste, smell and touch. There's always something that isn't quite right. It's too cold or too hot, we have a headache or backache, unwanted noises, odours and things like this impinge or come in contact with this form, and then we experience its beauty, its ugliness, pleasure and pain. But even pleasure is irritating when you think about it. We like pleasure, but just having a lot of pleasure is also very exhausting and irritating. This is not a criticism; it's just noticing that, 'having a human body is like this,' 'breathing is like this,' 'consciousness is like this.'

Trust in your own intuitive awakened sense. Don't trust
in your views and opinions about anything.

How sensitive we are just to words and thoughts. We can say things and upset everybody just through a certain tone of voice, or the use of certain words can be very distressing. We can remember things of the past that are pleasant or unpleasant. We can obsess our minds about things we shouldn't have done in the past; we can feel a lot of guilt and remorse or self-aversion because of mistakes, failures or unskilful acts in the past that we remember. We can get really neurotic, because in the present moment we can be totally obsessed with the thing we shouldn't have done twenty years ago. We can drop ourselves into real states of depression and despair.

Some people think it's good kamma to just have an easy ride, to be born with wealthy parents and high status, a beautiful appearance, intelligence, an easy life, all the blessings, all the good things. It's good merit, good parami and all that. But when I look at my own life, incredible challenges have come to me that have shaken me, that really upset me, and disappointed me to the point where I have contemplated suicide - 'I just want to get this over with. I don't want to spend more and more years in this realm. I can't take it.' But awakening to that I realised, that I'm quite willing to take what life presents and learn from it. That's the challenge to see that this is an opportunity that we have as human beings, as conscious beings. If you put it in the context of knowing the world as the world, we can take anything. We have incredible abilities to learn from even the most unfair, miserable, painful and nasty conditions. These are not the obstructions to enlightenment; it's whether we awaken or not.

Now the teachings of the Lord Buddha are teachings pointing to this. They're to awaken you rather than to condition you. We're not trying to grasp them as doctrinal positions to take, but expedient means to use to develop awakened awareness, mindfulness and intuition, to not fear sensitivity, to really open to it. Be fully sensitive rather than trying to protect yourself endlessly from possible pain or misfortune.

Knowing the world as the world is not a resignation in a negative way - 'Oh, you know how the world is!' - as if it were bad, that there's something wrong with it. That's not knowing the world as the world. Rather it's studying and taking an interest, examining experience, and being willing to look at and feel the negative side. It's not just seeking pleasurable experiences, but seeing even your most disappointing ones, your worst failures as opportunities to learn, as a chance to awaken; as devadutas or 'messengers' that tap us on the shoulder and say, 'Wake up!' That's why in Buddhism getting old, sickness, disabilities and loss

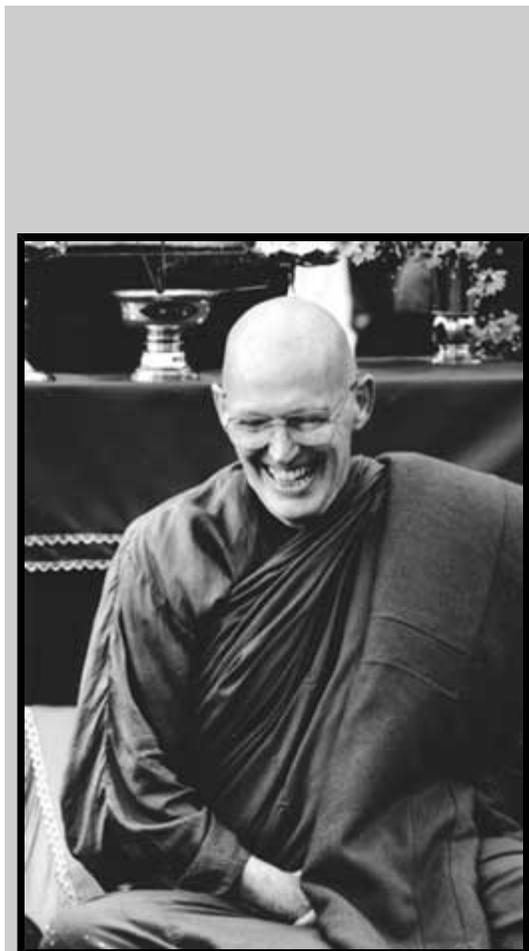
are not seen as things to fear and despise, but as devaluates or 'heavenly messengers'. This word devaduta is a Pali word; duta means a messenger of some sort, deva is 'angelic' or 'heavenly'; so heavenly messengers sent to warn us. A Christian asked me once if we had angels in Buddhism. 'We have angels in Christianity; all kinds of white and beautiful beings that play harps; they're very radiant, light beings.' I replied, 'Well, Buddhist angels are not that way. They're old age, sickness and death!' The fourth devaduta is the samana, the human being who has spiritual realisations.

> Old people you can see as devaluates. Like me: I'll be sixty-seven in a few days. Not only a devaduta on the level of a samara, but an old man too. As I get sick and senile, I'll be even more of a devaduta; and when I'm dead, I'll be four all in one! For reflecting in this way, to see how to use life, the malleability of our human mind is endless.

> We can be so set and conditioned by dualistic thinking. For example, I was brought up in a very dualistic way of looking at everything. Things were absolutely right or wrong, good or evil. These were very fixed ways of looking at everything. I had this very limited use of my mind because it tended to move between these two extremes.

> Are we going to become inflated egotistical monsters if we admit that we love good things? Why did I become a Bhikkhu? I could give you reasons like 'I've got to shape up and get my act together. I can't do it any other way.' I can look it in terms of weakness and inability, that I need the support from external conditions because I can't do it by myself. Or I can look at it in terms of being attracted to what is good, virtuous and beautiful. Both have their points to make; it's not that I'm so good, that I just gravitate to everything that's light and beautiful, I've certainly had my fascinations for that which isn't, but I would say that my preference leans towards the light and the good, the true and the beautiful. This is the movement that I'm interested in and that's something to respect. I see that this is something very good in my character.

Learning to be honest, to admit and make a conscious appreciation of your own humanity and your individuality helps to give you a confidence that you don't have if you're too obsessed with being critical and seeing yourself through negative perceptions. This is being able to use our critical mind, our discriminative abilities not just to analyse and compare one thing with another, but to examine and investigate in terms of experience. We awaken to the breath - 'It's like this,' - awaken to the sensitive state that we're in - 'It's like this,' - awaken to the irritations that we experience as conditions that contact and irritate our senses. With our obsessions and



emotional habits, whatever they might be, we put them in perspective rather than seeing them as something to get rid of. They're something to awaken to; this is a change from pushing away, resisting and denying towards awakening, accepting and welcoming.

In the First Noble Truth, the Buddha proclaimed that 'there is dukkha (suffering).' It is put into the context of a 'Noble Truth' rather than a dismal reality. If we look at it as a dismal reality, what happens? 'Life is just suffering, it's all just suffering. You get old, you get sick and then die. You have to lose all your friends: "All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become otherwise, will become separated from me." That's all it's about; it's just dukkha from beginning to end'. There's nothing noble in that, is there? It's just pessimistic and depressing seeing it in terms of, 'I don't like it. I don't want suffering. What a bad joke God played on us creating this mess. And me being born in this mess, to live just to get old. What am I living for? Just to get old, get sick and die'. Of course, that's very depressing. That's not a Noble Truth. You're creating a problem around the way things are. With the Noble Truth, 'there is suffering,' the advice to deal with this suffering is to welcome it, to understand it, to open to it, to admit it, to begin to notice it and accept it. It's a willingness to embrace and learn from that which we don't like and don't want - the pain and the irritation, whether it's physical, mental or emotional.

To understand suffering is to open to it. We say, 'We understand suffering because it's...' We rationalise it, but that's not understanding. It's in welcoming the suffering that we are experiencing - our frustration, despair, pain, irritation, boredom, fear and desires - just welcoming, opening, accepting. Then this is a Noble Truth, isn't it? Our humanity then is being noble; it's an ariyan truth. This word ariya means 'noble'. What is this English word 'noble'? It's a kind of grand quality; it rises up. If you're noble, you rise up to things. You don't just say 'Oh, life is misery and I want to hide away from it. I can't bear it'. There's nothing noble in that; or in blaming - 'God, why did you create this mess? It's your fault,' if you're brought up as a Christian. I used to feel furious with God. I remember as a child thinking that if I were God I wouldn't have created pain. You fall down and hurt yourself and you think, 'Why does God allow this? Why did He create a realm where there is so much pain?' My mother could never answer that question very well, because the pain was seen as something wrong. Or is pain a Noble Truth? Is loss, separation, all these experiences that we all have to have in this human realm, a Noble Truth? Seeing it in terms of a Noble Truth, rather than complaining and blaming, this is what I'm pointing to.

We can look at things in different ways. We can choose. The programme from the culture and family that we're born into might not be a very good programme. Sometimes it is, but still it's limited. Now we have this opportunity to explore, to investigate reality, to know it in a direct way. Enlightenment is not something remote and impossible. You can see it in terms of some very abstract state that you hold up and aim for but that you don't think you'll ever achieve. That way of thinking is based on what? If I depended on my personality, I couldn't do anything, I'd never hope to get enlightened because my personality can't possibly conceive myself as a person being enlightened. My personality is conditioned to think of myself in terms of what's wrong with me, coming from a competitive society where you are very much aware of who's better and who's worse. So I can't trust that. My personal habits are conditioned things, so they're not flexible in themselves. If we just attach or interpret experience through those perceptions and never learn to look at things in any other way, then we are stuck with a limited view that can be a very depressing way to live a life.

Awakening; wake up and begin to see beyond the rigid dualism or the initial programme that you acquire through your family and social background. Trust in your own intuitive awakened sense. Don't trust in your views and opinions about anything - about yourself, about Buddhism or the world - they are oftentimes very biased. We get very biased views about each other; we have racial prejudices, class identities, ethnic biases and feelings of social superiority. These

are not to be trusted.

We can look at things in many different ways. We don't have to look at something always from the conditioning that we have acquired. So when the Buddha talks about the Buddha-mind, it's very flexible and malleable; it's universal. The mind has a radiant quality to it. Consciousness has a radiance. So when we begin to let go of limiting ourselves through the distortions of our conditioned mental states, then we begin to understand, to see things as they really are, to know the Dhamma - enlightenment. This is not something remote and impossible, unless you want to hold to those views about it and about yourself as a person, holding it so high that it's way beyond your personal ability to achieve. Then you haven't awakened to what you're doing. You're merely operating from a conditioned view of everything.

'There is dukkha', and 'dukkha should be welcomed'. This is my new interpretation. Usually it's 'dukkha should be understood.' 'Dukkha should be welcomed'; how's that? Try that one. You can experiment with these different words. You don't have to say 'Pali scriptures say "understand," they didn't say "welcome"!' Pali scriptures don't say 'understand', they use a Pali word that we translate as 'understand'. Maybe we don't understand what 'understand' means. Did you ever think about that? We're so limited to a particular narrow view of the word 'understand' that we can't expand it. That's why we can experiment with the words. Just observe the effect. So I say 'welcoming' now. I'm not interested in proving that I'm right, that my translations are the best, but rather seeing how they work, what the effect is in the here-and-now. I am sharing this with you as a way of encouraging you to have that right and that freedom to know for yourself. You don't always have to try and fit yourself into the views and opinions even of our tradition - orthodox forms or definitions, our particular group's way of looking at things.

'There is dukkha', and 'dukkha should be welcomed'. 'Dukkha has been welcomed'. What is that like? Try that one. I don't know if it works for you, but it does for me, because the tendency is to push dukkha away. That's my conditioning, my personality. Suffering? Push it away; I don't want it. With somebody else's suffering, I don't want to go near them, I want to push away from them. There's a problem - 'Ajahn Sumedho, I've got a problem' - I don't want a problem. This is my character tendency, to do that. I don't want to know about suffering; tell me about the good things. 'How are you today?' 'I'm fine, Ajahn Sumedho. I just love it here at Amaravati. I love being a monk. I just adore the Dhamma and the Theravada form and the Vinaya. I love the whole thing.' Oh, that makes me feel so good. Tell me more. And I go to somebody else - 'How are you this morning?' 'Ugh! This life is such a dreary, miserable thing. I'm fed up. I want to disrobe.' I don't want to hear that; don't tell me that. We go around trying to make people make us feel good. Tell me the good things, because that makes me feel good. Don't tell me the bad stuff, because that makes me feel bad. I don't want to feel bad. I don't want suffering; I don't welcome it, I want to get rid of it. Therefore, I'm going to try and live my life so that I can get as much of the good stuff as I can and push away the bad stuff. But in this new translation of 'There's suffering and suffering should be welcomed,' it changes, doesn't it? You see the suffering, your own, or somebody else's problems, as things to welcome rather than as things to run away from or push away.

We've been on retreat for the past week: I really like formal practice. I like to sit here and face the shrine. I like the temple; it's a very pleasant place to sit. I sit on a triangular cushion that supports the spine, so I can sit very comfortably for long periods of time. I look at the shrine and the mind goes very still and quiet. Then when I look around and face you... What happens when I'm looking at all of you? This is just a way of contemplating. When I look at the shrine, all the things on the shrine bring peace and calm; the candles, incense and Buddha image, they aren't dukkha for me, they inspire, they're pleasing. They aren't irritating or causing me any kind of unpleasant feelings. If I don't particularly want to look at them, I can just close my

eyes and not look at anything. But then turning around and you're all here - what happens? It brings up a sense of there being so many possibilities, with all these different people, some of whom I don't even know. I've got views about some of you - you're like this and you're like that. Each person will bring up certain memories, some pleasant, some unpleasant; you have different ways of moving and saying things that brings up different feelings in my mind. If I think, 'Oh, I can't bear this.' I have to immediately turn around and look at the shrine again. Or if I'm looking at the shrine, I can begin to allow awareness to take me to non-grasping, to the reality of non-attachment, and really know this; not merely depend on the lack of stimulation for this or turning away from the community in order to get it, but really turning towards the community and realising it's something here. It's not dependent on facing any direction. So beginning to awaken to reality rather than being dependent upon a conditioned experience.

The refuge in Sangha we can define in terms of the four pairs, the eight kinds of noble beings. How many of you fit into that description? How many of your egos can think of yourself as sotapanna-magga, sotapanna-phala, sakadagami-magga, sakadagami-phala, anagami-magga, anaagami-phala, arahatta-magga, arahatta-phala*? Which one are you? How can I take refuge in 'four pairs and eight kinds of noble beings'? It's very abstract; sages, ideal beings who are somewhere - maybe. Or are they here: this monk, or that nun? What's the refuge in Sangha then? Is it up to me to decide who's a sotapanna, sakadagami and so forth, to figure out who I can take refuge with? Then it's just a matter of my ego again. Here I am trying to decide what somebody else is. Rather take these words like Sangha and make them work for you. Make it practical. Our refuge is in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, not in personal attitudes or habits, or views and opinions. When we see each other in terms of Sangha or as devaluates, it's a way of looking at each other that is beginning to appreciate, respect and get beyond just personal preference and reactivity. But we're not trying to annihilate those either because the dukkha we welcome is this personal reactivity. Why I feel angry, why I feel jealous or why I feel rejected; it's not trying to dismiss this. But as we trust in this awakened state, then we can welcome our own feelings - foolish feelings or neurotic habits - we can welcome these things in terms of a Noble Truth rather than as personal faults.

(*These are the 8 kinds of noble beings, in respective order - One realising the path of stream-entry, one realising the fruition of stream-entry; one realising the path of once-return, one realising the fruition of once-return; one realising the path of non-return, one realising the fruition of non-return; one realising the path of arahatship, one realising the fruition of arahatship.)



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Editorial: ■ Nourishing our Hearts; Sister Thaniya

HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

Reading the Heart

*From Looking Inward by Upasika Kee Nanayon.
 Translated from the Thai by Ajahn Thanissaro.*

The Buddha taught that we are to know with our own hearts and minds. Even though there are many, many words and phrases coined to explain the Dhamma, we need focus only on the things we can know and see, extinguish and let go of, right in each moment of the immediate present - better than taking on a load of other things. Once we can read and comprehend our inner awareness, we'll be struck deep within us that the Buddha awakened to the truth right here in the heart. His truth is truly the language of the heart.

When they translate the Dhamma in all sorts of ways, it becomes something ordinary. But if you keep close and careful watch right at the heart and mind, you'll be able to see clearly, to let go, to put down your burdens. If you don't know right here, your knowledge will send out all sorts of branches, turning into thought-formations with all sorts of meanings in line with conventional labels - and all of them way off the mark.

If you know right at your inner awareness and make it your constant stance, there's nothing at all: no need to take hold of anything, no need to label anything, no need to give anything names. Right where craving arises, right where it disbands: That's where you'll know what nibbana is like... 'Nibbana is simply this disbanding of craving.' That's what the Buddha stressed over and over again.

The mind can be at normalcy, at equilibrium - calm and undisturbed by defilement or the stresses that come from sensory contact.

The mind, if mindfulness and awareness are watching over it, won't meet with any suffering as the result of its actions. If suffering does arise, we'll be immediately aware of it and able to put it out. This is one point of the practice we can work at constantly. And we can test ourselves by seeing how refined and subtle our all-around awareness is inside the mind. Whenever the mind slips away and goes out to receive external sensory contact: Can it maintain its basic stance of mindfulness or internal awareness? The practice we need to work at in our everyday life is to have constant mindfulness, constant all-around present awareness like this. This is something we work at in every posture: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. Make sure that your mindfulness stays continuous.

Living in this world - the mental and physical phenomena of these five aggregates - gives us plenty to contemplate. We must try to watch them, to contemplate them, so that we can understand them - because the truths we must learn how to read in this body and mind are here to be read with every moment. We don't have to get wrapped up with any other extraneous themes, because all the themes we need are right here in the body and mind. As long as we can keep the mind constantly aware all around, we can contemplate them.

If you contemplate mental and physical events to see how they arise and disband right in the here and now, and don't get involved with external things - like sights making contact with the eyes, or sounds with the ears - then there really aren't a lot of issues. The mind can be at normalcy, at equilibrium - calm and undisturbed by defilement or the stresses that come from sensory contact. It can look after itself and maintain its balance. You'll come to sense that if you're aware right at awareness in and of itself, without going out to get involved in external things like the mental labels and thoughts that will tend to arise, the mind will see their constant arising and disbanding - and won't be embroiled in anything. This way it can be disengaged, empty, and free. But if it goes out to label things as good or evil, as 'me' or 'mine,' or gets attached to anything, it'll become unsettled and disturbed.

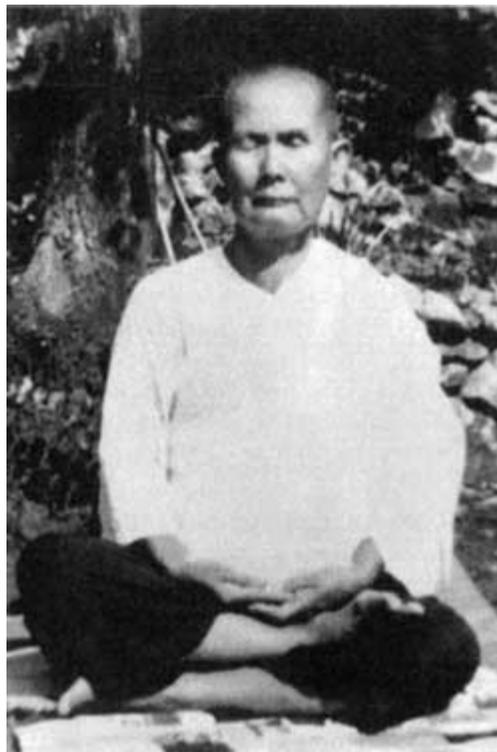
You have to know that if the mind can be still, totally and presently aware, and capable of contemplating with every activity, then blatant forms of suffering and stress will dissolve away. Even if they start to form, you can be alert to them and disperse them immediately. Once you see this actually happening - even in only the beginning stages - it can disperse a lot of the confusion and turmoil in your heart. In other words, don't let yourself dwell on the past or latch onto thoughts of the future. As for the events arising and passing away in the present, you have to leave them alone. Whatever your duties, simply do them as you have to - and the mind won't get worked up about anything. It will be able, to at least some extent, to be empty and still.

If you can take your stance at awareness, if you're skilled at looking, the mind can be at peace. You'll know how things arise and disband. First practice keeping awareness right within yourself so that your mindfulness can be firm, without being affected by the objects of sensory contact, so that it won't label things as good or bad, pleasing or displeasing. You have to keep checking to see that when the mind can be at normalcy, centred and neutral as its primary stance, then - whatever it knows or sees - it will be able to contemplate and let go.

The sensations in the mind that we explain at such length are still on the level of labels. Only when there can be awareness right at awareness will you really be able to know that the mind that is aware of awareness in this way doesn't send its knowing outside of this awareness. There are no issues. Nothing can be concocted in the mind when it knows in this way. In other words,

An inward-staying
unentangled knowing,
All outward-going knowing
cast aside.

The only thing you have to work at maintaining is the state of mind at normalcy - knowing, seeing, and still in the present. If you don't maintain it, if you don't keep looking after it, then when sensory contact comes it will have an effect. The mind will go out with labels of good and bad, liking and disliking. So make sure you maintain the basic awareness that's



aware right at yourself. And don't let there be any labelling. No matter what sort of sensory contact comes, you have to make sure that this awareness comes first.

If you train yourself correctly in this way, everything will stop. You won't go straying out through your senses of sight, hearing, etc. The mind will stop and look, stop and be aware right at awareness, so as to know the truth that all things arise and disband. There's no real truth to anything. Only our stupidity is what latches onto things, giving them meanings and then suffering for it - suffering because of its ignorance, suffering because of its unacquaintance with the five aggregates - form, feelings, perceptions, thought-formations, and consciousness - all of which are inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

Aware Right at Awareness

Use mindfulness to gather your awareness together, and the mind will stop getting unsettled, stop running after things. It will be able to stop and be still. Then make it know in this way, see in this way constantly - at every moment, with every activity. Work at watching and knowing the mind in and of itself: That will be enough to cut away all sorts of issues. You won't have to concern yourself with them.

If the body is in pain, simply keep watch of it. You can simply keep watch of feelings in the body because the mind that's aware of itself in this way can keep watch of anything within or without. Or it can simply be aware of itself to the point where it lets go of things outside, lets go of sensory contact, and keeps constant watch on the mind in and of itself. That's when you'll know that this is what the mind is like when it's at peace: It doesn't give meanings to anything. It's the emptiness of the mind unattached, uninvolved, unconcerned with anything at all.

These words - unattached, uninvolved, and unconcerned - are things you have to consider

carefully, because what they refer to is subtle and deep. 'Uninvolved' means uninvolved with sensory contact, undisturbed by the body or feelings. 'Unconcerned' means not worried about past, future, or present. You have to contemplate these things until you know them skillfully. Even though they're subtle, you have to contemplate them until you know them thoroughly. And don't go concerning yourself with external things, because they'll keep you unsettled, keep you running, keep you distracted with labels and thoughts of good and bad and all that sort of thing. You have to put a stop to these things. If you don't, your practice won't accomplish anything, because these things keep playing up to you and deceiving you - i.e., once you see anything, it will fool you into seeing it as right, wrong, good, bad, and so forth.

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Our major obstacle is this aggregate of perceptions, of labels. If we aren't aware of the arising and disbanding of perceptions, these labels will take hold. Perceptions are the chief instigators that label things within and without, so we have to be aware of their arising and disbanding. Once we're aware in this way, perceptions will no longer function as a cause of suffering. In other words, they won't give rise to any further thought-formations. The mind will be aware in itself and able to extinguish these things in itself.

So we have to stop things at the level of perception. If we don't, thought-formations will fashion things into issues and then cause consciousness to wobble and waver in all sorts of ways. But these are things we can stop and look at, things we can know with every mental moment... If we aren't yet really acquainted with the arising and disbanding in the mind, we won't be able to let go. We can talk about letting go, but we can't do it because we don't yet know. As soon as anything arises we grab hold of it - even when actually it's already disbanded, but since we don't really see, we don't know...

So I ask that you understand this basic principle. Don't go grasping after this thing or that, or else you'll get yourself all unsettled. The basic theme is within: Look on in, keep knowing on in until you penetrate everything. The mind will then be free from turmoil. Empty. Quiet. Aware. So keep continuous watch of the mind in and of itself, and you'll come to the point where you simply run out of things to say. Everything will stop on its own, grow still on its own, because the underlying condition that has stopped and is still is already there, simply that we aren't aware of it yet.



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HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

Shared Enjoyment

From an on-going collection of articles on meditation by Ajahn Sucitto.

The practice of mudita attunes us to sensing others and ourselves through the reference of joy. It is an acknowledgement of the common happiness that all beings seek, a buoyancy of awareness that occurs at every moment when their presence is sustained rather than afflicted; or whenever an affliction ceases - even temporarily. It is an experience of appreciation that we can lose contact with. This is because the mind is programmed to easily imagining how much better things could be than they are right now... and it takes an effort to imagine how much worse things could be. This is the programming of ambition and craving, and even spiritual matters are affected by it. These forms of desire never appreciate anything, and the resultant mood is arati - negativity and contractedness of heart. Jealousy, cynicism, and more subtly, indifference, can stain our hearts when other people enjoy good fortune. Arati often manifests as an 'inner critic' that whinges and moans about everything and everyone; even in a suppressed form, this sense of being at odds with others embeds us in loneliness. So if one is to experience any degree of contentment, or even appreciation of one's own good fortune, this programming has to change. We do have the ability to receive and empathetically attune to the specific presence of people and things without adding comparisons of self with others, or past with future; this has to be brought to the fore of attention. Then there can be some letting go. As one develops letting go in terms of the tendency to judge in terms of who deserves what, and how things should be, the appreciative joy of mudita arises.

It's not that discriminative comparisons play no part in life. We need to discern whether an action, our own or somebody else's leads to a good result or not. But problems arise when an action or a behaviour is understood to be a person. This 'self-conceit' seriously limits our perception of the range of possibilities that we all carry. It also blocks the potential for change. And as impermanence fades from the picture, the heart hardens into a series of standpoints. Out of that arises the judgemental self. But who has the right to judge how things should be and how fair it all is? And why respond to others' good fortune with negativity?

The skill of a trained awareness can meet the arising
without the fear or craving that is at the root of
contraction.

Like the other brahmavihara, mudita is to be cultivated 'to others as to myself': this rounds out the practice into a wholeness in which aspects of self-differentiation are put aside. The furtherance of the practice is then to develop insight into that sphere of empathetic joy - attuning to its nature as that which arises dependent on conditions and not a final truth in itself. In this respect it is called one of 'the doors to the Deathless.' (*Majjhima 52.*)

The cultivation of mudita is said to lead to the 'sphere of unbounded consciousness.' (*Samyutta 46:54.*) Whereas the flow of experience is holistic, consciousness establishes boundaries on a moment-by-moment basis: i.e. this experience is 'in here', that is 'out there'; this feeling and perception is derived from 'this' sense-base, not 'that' one; 'this' impulse is to

be acted upon through 'this' response, not through 'that' one. Although consciousness as it arises establishes boundaries that ascribe location to elements of experience, whatever arises out of consciousness - such as a feeling or a thought - is a non-locational experience. Where is the worry that tints one's world? To whom is it ascribed? In itself it has no 'here' or 'there' (or 'in-between'). However the result of the moment-by-moment arising of consciousness, is the establishment or 'this is me and that is you.' This of course is the normal functional aim of consciousness. Yet there can be a consciousness that lays aside the boundaries; with this, 'in here', 'out there', 'you', 'me', and any location are laid aside.

The point to catch is the arising of consciousness; particularly to be with the kammic drive in that volition. The skill of a trained awareness can meet the arising without the fear or craving that is at the root of contraction. This pleasant and skilful awareness becomes a brahmavihara - an abiding place that does not set up boundaries. The furtherance of the practice is in understanding the volition that sustains even that abiding, and relinquishing attachment to that. (*Majjhima 121 presents teachings on 'emptying' the volition that carries the sense of self. Anguttara: 8:, 63 presents an overview of how the brahmavihara practices dovetail in with the cultivation of samatha and vipassana. As in the Buddha's advice to Bahiya (Udana, Ch.1, 8). "Then Bahiya, thus you must train yourself: In the seen there will just be the seen, in the heard there will just be the heard, in the sensed there will just be the sensed, in the cognised there will just be the cognised. Then Bahiya you will have no 'thereby.' You will then have no 'therein.' As you will have no 'therein' it follows you will have no 'here' or 'beyond' or 'midway between.' This itself is the end of suffering".*)

While sitting, standing, walking or reclining, establish the base of mudita in oneself:
Centre your awareness in your body, being aware of the general form, the central core, and the breathing. Explore the relatedness of all this: the whole body being an interplay between the light flow of breathing and the firm stability of the body mass. Acknowledge the inner space of the body and the outer space around it, with the breathing connecting the two - now reaching out, now reaching in...a sharing sense.

Every few moments a breath comes to be. Every few moments the boundless shared air enters, permeates, saturates the body. Every few moments the body empties its breath into the shared air. Let yourself be held in this interplay.

Finer even than breath, each moment mind comes to be. Thoughts, attention, moods well up and move out into the silence. Each moment, something is received, a sight, sound, touch or intuition. Some with purpose, some without; some with reaction, some with just a faint resonance of awareness. Sense the present vibrancy.

Acknowledge the conscious system that you are, born moment-by-moment out of



conscious space. The sense of wonder. The sense of thankfulness. Pass that through the mind and into the silence.

Consider your own body, the parents whose genes establish it, the many life forms that sustain it. Allow your mood to be part of that sustenance by adding the blessing of your appreciation. In doing that attune and enjoy the participation which that sense affords.

Enjoy, with mindful awareness rather than thoughts, your own presence. Attune to the specific uniqueness of how that is right now. Appreciate your presence. Acknowledge any need for boundaries, such as the wish to be private or unnoticed: appreciate that protective function, but check whether now there is a need for defence or fear. Notice how those senses affect your body. If the present space around your body, chest, throat etc. is safe... can the body relax? Work on laying a boundary aside, temporarily. Feel the relief.

Soften the impulse to do or be something special; all that you need right now is here. Allow yourself to feel exposed and keep acknowledging the nourishment that the air is bringing you, the steadiness of the ground beneath and the willing receptivity of the knowing space that wraps around you. Feel the steady support of your own bodily centre.

Enrich this mood with reference to wholesome actions that you have done, or kindly aspirations that you have, or on-going intentions for supporting others. These recollections, which the negative mind obscures, may now be more apparent. Give yourself the full allowance to recollect, sense and get a feeling for them.

... o o 0 o o ...

Practise extending mudita to others:

Recollect an occasion when you felt that your presence was enjoyed by another person. Recall

how that felt, return to that feeling, and try to stay within that in the present.

Acknowledge what is coming to be around you. Living beings, alive a moment at a time; everything turned towards its own well-being. Recognize in all of them, the vitality that rises up, the wish to be that is met in their incarnation. Attune to the well-being that the shared air brings. Join in their interest that this well-being not be parted from them.

While staying connected to your own centredness, practise introducing the perception of others. Sense the joy that arises when a person meets again a dear friend, a relative that they had been separated from. Attune to that. Attune to the happiness that occurs when someone attains a goal that they had been working for. Acknowledge that that does not lessen you. Stay connected to the arising of a happiness that you feel they have.

Work through the perceptions of those who one feels are worthy of good fortune, then advantaged, then over-advantaged, then privileged. Stay connected to your own ability to empathise when you bring to mind people who have greater good fortune than yourself. Stay connected to the sense of happiness but let go of whose it is.

Introduce the perceptions of people who are worthy and who have little good fortune, but not much suffering. Attune to their goodness and contentment, then let go of the attribution.

In this conscious space, acknowledge living beings in duress, energising their sensitivity and intelligence to adapt and to bring them to safety and well-being. Appreciate that guiding sense. Remember the happiness that arises when one comes out of trouble and duress into a refuge again. Consider that this as happening any time when the mind lets go of its suffering for a moment.

Introduce the perception of people who experience a lot of suffering. Attune to the simplicity of the relief related to any diminution in that suffering, and the ability for people even in states of deprivation, to bear with that and care for their families or friends. Recognise that the ability to be uncorrupted by suffering is the strongest and most reliable base for happiness.

Bring to mind the dying and passing forth of beings. How their struggle melts and they are received. And how they fare on according to their kamma, not separated from the results of good deeds; nor separated from the possibility of making good kamma.

. . . o o 0 o o . . .

Settle into and contemplate the 'boundless sphere' of mudita: Move from considering any object or person, into the awareness that attunes to the joy of sharing.

Contemplate that sphere, letting the mind take in the boundlessness of that way of conceiving. Acknowledge that dualities of 'you', 'me' and 'how he was', are a play of consciousness. Sense the separateness of beings to be like currents in the wind, that give the wind its manifest qualities.

If this image is meaningful for you, attune to the volition, the 'push of the wind' that holds the phenomenal sphere. What does the arising of things depend upon? Can that condition for arising be released with something like trust?

After an appropriate period of time, return to the interplay of the breath, and allow your sense of yourself to get re-established. Welcome this as you would a friend coming home from a long journey.

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Editorial: ■ Nourishing our Hearts; Sister Thaniya

HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

Reflections

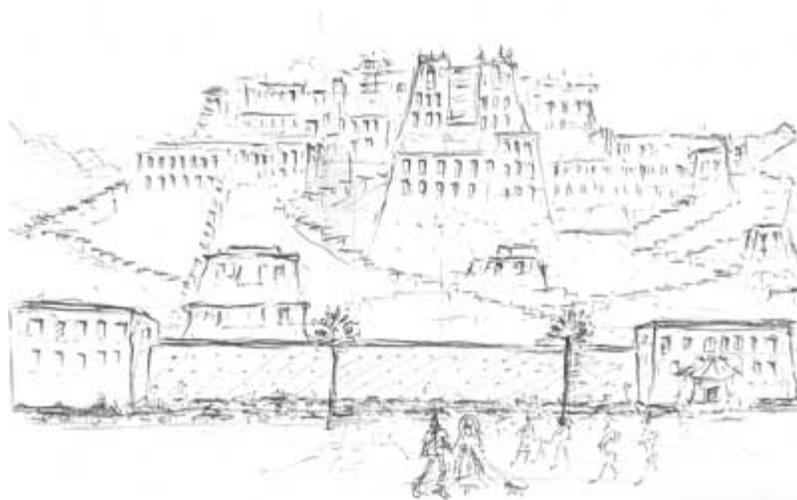
Part of a talk given by Ajahn Pannasaro at Amaravati during the Winter Retreat 2002.

After the temple opening I took a vow that I would never leave this place; that I will stay indefinitely. It was quite a relief for me when I relinquished the ideas I had of wanting to go somewhere else, of 'this is not the right place for practice', 'I don't like these people', 'I don't like these ideas'. So I learnt to let go a lot, I learnt to appreciate other people's needs. This has helped me a lot in terms of practice. And positive things start to happen that bring harmony to the Sangha. This is especially so this winter retreat; we have had a good group of lay supporters, a good group of monks, nuns and anagariks - Luang Por can have his sabbatical with his mind at ease.

That was part of my inspiration; that there is this very rare opportunity in this age, that this situation exists.

I will take this opportunity to let you all know some of his plans. From the beginning of April, Luang Por will turn to a mode of seclusion. He will still remain at Amaravati but be more on his own. He'll also do some physical training to get himself ready for Mount Kailash. In May we'll take a flight to Thailand and then on to Kathmandu. Right now we are in the process of getting letters of recommendation to the Chinese Government to accompany our application forms so that we can go to Mount Kailash. At the beginning of June after we have finished the pilgrimage to Mount Kailash - I hope we will not be dumped at the Nepalese border - we have been invited to a Thai hotel, which has kutis for monks, and will stay there for a few weeks. Then we will fly back to Thailand and Luang Por will go on to Vientianne in Laos and then see his Upajjhaya. He will go to Vietnam. Some people who knew Luang Por when he was in the Peace Corps in Borneo have also invited him to go back to Borneo. Then Luang Por will return to Amaravati for the vassa. Straight after that he will go to India. So this is a good opportunity for Luang Por, after being involved for thirty-five years with setting up and running monasteries, to go back to places where he got inspiration about practice and Buddhism at the beginning of his practice.

Some people when they look back at their lives, at what they have been doing for twenty or thirty years, can feel regret because they can no longer use their bodies as they want, or they look in the mirror and they find an ugly face and grey hair. So, even though they have enormous wealth, they can not retrieve back anything. If we practice then, when we look back, we will never feel regret. As I



look back at what happened for me over fifteen years, I never regret a single moment. Even though we can sit here with painful knees and backs, and feeling that we never get anywhere, never get enough samadhi, or that our minds are always restless, the process of training is just like that. But when you look back you will never regret. Do you believe me or not?

This is my first time up on the High Seat. When I returned to Thailand to study Pali, Ajahn Jayasaro invited me to be the caretaker at Wat Pah Nanachat for two years running while the other monks went into the jungle at Kanchanaburi. When I had first gone to Nanachat I had met Ajahn Jayasaro in front of the sala where he was laying a path to it. I asked for the Abbot and he said, 'the Abbot has taken all the monks into the jungle at Kanchanaburi and now I am the caretaker of the place.' So seven or eight years later I found myself in the same position. When people would come and ask for the Abbot I'd say, 'he took the monks into the jungle at Kanchanaburi, I'm the caretaker here.' It was quite a surprise. Now I find myself on the Dhamma Seat. And I have a strong sense of when I first came here and heard Luang Por give a talk. It seemed to be the first time that I heard the word Katannu, gratitude. Luang Por uses this word almost every time he gives a talk about Luang Por Chah. So, I would like to express my Katannu Katavedi to Luang Por. Also to all the lay supporters. When I first came here I made friends here so that makes me feel that I belong to this place. Part of the reason that I decided to join the monastic life was because of the good support. I was surprised when I first came here - 'How did this place happen? Why can I just stay here without paying for board or anything else?' Then a week or two later I started to realize that when people came on Sundays they made big contributions, that they brought a lot of offerings with them. That was part of my inspiration; that there is this very rare opportunity in this age, that this situation exists.



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HOME ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

Mt. Kailash

From messages sent by Luang Por Sumedho.

31st of May:

Greetings,

We arrived in Lhasa this morning. Our pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash went well. It has taken 5 days of very bumpy and dusty driving to reach Lhasa today. I often thought of you during the circumambulation on the Kora. Reaching up to 18,000 ft. altitude at the Dolmala Pass - Prayer flags were made and now have joined tens of thousands of others on this very auspicious pass. At least one of these flags was made with you all in mind. Sending you blessings and gratitude. I and Ven. Panya will be in Lhasa until 4 June when we return to Kathmandu. I am in good health and contented.

The roads in Western Tibet are the worst in the world.

16th of June:

Greetings,

We are now staying at the Himalaya Chalet Resort which is about 30 Km from Kathmandu. It is in a famous resort and viewing area called Nagarkot one of the higher hills where you can have a panoramic view of the Himalayas.

We have spent most of the time recovering from our time in Tibet. Looking back at that pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash, I can only feel that it was a truly wonderful experience. Physically, I found it very difficult. At high altitudes I lose my appetite. It was very difficult to eat any food. Plus the available food was not very appetizing. There were thousands of Tibetan pilgrims. They would arrive at Kailash in big trucks all crowded together. The roads in Western Tibet are the worst in the world; you literally eat dust most of the time. But the devotional impact of the pilgrims and the austere beauty of Mt. Kailash led to a most sublime atmosphere and the physical stress even increased the quality of the spiritual experience.

Yesterday, we walked to Bhaktapur (22 Km). Bhaktapur has preserved its rather medieval atmosphere with its winding lanes, temples, palaces etc. We returned to Nagarkot on the public transport; a bus jammed with school children on their way home. I thoroughly enjoyed the Asian scene. The walk to Bhaktapur led us through beautiful villages and Asian life scenes are forever compelling and interesting to me.

The World Cup fever pervades life in Nepal. The school children on the bus were talking about Argentina, Brazil, and even familiar with the players' names. I've seen Denmark win



over France and England over Argentina plus a few others. This fever has even taken over Tibet.

We will fly to Bangkok on 20th June.

All my best to everyone,
LP Sumedho.



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HOME ■
BACK ISSUES ■

EDITORIAL

Nourishing our Hearts

'...then Ananda, attention should be directed to some inspiring object of thought, and delight springs up. When there is delight rapture arises. When rapture is experienced the body calms down. With the body calmed down, joy arises. Being joyful, the mind becomes concentrated....'
 (*Samyutta 47, Satipatthana Vagga, 10.*)

'Thus, following after a good person, when complete, completes listening to true Dhamma; listening to true Dhamma completes faith; faith completes thorough work of mind; and that mindfulness and self-possession; that control of the sense faculties; that the three right ways of practice; that the arising of mindfulness; and that the seven factors of enlightenment; while they, when complete, complete release by knowledge.' (*Anguttara X, Ch VII, i. Text v 115.*)

This movement of ours to free the heart from all that hinders is described in different ways. In the negative sense there is the outlining of those things to be guarded against or uprooted; in the positive sense there is a whole matrix of skilful factors to be cultivated and dwelt within - and to be let go of with wisdom. Fundamental among skilful factors that bring furtherance are the heart qualities of the brahmavihara (metta/loving kindness, karuna/compassion, mudita/empathetic joy and upekkha/equanimity). These are based in a sense of relatedness that gladdens and leads us forward; we are connected to others and so the quality of that connection is an important factor in the ripening of our hearts.

Allowing our heart to attune to the goodness of those who support our cultivation, providing spiritual food and shelter, is a valuable way to gladden and collect our minds.

Living as an alms mendicant, being completely dependent on others' goodness, brings this into focus. When we step into uncertainty regarding something as basic as food, the power both of relinquishing control and of trusting in a greater human field than ourselves leaves a great space for miracles. The constant miracle of having enough to eat reveals the extent of human kindness and generosity; and the gladness (mudita) that arises when we attune to the goodness of those around us can be more nourishing than the food itself. Connecting to such experiences of benevolence can heal the sense of poverty or lack we may carry, which can so limit the essential experience of well being. It challenges the expectation that there won't be enough - a sense fundamental to competitive materialistic society, that can taint all levels of our experience.

We, therefore, need to train our minds to attune to what is wholesome and nourishing, to attend to that around us which can steady and brighten. Much of where we are asked to point our attention is at what is not 'right' - in the news, in the discrimination needed to be fixing and

improving things. This can become a habit of mind that we then extend to how we perceive and relate to others, making us unable to receive what they are offering. So we need to deliberately notice what is lovely, the skilful qualities the people around us are embodying, how we are supported and looked after, acts of kindness.... When we sense the goodness around us we no longer need to disconnect or disappear - we realise that 'this is a good place to be.' And gratitude arises.

It is also helpful to recollect references that are larger, more fundamental, than those of personality or events (which can be awful), to let our hearts resonate with 'Buddha', 'Teacher' or 'Pilgrim', and let these feed and satisfy the mind. Allowing the heart to attune to the goodness of those who support our cultivation, providing spiritual food and shelter, is a valuable way to gladden and collect our minds, to clear away unwholesome qualities. This may be the Lord Buddha himself, or someone we have been drawn to listen to, have come into relationship with, and feel we have benefited from. Within these communities Luang Por Sumedho has been one such 'good person' to follow after, a field of merit that has provided Dhamma nourishment, either directly or indirectly. Also, after his decades of supporting our communities, we can simply rejoice in the fact that he was able, despite the difficulties, to make the pilgrimage around Mt. Kailash, something he has aspired to for a long time.

What is it like to let our hearts resonate with someone else's goodness and happiness? Can we feel that our 'hearts naturally gravitate towards the light and good' and let that appreciation strengthen us? Then we do have the ability to 'know the world', welcoming whatever arises; we are attuned to a heart quality that establishes a skilful relationship with all of our experience. Awareness is able to let go of the boundaries it would otherwise set up. We can rest in the sphere of the brahmavihara and resonate with the loveliness of awareness itself, freed from lack or defensiveness.

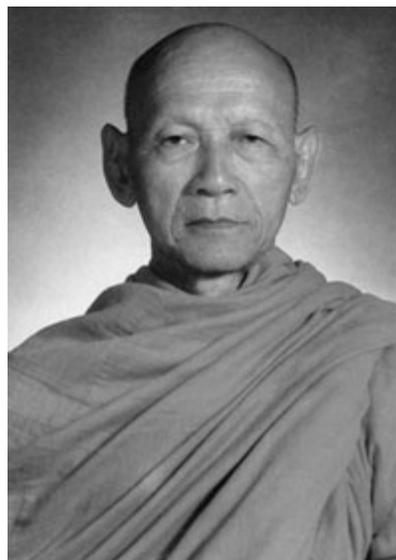
Sister Thaniya

Notices

Phra Dhammapariyattimuni

Phra Dhammapariyattimuni passed away on the 19th of July 2002. He was the Upajjhaya (Preceptor) of Ajahn Sumedho. He was the head monk of Nongkhai Province, Thailand when Ajahn Sumedho received the Pabbajja (Samanera ordination) in July of 1964. He gave the higher ordination (Upasampada) to Ajahn Sumedho in 1967. He, later, resigned his position in Nong Khai in order to become the Abbot of Wat Dhatu Panom province.

He was 84 years old when he died.'



The Island

*There's a mountain that stands for everything.
There's a valley that empties everything.
There's a sky that blesses everything.
There's a soil that gives back everything.*

*Little want pores over the maps and charts;
then runs around the hopeful world;
then ransacks the jewelled cosmos....
The abyss sucks it whimpering back.*

*So then, where could attention surrender...?
But there's the near side of nowhere-
intimate, dangerous, untrodden.
The abundant.*

Yours. Mine. Everything's.

