



# FOREST SANGHA newsletter

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## Question Time

Questions presented to Tuhn Ajahn Sumedho during the January monastic retreat of 1988

### Question:

How do you practise contemplation of the citta\*?

### Answer:

Well it's just like a mood; vedana (feeling) is attractive, repulsive or neutral, but citta can be quite fuzzy - you can feel emotionally confused or hesitant, or muddled or just dull and very nebulous feelings of moods. If you're practising citta vipassana you're really aware of what your citta is like. But sometimes people in meditation develop a technique, and they do it no matter what. They aren't aware of their actual mood or what's affecting them. They become conditioned to a meditation technique: "It's 8.35 - time to do my anapanasati," and then they're not aware. They've just been on the telephone, and their Mother told them that their Father ran away with the secretary and that the electricity bill wasn't paid so the lights go out and there are all these things that make you upset -and then they wonder why: "I couldn't meditate last night, I was too upset; I just couldn't concentrate on my breath!" But if you're meditating properly, then if some horrible thing happens, you can watch your citta. Don't think you've got to do anapanasati at that time -I mean its not going to be much use. No wonder. There's a lot going on here that you have to accept and notice. You can do anapanasati when nothing much is disturbing you.

*\*citta - approximates to "mind", except that it is not cerebral, nor is it located in a place in the body. The word refers to the sense of mind consciousness.*

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I found through obsessing my mind with those two words (let go) eventually the thinking began to still.

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People ask me, they say: "I've been trying to do anapanasati for years, I haven't gotten anywhere" They have this idea that to do anapanasati is a good practice, but they, don't reflect on other factors in life: what kind of work they do, what kind of family situation they're in and all the things that are going to influence and affect their mind and heart. Maybe for a moment you might be able to suppress everything out, but it all comes exploding back into your mind

again. So the more quiet you get, the easier it is just to concentrate on the breath.

When I first started meditating I couldn't do anapanasati at all. So I did mantras. Something like mantras I found very helpful to calm - like fighting fire with fire. My mind was such an obsessed thinker that I needed a thought. I couldn't contemplate on anything as subtle as my breathing, So I made up this mantra - "Let go" - and it worked. After a while, I just kept saying this mantra: "Let go" The first month of my meditation when I was a novice was an utter hell realm for me really. Suddenly I found myself living a very lonely life in the monastery, all alone. Nobody to talk to, nowhere to go. I'd just sit there and wait for them to bring me the meal. I became obsessed about the food - really ridiculous. And then try to do this anapanasati. In the end I thought, "Let go, just say: 'Let go'" So I did that, and I found through obsessing my mind with those two words eventually the thinking began to still - I'd get moments when I wasn't actually thinking; there was a moment of calm. And I'd notice it. And then the mind went back into obsession, and I'd say: "Let go, let go, let go" Eventually it was really like a machine gun! And after a while my mind became much more calm, so I could just more or less casually go about it. That's working with the mind. Then after a while mantras seemed ridiculous - I had no need for them - and then anapanasati became something I really enjoyed, I really liked to do.

**Question:**

If consciousness and the khandhas\*\* cease in a Tathagata, in a Buddha, in someone who becomes enlightened, who exists, what kind of existence is there left? Is there anything, is there nothing, or what?

**Answer:**

There's no delusion, about it any more. There's consciousness -the buddha was conscious, he wasn't unconscious - and he had a body and he had perception. He had vedana and he had sanna sankhara, vinnara. He had sense organs, and could see, hear, smell, taste, touch, think, and he had vedana,- there was vedana but there was no desire from that, coming from, ignorance. There was the ability to respond, to teach out of compassion for other beings, but there was no self to do it: there was just the remaining of what was left of that lifetime. He lived over forty years after his enlightenment, for the welfare of others beings. Language gets very confusing, because cessation sounds like annihilation to us-but it isn't. It's the ceasing of ignorance, the cessation of ignorance.

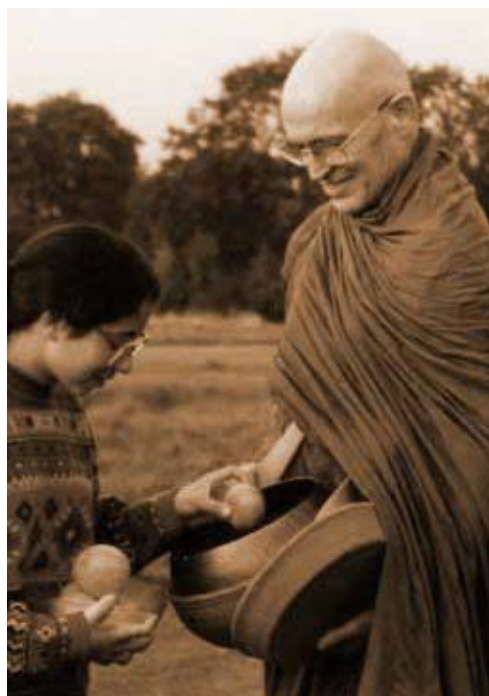
*\*\*Khandhas - body or form (rupa) and mind, which is made up of feeling (vedana), perception or recognition (sanna), mind creations (sankhara), and consciousness dependent on the six senses (vinnana)*

**Question:**

If there is no desire, if there's parinibbana, doesn't that mean everything ceases?

**Answer:**

That's it. There's the nibbana of non-grasping while the bodies still living, and then there's the parinibbana the final relinquishment; there's nothing to get reborn.



You see, when people die still unenlightened they desire to be reborn again. If you identify with the body, then you try to hold onto it as long as possible or there's the desire to be reborn into something else. You can see it just in a day here when you want something to stimulate you - that's rebirth actually. There's all this desire that will always take us to doing something, absorbing into something else. Well, apply that to when the body is dying. If you're frightened of death, and you've not really contemplated life and you're still attached to all these views about yourself, then there's a lot of desire going to come for rebirth. What you're attached to you tend to absorb into - the things you're used to, what you like, what you find attractive. You tend to go for that all the time; seeking people that you like, or seeking the place or the things, the thoughts and memories which are familiar. People will even hang on to misery and pain, because they're used to it.

As I said last night, when you're miserable at least you feel alive. To feel persecuted makes you feel really alive. Hating people makes you feel alive, doesn't it? If you really hate somebody, then you know you're really alive and you feel energised. Some people get very dull when they don't hate people, when they don't have any lust or greed for something, or any ambition to get somewhere. Why do people want to climb Mount Everest, or be the first one to sit the longest in a tub of baked beans? (There is actually someone - it's in the Guinness Book of Records. Imagine the danger of being reborn from that one!) Taking revenge, seeking vengeance, is sometimes what keeps people alive. I've never been in an English pub because all my life in England I've lived as a monk -but in American ones, I remember you'd go and you'd argue. You can get very heated about political things that you really don't care about very much-, it makes you feel alive to win an argument, or to support and defend a particular viewpoint.

Now contrast that to what we're doing here where the attention is on such ordinary things. There's nothing much: the passions are let go of - greed, hatred, delusion. You're conscious of breathing now, conscious of feeling - neutral feeling - Conscious of causes. You're bringing into consciousness the way things are. Now one doesn't feel this desire: the desire to go after extremes falls away. Most of us would really not want to argue about political views, or go to pubs, or climb Mount Everest, or sit in a tub of baked beans. So this is where most of our life is: it's the same for everyone really. The extremes are brief moments, but most of our life is like this: it's eating, walking, sitting, lying down, feeling, waiting for the bus, waiting for somebody to telephone, waiting for the bell to ring, waiting for the next event. And all that time we're breathing and there's feeling, and there's consciousness. In the practice of awareness, we're bringing consciousness to the ordinariness because we're not Usually conscious of that: Usually the ignorant person is conscious only in the extreme moments.



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## To Arrive at Where You Are

*The three bhikkhus and two anagarikas of the Devon Vihara walked from Devon to Chithurst in July. Here are extracts from Ajahn Kittisaro's letter, beginning with the time of leaving the Vihara.*

The unknown sharpens the mind and calls forth rejuvenating effort to meet the challenge. A quadruple rainbow heralded our departure and our initiation into the tudonga life was immediate. From our very first step it poured with rain, and we smiled wet and happy smiles as we strode along, exhilarated by the exertion itself, the movement, the utter simplicity ...

Rhythmic footsteps became our good friends, along with the seemingly omnipresent pack. Its weight, pressure, , and burden was reassuringly familiar amidst the constant change of wandering. It staged with me wherever we went, encouraging me to develop energy and patient endurance: and it gathered together our requisites into a very small space, helping us to see clearly how simple (or complicated) our bodily needs were.

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mocking, ignoring, or offering, as the case might be.

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Physically we still needed a place to rest our bodies for a night. Not wanting to take anything not given, we would put our tents down somewhere only with permission. Though often surrounded by vast tracts of lovely, spacious, empty, and alluring countryside, we remembered: "This belongs to somebody." People get annoyed when others take things for granted and use property improperly. So often as the afternoon began to fade we would look for someone to ask:

"We are Buddhist monks walking on pilgrimage to our monastery in West Sussex. Do you know where we might be able to get permission to camp for one night?"

...In this way, drawn together by need and a kind heart, we met many wonderful beings who invited us into their space. Our bodies were offered abundant fresh air, shelter, and nourishment; our hearts found encouragement, gratitude and trust, and our minds were given many things to reflect upon. Those who welcomed us seemed to receive in the giving. Everyone glows.

Once we approached the village of Mockbegger. We all wondered, will we be mocked. I thought it would be good for us to be available for mocking, ignoring, or offering, as the case might be. As it was late afternoon and we had no place to stay, I approached a house in order to speak with someone. Just as I opened the squeaky gate a man appeared out of nowhere, on cue, and he mocked me in a rather condescending tone as if he had caught me red-handed. "And what can I do for you, young man?"

I answered honestly, and contemplated that praise is not a true refuge. To hear tones of blame sounding Dhamma truth is indeed liberating. Mockbegger is giving us some good practice, we thought. The local vicar, who was newly ordained, seemed rather shocked to see us, and said it was against the law to camp. He directed us a few miles away to a public campsite. This is not the kind of news you like to hear at the end of a long day when you are tired.

Next door was a beautiful farm, Mockbegger Farm. We walked by, looked in wistfully, and went on. We'll take what has been given, I thought. The vicar has offered us his advice - not necessarily what we wanted - and we are capable of walking another mile or so with equanimity. Just as we were walking away I heard a cough. Turning around I saw a woman with a dog. I spoke to her amidst a barrage of unwelcoming barks.

She warmly invited us to Mockbegger Farm and we were offered a place to camp. She said: "I feel you've been sent. I'd like to talk to you about your philosophy and way of life, but I suppose you'll be having dinner now:" "No," I said, "we don't eat dinner" "I can see that. You all do look very thin. Surely you must be allowed something..."

Later that night, as it was raining, Christine welcomed us into the stable, and having been refreshed by her abundant offerings of tea and cheese, we sat on the straw-covered floor and talked and delighted in Dhamma with our kind host.

As I went to sleep in the tent that night I realised that we are the Mockbeggars. Outwardly we are poor and in need. We have no shelter, no money, no food, no way to continue our bodily existence alone. In consciously living this apparently ailing and impoverished life, we allow the kindness of others to blossom, we allow our own trust and serenity to develop. Inside we are Mockbeggars indeed, for we carry the precious gems of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha in our hearts.



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## The Desire That Ends Desire

*Tuhn Ajahn Maha Boowa is one of the most highly respected meditation masters in Thailand today. He is a native of the North-East (Isan) and spends much of his time in his forest monastery, Mat Pah Ban Tard, in Udon Province. Along with Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Thate and Ajahn Lee, he is one of the few forest masters whose talks have been translated into English. Several collections of his talks are available at Amaravati, Chithurst and the branch monasteries.*

### Question:

Tuhn Ajahn, sitting meditation because one wants to develop discernment and wisdom in order to transcend the defilements . . . is setting up an aim such as this (itself) a kind of defilement?

### Answer:

Setting up an aim is part of the plan to kill defilements, it's not defilement. For instance, (considering) how one is going to practise, or determining to practise in such and such a way so that the defilements will gradually die out until they are all gone ... that is our plan. Now we practise, we resolve ourselves to act accordingly: none of that is defilement. It isn't defilement to want to go to Nibbana, one isn't a corpse yet. Wanting to go to Nibbana, this kind of wanting is the Path (Magga). It's the Path one must use to reach liberation. This wanting is the motivation to walk the path to liberation. Wanting to make merit, wanting to transcend suffering, doing good actions ... these are not defilements. If one didn't want anything at all what would one do? As soon as there is a little wanting (one thinks) it's all defilement. So one simply "doesn't want" and just takes it easy, just like a tree stump or a corpse. Corpses don't have any wanting, so they must have reached Nibbana, right?

### Question:

Sometimes I'm not sure what the defilements are.

### Answer:

Not knowing what the defilements are: right there, that's defilement! Do you understand? YOU still don't know? That's defilement!

### Question:

Well then, knowing what defilements are, that's defilement again.

### Answer:

That's Dhamma! Do you understand yet? Do you understand this much?

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When I read of the Buddha collapsing through exertion,  
I felt so sorry for him the tears fell right there as I was  
reading.

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### Question:

Some people, ordinary lay people talking together, say that defilement is that which stains, then they go on to say that doing evil is defilement, doing good is defilement. ...

**Answer:**

Now do you understand this or not? Aspiring to virtue and practising virtuously: that's Magga, Do you understand yet? That is the desire to transcend suffering. Let's put it simply. Whatever is defilement has its own defining characteristics. Wanting is of two kinds: there is wanting as a kind of defilement, and also wanting as a part of Magga (Path). If one doesn't want at all then one doesn't have an aim in life, one just meanders and wanders around until one bumps into the wall, one doesn't walk along the path. Now there is this point of aspiration, the transcending of suffering. This is worth expanding on. Know which type of wanting to use, know both kinds.

I've seen this clearly already and haven't forgotten it to this very day because it was so momentous.

... Let's talk about Luang Dtah Boowa\* again ... Regarding reverence for the monks and the religion - sure, I was reverent, but I didn't particularly want to be ordained. It's just that certain events forced me to become a monk, so I did. Having been ordained I looked into the Dhamma books. Wherever I looked I was impressed. I was struck especially by the Buddha's life story and the lives of the disciples. Oh, it sent my mind reeling! When I read of the Buddha collapsing through exertion, I felt so sorry for him the tears fell right there as I was reading. Then when I read of his Enlightenment the tears fell again out of wonder. Reading the lives of the disciples would also fill me with wonder. When I read how they endured such suffering and hardships, the sympathy I felt caused such tears to flow again, and then again when I read how thou attained the superhuman attainments realising the Dhamma. So the lives of both the Buddha and his disciples were impressed into mg mind. Mg mind focused in on that, focused in on the Dhamma. Now as for external concerns, they gradually faded and lost their attraction as mg mind directed inwards. Reading the biographies of those who had realised Enlightenment, I wanted to be an arahant, I wanted to go to Nibbana.

*\*Luang Dtah Boowa, a term the Van Ajahn often uses in referring to himself in conversation, is mildly comical. Unlike "Luang Por" - Grand Father - 'Luang Dtah' approximates to "Grandad".*

So I had this single desire. It was not a normal one; the desire was so strong that if I didn't attain Enlightenment and Nibbana, I was prepared to die. Then this problem arose: now that I wanted Enlightenment and Nibbana with all my heart, were these things still available in our day and age\*\*? Or were Enlightenment and Nibbana extinct now? If Enlightenment and Nibbana were no longer in existence then my practice, no matter how hard I tried, would be useless because there would be no fruit as a result of it. So this caused me to further determine: "May I meet up with a teacher who is able to reveal this matter of Enlightenment and Nibbana to me, so that I may see that those things still exist without a shadow of a doubt. Just this much .... When I am satisfied of this, I will offer myself body and mind to that teacher, and I will exert myself in the practice to reach arahantship and Nibbana to the utmost of my ability. It doesn't matter if I die, just so long as I find out this one thing. Just so long as I can believe wholeheartedly that Enlightenment and Nibbana exist, then I will practise for that Enlightenment and Nibbana just as wholeheartedly as my conviction:'

*\*\* Literally, "in our religion".*

Now, having finished as much of my studies as I had determined to undertake, I set out to look for Venerable Ajahn Mun. Coming to Udon I found he had gone to Sakhon Nakorn, so I went up to Nong Khai first and stayed at Wat Toong Sa-Wahng for 3 months. Then I set out after him for Sakhon Nakorn and to where he was staying at Bahn Koke Nah Mon. That year he had spent the rains retreat there. I arrived there just as it was getting dark. He was walking up and down beside the tiny sala where he had a room. (That was the room where I had sat and listened in on him chanting.) Now as soon as I had arrived -it was as if he had recorded every single question that I had prepared to ask him -he answered all my questions right then and there, just as if to say: "Here, this is Enlightenment and Nibbana, where have you been looking? Don't you know? Enlightenment and Nibbana are right here, right here! Do you see?" The more I listened the more inspired I became, until I lost all doubts ... even though my heart was still full of defilements, mind you ... but I lost all doubts concerning whether Enlightenment and Nibbana still existed or not. I was simply certain that Enlightenment and Nibbana were still replete, just as the Venerable Ajahn had revealed to me, as if from his own heart. It was as if he were to pull out an object and say: "Here it is, do you see it or are you blind? If you're not blind, then when I put it here on the palm of my hand you must see it. Do you see it or not?" How could I not see it when it was laid on the palm of his hand like that? Now I was convinced, I believed him because he had brought the truth forward from his heart for me to see clearly.



Now concerning this desire of mine which was so strong ... As long as I still doubted about the fruit of the practice, then my aspiration had not yet ripened. As soon as he had explained about Enlightenment and Nibbana, I thought: "Now, the Venerable Ajahn has explained so much, are you convinced?" "Yeah, I'm thoroughly convinced." "Well now, are you going to really do it?" "I must really do it, I can't not really do it. I must, even at the cost of death." And it really was like that. The practice of one who has thrown his life into it and ordinary practice are very different, even, in the one person. Ordinary practice is one thing, but the practice which contains firm conviction and dedication has overwhelming strength. The exertion to reach the goal must be like an almighty blow. If one dies, one dies. If one doesn't die, one will unfailingly reach the goal. It can't be otherwise, there can be no turning back. One will die on the battlefield.

And here there is only wanting which can lead one! Let's take a look at this wanting. It was a strong kind of wanting I wanted to be liberated, wanted to know, to see' the Dhamma, Enlightenment and Nibbana. I wanted to be an arahant, I really wanted to. Even though I was only Luang Dtah Boowa, no bigger than a mouse, yet my desire was the size of a mountain. When I learned the truth from Venerable Ajahn Mun ... well, then, I was going to feed my hunger. Let's put it simply like that. To feed my hunger means to go to the limit! From that point on my practice was like a propeller, or like I don't know what. My mind wouldn't so much as flick outwards to my fellow monks or the lay people, it spun inwards. I wasn't interested in being -or even so much as thought that I would be - a teacher of monks, novices and lay people such as I am now, and get it has happened, I don't know how. At the time when my mind was immersed in the practice, engaged in hand-to-hand combat, I wasn't concerned with anybody else's life but my own. I couldn't come and live normally with others, I had to go



off to the mountains and the forests. When I found that living with one or two others wasn't convenient for me I changed my way. I knew within myself that that I wasn't convenient for me so I lived alone. If I wanted to eat I did, and if I didn't want to eat, no matter how many days. I wasn't afraid of dying. Oh, I was only skin and bone. Then I was still young and strong, I was 27 when I first got down to the practice. How do you think it was to be only skin and bone, was I skin or wasn't I?

Eventually, one day I came down to meet the others and they were all shocked to see me. Even Ajahn Mun was shocked! "OK, why are you like this? Coming down from the mountain all yellow like this ... what happened to you?" Then he countered himself immediately with: "Well, a true fighter has to be like this, eh!" He was afraid I'd get all faint-hearted and start blubbling! Do you get that? When he said: "What's happened to you?" I was ready to start blubbling, but when he added: "Its got to be like this before you can really be called a fighter," he knocked it out straight away.

So practising on one's desire has a special kind of impetus. I dare to say this. I'm not bragging or boasting, I'm just talking the truth. Actually I don't want to sag it, but when a reason arises for something to be said then I sag it, by bringing forth this kind of wanting to compare with that kind which is defilement.

I've wanted wholeheartedly in the past. I wanted Enlightenment and Nibbana. And my practice was in proportion to that wanting, practising to the utmost of my ability and wisdom. Sometimes I just threw everything I had into it: "Hm! If I die I die, this is the moment of decision." There was no turning back, only either to die or to break through. Like a drill, one has to drill, one has to drill till it breaks through, or like a person who is tangled in the brush, ha must break through. There was no turning back because I had reached the point of no return, When one has begun the combat at close quarters like that there's 110 turning back. One has either to fight to the death or to victory. it was like this sometimes.

I had already thrown my life into the practice, so that when it reached those times when the going got harder and heavier, I just kept on going. If I didn't I wouldn't find out, death was superfluous. And why? Because of this wanting to know, wanting to see. All the torment and hardship that I felt during this time of developing the kammattana practice, was because of the power of that wanting, it was so heavy. I didn't think I would survive to this day as I have.

I didn't have many companions in those days because I wasn't interested in others. I just staged in the forests by myself. No matter how many days I wanted to eat or to fast it didn't matter. When I felt like I was really going to die, I'd stagger out on almsround and eat for a day and feel a little stronger. Why did I have to do this? Because I'm a coarse fellow, I admit it. Whenever I had a decent feed I'd just go to sleep like a pig and wouldn't want to get up. Was I raising a pig or something? This wasn't a pig farm! When I fasted and my body became wasted and thin, although the body wouldn't have much strength, the mind would be clear. I could see it clearly This is why I fasted, not for other reasons. When it came time to eat then it became a case for the "little court:" One voice would sag: "Hey. are you going to fast to the death or something? You're half dead already!" Another voice would sag: "Huhl Whenever you get something to eat YOU just sleep like a pig, that's even worse than death! You put your head on the chopping block and just wait for it. Why do you want so much to eat anyway?" The outcome of the trial. I was the judge, was: "Hm ... fast some, eat some, that's the best way." It probably wasn't wrong if I made up my own mind. Fast some, eat some, that's the way. So I kept to that continually until I reached the limit of my ability NOW I'M simply this Old Venerable Boowa that you see before you now. I don't want anything. You may wonder if I'm dead or something to say this, huh? I don't want, so I tell you I don't want. Regardless of what anybody says. If they say I'm crazy then I'm crazy ... crazy with "not wanting". Heaven, I don't want. Nibbana, I don't want. An arahant? I don't want to be one. I'm just simply Old

Venerable Boowa, what more can I say? That's all there is to it. That's the end of the problem of wanting. So go and decipher that and think about it. When it was time to want, I wanted. When the wanting became so much that nothing could satisfy it, I couldn't be bothered wanting any more. So I just don't want anything, I'm just as I am. What more can I say?



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## Filling in the Dots

*Sister Abhassara has been working on providing a way of chanting the Pujas in English for the past year or so. Here she comments on the process so far.*

As Buddhism gradually takes root in Western soil we see the traditional forms developing and changing as they adapt to the culture. One such change that has been introduced recently in our Sangha is the rendering of our morning chanting - into English. When chanted in one's own language the devotional quality of the words and the meaning of the Buddha's teaching become much clearer.

I was asked to work out a way of chanting the English translation of the morning and evening puja over a year ago. At first I felt very uncertain as to how to go about this, and I spent some time listening to various other religious chanting styles and talking to cis many "experts" as I could find. But in the end I had to drop all attempts to contrive something or to rely on external help; all that was needed was to merely let the heart speak. The first recording was mostly spontaneous and improvised, and, although a little rough, it met with approval from the people that heard d it. So then the lengthy process of crystallising the pure spark of inspiration into a solid form began. This process could also be called "filling in the dots"! - as I had devised a system of recording the tonal changes by placing a dot above or below the chosen syllable, to indicate the rising and failing of pitch.

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These notes have a cooling effect on the mind and also  
serve to open the heart.

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Sound and vibration have a deep effect on mind and body. My intention was to create a feeling of depth and devotion, without making an overelaborate sound or wandering into the realms of singing or sentimentality. The beauty of chanting lies in its simplicity of tone and its ability to set up a strength of resonance or vibration that has a calming and peaceful effect on mind and body. Bearing this in mind I chose the limitation of just three notes: the home note in the middle. the higher note being a whole tone above that, and the lower note a whole tone below. These notes have a cooling effect on the mind and also serve to open the heart. They are used in Gregorian plainsong, the ancient Christian style of chanting, and also in the Thai tradition, where these notes are still used in some of the chanting today.

Having first settled on the notes, the hardest part was finding some sort of rhythm to use -the English language having a rather jerky rhythm to it. In the end I decided not to define it so closely in terms of long and short beats, as the Pali is structured; but rather to use the natural rhythm and flow of conversational English, with a few syllables lengthened at the ends of lines to provide emphasis and to give the sense of coming to a close. For example, in "you still had compassion for later generations" -the

lengthening is on the last word, third syllable, the rest of the line being chanted with the natural spoken rhythm.

Finally, after a six-month gestation period, the English chanting was born, and a tape was played to the Amaravati community during the winter retreat.

Later in the year I began to revise the Pali chanting in a similar fashion, giving it the same three notes as the English chanting and borrowing heavily from the old Thai style of chanting, which had been used in the early years at Chithurst monastery. The main difference between our Pali and that of the Thai style is the more clearly defined Pali rhythm and pronunciation that was introduced over four years ago. Hopefully the new Pali chanting strikes a balance between accuracy of rhythm and pronunciation, and devotional expression.

After completing the revision of the Pali chanting, I was encouraged to merge the English and Pali together. This was done in a manner similar to the Pali and Thai chanting used in Ajahn Chah's monasteries - one line in Pali and then its translation. This intermixing worked surprisingly smoothly, as I had not intended to put the English and Pali together when working on them separately.

So, with the help of Sister Siripanna, we made a recording of the Pali and English chanting in a gruelling three-hour recording session. From then on, it was played every morning to the community, and people gradually started to learn it. Hopefully there will be a tape made generally available towards the end of the year.

The process of creation and transformation can be very inspiring, but there needs to be a lot of patience and letting-go of expectations and ownership, in order for something to manifest fully at the right time and in the right way.

My original intention was to give the daily recollection and devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha a form that would most easily lend itself to devotional feeling and a sense of gladness and uplift. Also the idea was to make the Buddhas teaching more accessible to those not familiar with the meaning of the Pali language.

I hope this will help your hearts to open in faith and trust in the Buddha-Dhamma, and to breathe fresh life into the traditional forms handed down through many generations since the time of the Buddha.

I dedicate the blessings and good fortune generated through this work to Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Sumedho and all sentient beings.



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## Zeal and New Land

*An interview with Venerable Subbato, a New Zealander by birth who spent about one year (1985-86) offering his services during the early stages of the development of the New Zealand Monastery, "Bodhinyanarama".*

PS letter from Ajahn Viradhammo

### Question:

What kind of interest and support is there for "Bodhinyanarama"?

### Answer:

There is certainly interest and very good, willing support. The committee that invited the monks here is very keen to see that the monastery gets off to a good start, and are doing everything they can to establish it in a way that the Sangha feels will be beneficial. The pace of life in New Zealand is noticeably slower, and coming from England I could see that people have more time available to spend at the monastery; they seem to have more time to come in the evenings after work and at the weekends. Even right at the beginning of Bodhinyanarama when there was no monastery as such - just a couple of huts in the forest - people would come regularly to meditate with us. They would also come to help with the work when the monastery was being built, and would regularly take part in "Working bee" weekends. The laity have put a lot of effort into raising funds - frequently holding charity dinners and food fairs - and a lot of support has been given in donations, enabling the expenses for land and property to be paid without the need for loans. Everyday, different devoted supporters would bring cooked alms-food for the monks - the anagarikas rarely have to cook.

### Question:

Could you say a little about what the situation was like when the monks first arrived in New Zealand?

### Answer:

When the monks first arrived they understood it would not be long before they would settle into the new premises, but they found the lay people were having a few problems in getting things moving. Although the Association had already purchased a beautiful fifty-acre property near the capital city, Wellington, there were still some delays with the architect's office. The property is in a lovely situation at the top of a valley bordering on a large range of bush-clad hills called the Rimutakas. There's no flat land, it's just all either up or down. The first task was to clear some tracks so that we could move around on the property, because there was nothing there, just really thick bush, and the only way you could move around was by crawling on all fours along the wild pig tracks.

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It wasn't long before people warmed to the presence of  
the monastery.

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### Question:

When the accommodation was eventually built, what did it consist of?

**Answer:**

The initial idea, when the Buddhist Association discussed it with Ajahn Sumedho and made their invitation, was to provide accommodation for two monks, and a guest house and meditation hall. But even when I was there, there were already three monks and one anagarika. It was quite obvious that the monastery was not just going to stay as a small vihara. There was a lot of interest, wherever we went in the country; people would ask about coming to stay, and a few enquired about the possibility of ordination. Because in New Zealand you're such a long way from England or Thailand or anywhere else in the world, and to travel there from New Zealand is quite expensive.

By early '86, the plans for building an accommodation block had all gone through and contractors had been employed, so the accommodation block went ahead as the first stage of the monastery development. While that was being built, the monks and anagarikas started building a few huts, kutis, further up in the forest - which wasn't part of the initial plan, of course. That meant the accommodation block could be used as a temporary shrine room.

**Question:**

What about the relationship with the locals immediately around the monastery - was there any difficulty in the beginning?

Answer: There was never really any problem. When the locals first heard about us - I think when the association initially bought the land - there was a remarkable article published by a fundamentalist Christian Group. But there was an immediate rapport with neighbours once the monks moved into the valley and began walking around and talking to the local people. As it's a warmer climate, people are outside more, so you walk down the road and you see your neighbours and talk to them - it's a much more out-and-about sort of place. It wasn't long before people warmed to the presence of the monastery there.

**Question:**

What do you feel were the main difficulties faced by monks during the initial stages?

**Answer:**

Well the initial stay in which I was involved was really very demanding physically; having to carry bags of gravel, and put a lot of energy into the mundane side of things. It is quite hard when you are so involved with that to then stop, and relate with lay people and give teachings. We were actually criticised for working too hard on one occasion. It was one of those days when everything goes wrong; we had to move about 800 concrete blocks from the bottom of the drive up to the top on that one day, because the builder needed them by the next day. We organised a "working bee", but it was pouring with rain, so only about three or four people turned up, and we ended up working until some ridiculous hour carrying all these concrete blocks. A local truck driver came to help but after ferrying the first load of blocks, his truck went off the drive. We had stacked the blocks the wrong way and about one third of them were damaged. Then to top it all, we found out later that we were supposed to be at a Cambodian ceremony; we'd forgotten all about it. It was a complete disaster.

It's a very high-energy situation when you're moving tons of gravel up the hill and hauling logs down -the Sangha and those living with us were putting everything into it. That could be a bit overwhelming for outsiders who had come to share in the tranquillity and peace of the monastery, and instead we were tiring sacks of gravel at them faster than they could answer back. There were times when we felt people were perhaps a little intimidated by the situation. It was lovely to see, as things became established -and it was no longer just a building site - to see it begin to function again in a more traditional way as a sanctuary, a place for people to come, to be quiet.

**Question:**

Did you manage to have a traditional Vassa rains retreat during that year?

**Answer:**

Well, yes -it rained for three months, that was pretty traditional. We had to decide whether we were going to spend the Vassa in the town flat. As it was beside a very busy main road, we were very keen to ' get into the forest, but that meant that all of us had to accept that we were going to live in one 8'x12' hut - because that's all we had.

We'd all get up at the same time in the morning, and do the same yoga, and then sit together. We kept a very good routine just to keep us going, because as you can imagine, living so closely and then working all day together, we couldn't get away from each other. .It was quite a difficult time, actually being winter in New Zealand. Ajahn Viradhammo was away in Canada that Vassa. leaving the three of us: myself, Ven Thanavaro and anagarika Gary. We dug holes in the ground for toilets and collected rainwater for our supply of water. But we did have a microwave oven, which Was really a lifesaver. We had to decide whether we were going to use the microwave oven or not, some of the Sangha felt they didn't mind eating cold food, but I thought on top of everything else - that was going a bit too far, and if we had to have a 100-metre extension cord with a microwave on the end of it, that was perfectly all right by me!

**Question:**

Could you say something about the Ohara in Auckland?

**Answer:**

The monastery has really been supported by the New Zealand Buddhist Association - a combination of the Wellington and Auckland Association.

Auckland is about 400 miles away from Wellington, and it's also the largest centre of



population in the country. If you picture New Zealand as a country about the size of the British Isles, Wellington is in the middle and Auckland is near the top. It was difficult to decide where to put the monastery. As it worked out, they decided Wellington was the most central and so they went ahead there. However, the people in Auckland are very much involved, and I wouldn't be surprised if sooner or later they invite the Sangha to have a forest monastery near Auckland - mainly because it is such a large centre of population. A lot of Sri Lankan, Thai, Burmese and Western people are interested there. They have large gatherings for the Wesak and Kathina celebrations; hundreds of people literally, 200 or 300 people coming. Right from the beginning the monks would travel monthly by aeroplane up to Auckland to teach and meet with their supporters there. More recently the monks have been travelling all over the country, visiting a lot of small groups and holding retreats .... Here in England now we almost feel it's part of the tradition, the Sangha here is very strong. But there they are such a long way away, just a handful of people. Even so, I'm sure the Sangha will flourish in New Zealand because although there are only a few people involved as yet, the support there is really tremendous and the Sangha is very well taken care of. People really value the presence of the monks, and would also like to have nuns there one day.

... One of the most joyous occasions I remember there was after that quite difficult time when Ajahn Viradhammo was away in Canada with his family. After working very hard, at the end of the winter the Ajahn came back, the builders finished off the accommodation block and we were able to move in and stop for a month of formal retreat.

Ajahn Sumedho and Tuhn Chao Khun Pannananda had promised to come for a visit in early '87. By January the carpets and curtains were offered for the shrine room and it had been decorated, so we had all the necessary accommodation and amenities. Then quite unexpectedly they came at the same time. Ajahn Sumedho with Ajahn Anando and Ven Bodhinando, and Tuhn Chao Khun was accompanied by Ajahn Pasanno of Wat Pah Nanachat. With eight bhikkhus and one anagarika it was a big Sangha in our terms, but we were able to accommodate everyone on what had until recently just been a bush-clad hillside. We had a formal opening ceremony for Bodhinyanarama and many people came to the monastery at this happytime. It was a really wonderful feeling and one had the sense that good things had begun to take root in this remote corner of the world.

**Since this interview a few changes have taken place, most notably the acquisition of an adjacent plot of level land.**

**A recent letter from Ajahn Viradhammo:**

With only Tong to attend to anagarika duties it gets a bit difficult at times. Last week Tong had to meet Ven Thanavaro at the airport. It was a morning flight, so he also had to prepare the meal. Before driving to the airport he had all the food in pots ready to be cooked. All the pots were connected by electrical leads to one timer switch. As Tong was greeted by Ven Thanavaro coming off the plane the kitchen at Bodhinyanarama came alive, and by the time of Tony's return the meal was ready. Clever chap our Tong, but at times spread a bit thin!

It is an inspiring time at Bodhinyanarama. The Vassa has begun and we've created space for a longish retreat. We've been using Tuhn Ajahn's tapes from the January retreat, and his guidance is much appreciated. In such a small sangha, guidance in right-view from an Outside source - especially Tuhn Ajahn - is very helpful. As long as the winter retreats continue in the UK I would like to follow suit during the Vassa here in New Zealand.

We have also taken possession of a neighbouring property which opens up wonderful possibilities for this monastery. Hugh Tennent, our bodhisattva architect, has been here for the last four days creating ideas for the development of Bodhinyanarama. We have been crawling through the bush looking at potential sites for sala, kutis, stupa, paths and meditation groves. In October we shall submit a comprehensive plan (20 years down the road) to the town



planners. This is a big step for us because at present we are classified as a domestic residence which happens to have bhikkhus at home. We wish to be classified as a monastery and therefore have the freedom to develop according to our forest tradition. As it stands, we are not quite anything, and the usual doubts about how much can or cannot be done keep arising. By Christmas our position should be more clear.

A third bhikkhu, Ven Jotipanyo, has joined us for the Vassa, which makes a total of five people for these Vassa months. He is a most welcome addition and has kindly consented to give the vinaya readings each morning. He did this at Wat Pah Nanachat two years ago and has researched the work quite thoroughly.

Although we have not been in Stokes Valley for very long, it is becoming apparent to more and more people that our tradition has a direction and a stability that are not dependent on the fashions and trends of ordinary society. Here in New Zealand one is forever hearing of redundancies, plant closures, unemployment and people shifting to Australia. In Sydney they even joke that New Zealand is a welfare state of Australia. As well as economic uncertainty, there is also a lot of noise about racial issues involving Maoris, Pacific Islanders and Pakeha (New Zealanders of European descent). The Maoris are making many land claims based on the Waitangi Treaty and are having significant successes in the courts. Finally, there is the usual dose of doom and gloom on the box and in the newspapers.

Compared to the problems of Asia, of course, New Zealand has it very good. This is not much consolation to someone who has just been made redundant. Perhaps the real problem lies in the fact that this society offers little indication of an inner refuge. Thus, the inevitable changes of economics and politics take their toll in human suffering. Through it all, however, the Dhamma-Vinaya remains an impeccable source of guidance, admonishment and encouragement. Most of us need some social stability in order to contemplate the Buddha's teaching with any depth of penetration. Happily, the monastery provides standards for reflection based on Dhamma Vinaya - standards that provide our affiliated community with the guidance necessary for the development of stability in our own lives. Just being here, then, and practising the Buddha's way is important. Pointing out to people that there is an inner refuge independent of political parties and the price of lamb in Tehran, seems to be a vital task on this rather bruised planet.



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## Kwan Yin and the Noble Elephant

*In the winter of 1986-7 Venerable Sucitto was in Thailand; during that time he went wandering (tudong) with Venerable Gavesako. Most of the time was spent in the Isan - the provinces of North-East Thailand - but in the following piece he reflects on another part of the trip, in Siraja and Ko Sichang .....*

Siraja is not a particularly beautiful town. It's part of that urban overspill to the east of Bangkok that flows along the coast through Samut Pakhan and down to Chonburi, oozing along in the wake of the oil and shipping developments around the Gulf of Thailand. Ajahn Gavesako and I had decided to go there as part of our tudong trip in order to get out to an island called Ko Sichang - The Island of the Noble Elephant. This would be around Christmas time, which like most festive occasions in Thailand, is very noisy, at least in the more Western-influenced cities. Accordingly, we planned to stay a night or two at a small monastery that Ajahn Gavesako knew, and then go out to the island for a few days of living very simply away from the hustle and bustle.

It seemed like a good idea: even before the festivities began, life in the city was noisy compared with the forests of the Isan. The little monastery that we were staying in occupied a few acres squashed up against a hillside on the Outskirts of the city of Siraja; it wasn't exactly in the heart of town, but it certainly wasn't outside of it. There was a lot of noise from the streets and from Christmas music being played very loudly; so after the initial pleasantries with the resident monks, I for one was quite eager to get away. But of course one has to wait until someone gets to know of one's wishes and offers to buy a ticket - which may take a few days.

So one evening we went down to the seafront and walked out to a small island that was connected to the mainland by a pier. Off this island there was one of those Chinese Buddhist temples of which there are very many in Thailand, which go in for the more ritualistic side of Buddhism. In order to obtain good fortune one can make offerings at shrines in such temples - to the Buddha or to one of the bodhisattvas, particularly to the Bodhisattva of Compassion, The One Who Listens to The Sounds Of The World, or Kwan Yin as she is known in Chinese. I must admit this supplication to divine agencies has never fitted in with my ideas about Buddhism; my mind kept turning away from the painted images and the decorative shrines to the sea, bathed in sunset gold. The serene horizon hinted of sublime planes, and I found myself more eager than ever to get out to a place where I could apply myself wholeheartedly to meditation.

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"This is it: I thought, "this is going to be the night when I really get into some samadhi."

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By the next afternoon, unseen wheels had turned and we were able to get a ferry boat out to the island to Ko Sichang. We landed at a little harbour and walked along the coast of the island until we came to a more remote area. There we found a fantastic old ruined temple that had been built in the reign of King Mongkut. It wasn't like the Chinese temple. Its very decay

gave it a certain air of sanctity: there was a bodhi tree growing up through the roof, and the cracked walls inside were bare except for a few photographs of tudong bhikkhus like Venerable Ajahn Mun. To be in the presence Of such images of austerity and dedication to Dhamma practice was very encouraging. This was the right place, sure enough!

We walked on down to the rocky seashores the beaches and the sparkling water. We decided to make the best use of the situation by separating and practising on our own most of each day. I had resolved to fast for the five days that we'd be there, because whenever I fast then I find that there gives a clarity to my mind, and a greater refinement to my attention. The physical energies calm down and level out and there is less need to sleep.

The weather was beautiful. December in Thailand a lovely time of year, hot but not stuffy and sticky: and then being on an island there were pleasant breezes' so it was quite idyllic. At night it was, warm and balmy and I would sit underneath the measure stars meditating with the moon as my only companion. Time stretched itself out and went to rest...

After a few days of this I was getting pretty blissed out, Then, I think it was on the third day, I came across a beautiful old wooden palace structure that was half burnt down, set in grounds with frangipani trees - and that was quite amazing! I was near the ruined temple, and exploring further I found a cave which opened into the ground. You could walk down inside this great cleft in the ground, which then opened out to reveal long galleries where one could do walking meditation, and niches in the rock where you could sit and meditate. Then you could go down even further until you couldn't see or hear anything; so you could be completely enfolded in the earth's womb. A hermit's dream!

I thought, "This, is amazing, this is really wonderful And it was the day of the full moon, My immediately constructed the evening confrontation with Mara: I was near the ruined temple' so I could sit there with Ajahn Mun, or I could go down into the cave and practise, or I could do walking meditation out under the frangipani trees with the coal evening breezes blowing and the full moon beaming down. "This is it:' I thought, "this is going to be the night when I really get into some samadhi."

I was feeling very light, almost skipping up the slope with expectation, when I noticed some people along-which was kind Of strange. They were all dressed in white; then I recognised that it was one of the anagarikas from the monastery in Siraja we'd been staying at, and he had some lay women with him who were also dressed in white. I quickly realised that, they must have come to see us; but I didn't want to be bothered with polite conversation - particularly as I couldn't speak the language. However, they'd seen me: I could'nt ignore that, so I decided to make the best of it, come over, be nice, and hopefully it wouldn't last too long. We sat down by a big bodhi tree outside the ruined temple and they had one of those refrigerated boxes with some Coca Cola in it so I accepted a bottle and drank some. They started asking questions and talking and I



couldn't get very much of what they were saying. I just smiled and said I didn't understand, and thought that sooner or later Ajahn Gavesako would happen along. Then he would talk to them, and I could go off and sit and get into some samadhi.

But somewhere in the back of my mind was an anxious voice: "Why have they come? I wonder what it is?"

Then Ajahn Gavesako came along. I sat with him for a while, but he seemed quite at ease listening and talking to them, so I thought: "Well I'll just move off." I started to slip away: but as I was slipping away he turned around and said: "Oh, tuhn Sucitto, pack your bag, will you - we're going back."

My mind stopped: "Back, what?" He said, "We're going back to Siraja." And I said, "What for? What are we going back for?" Suddenly my evening of samadhi dropped away. "Oh, they've invited us." I looked at him questioningly, and he added. "I don't know what for. It doesn't matter. They've invited us we'd better go. It wouldn't be polite to refuse."

At that point something in me stopped. I turned around and walked off and went to where my bowl bag was and packed my alms bowl with my mind going: "What do they want? What are we doing? I suppose we're going back to chant something or another, do some silly ritual. Why can't we stay here? We came here for a few days. We were going to go back in a couple of days anyway. We came here for a few days to practise and now we've got to go back to the town. What for? What do they want?" But I knew enough to recognise that resistance in the mind and not to follow it. So I packed my bag. We walked back from that haven to a road where they'd got a motorbike taxi to give us a ride and Tuhn Sucitto pack your bag, will you - we're going back."

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We returned to the temple in the city not knowing what for. I went to my kuti, unpacked my bag and sat there waiting for something to happen. And I sat and waited: and nothing happened except the sounds of the city swelled as the duskfall turned into night. Sounds of the traffic, sounds of the world - and I had to listen to it as night turned into day. And it being Christmas Eve and Thai people, Christians as well as Buddhists, enjoying loud music, there were lots of loud Christmas songs in English. Perhaps it was because they were in English that it didn't seem to matter what they were. In English it didn't seem to matter what they were about, because they weren't even Christmas Carols you could be inspired by. What came rolling into my kuti was Christmas Muzak, like "White Christmas" and "Rudolph the Red-

Nosed Reindeer" - again and again. I sat there in the night and I sat there in the morning: listening, waiting and listening to "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer", remembering the full moon, the ruined temple, Ajahn Mun and samadhi.

But I did listen, and something in me got the point. Something in me stopped resisting and became at one with the way things are "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" is quite a reasonable song actually, when you listen to it a few times; it's got a moral to it. And when something in me let go and listened to the sounds of the world, it seemed there was a vibrant silence behind it all. That silence behind the sound of the world seemed to encompass and listen to everything. Profound or petty or inane, no sound could stain the silence of the listening mind: and in that acceptance was timeless compassion.

Nobody came for us; nor did anyone come to take us anywhere. They didn't want me to give a talk, do any chanting, bless anything, go anywhere, say anything. Maybe they were worried that we were getting lonely. Perhaps they thought we weren't getting enough to eat, I expect the whole event arose out of compassion. But in the end I was grateful. Whatever the Law or compassionate Bodhisattva that arranges these events - I have a lot to thank them for. They've always managed to catch me out; always turned me away from my attachments, and ideas of practice, and made me listen to the way things are. Their emissaries are everywhere. They never let up.

And perhaps I learnt something about the Noble Elephant, the symbol of Dhamma practice. The Buddha himself is likened to the elephant: it's the symbol of the unstoppable aspiration to Nibbana that keeps going through anything. It is with such an aspiration that a tudong monk establishes his practice - he inclines to be enduring, to be resilient, and to be tested by wild and lonely places. In fact for me it's always been a great pleasure to go to remote places, where I could be alone and independent. Yet. I've also noticed that when I interpret the aspiration too literally, a mahout climbs on the back of the Noble Elephant. This mahout is always saying things like: "I'm going to get into jhana tonight. This is the real place for practice, if I could stay in this place forever, I'd really develop." And he's always asking the practice to come up with something fancy; like a mahout that wants his elephant to dance and prance and perform tricks. He's always been a burden, this mahout; and as long as he's driving the elephant I've never felt that satisfied, even in blissful circumstances. Instead, my attitudes get caught up in trying to prove or attain or hold on to something - a rather self-conscious striving that finally does not lead to coolness, detachment or liberation.

Of course, when one lives as a bhikkhu there are chances to undertake austerities and live alone sometimes, but the basic standard always entails a relationship with the society. The life is one of dependence; it's an interface. Yet if the Buddha established the bhikkhu life for liberation, then we should trust the opportunity for selflessness that it presents. It's a bumpy ride at times, but I've learned to appreciate the tests of Sangha life, and the enigmatic compassion of the Way It Is: they always create predicaments where I have to let go of my self-interest.

When I came down from my kuti on Christmas Eve morning, Ajahn Gavesako was reading a newspaper. "It says here there's four babies born in the world every second!" "Better get used to group practice:" I commented.

Sometimes we need austerities, sometimes we need isolation, and sometimes it takes a Red-Nosed Reindeer to awaken us from ourselves.



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## Passing Thoughts From a Forest

*Venerable Vipassi was one of three bhikkhus to spend the entire Vassa on retreat in the Hammer Wood. He passes on these notes.*

Today has been still and overcast with intermittent showers of rain. The leaves on the trees around my hut are turning brown and have already started to fall. In the first few weeks of the retreat I came to appreciate the vast variety of shades of the colour green - from the subtle paleness of bracken to the deep, full richness of moss, I noticed often what a soothing affect it has upon one's whole being. Now the various shades of brown are beginning to display themselves too, from brilliant gallows and crimsons to the more muted colours of the leaves that have fallen across my walking path path.

Of this three-month period in solitude there remain twelve days or so. One of the monks who did such a retreat last year told me that for him it began to feel a bit like a prison sentence towards the end ... another said: "That last month is a bit of a grind." So far I haven't found this to be so, but there's still time! Of course there have been changes in mood and a kaleidoscope of different mental states to work with, but I have kept referring back to a resolution made at the beginning of the retreat -to accept the unpleasant. Calling to mind this intention when things have turned uncomfortable or difficult has helped the mind to resist and judge less, and remember that suffering ceases through changing one's attitude towards the way things are, not in changing the things themselves. Thus loneliness turns into aloneness, boredom into quiet acceptance of inactivity and even depression and despair have a still, peaceful centre when one no longer judges or resists them. Not that it necessarily gets any easier though. For while the faculty of investigation becomes sharper, the delusions can become subtler and quite effectively camouflage themselves against recognition and acknowledgement. There always seems to be something to work with.

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One doesn't look forward to retreat with a "now we'll really get down to it and get somewhere" kind of attitude, it's more of an openness to life as it unfolds.

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I was quite surprised before the retreat began by how many people asked as about it. It became apparent that they were imagining how they would cope with such a prospect. Actually I hadn't given it a great deal of thought beforehand -not nearly so much as I would have done a few years back. Solitude and inactivity was once quite a fearful prospect for me even when I had begun to meditate, for it opened the floodgates to unacknowledged fears and desires, repressed emotions and restlessness. After five years or so of practising as a member of the Sangha, some of these energies have diminished considerably. but more than this one finds less of a distinction between being \*on retreat" and "not on retreat", for the way in which we are taught to approach the practice is to work with whatever is happening. Some of the most important realisations have occurred in quite stressful and busy working situations where people aren't getting on well or there are a lot of demands. So one doesn't look forward to retreat with a "now we'll really get down to it and get somewhere" kind of attitude, it's more

of an openness to life as it unfolds and presents itself in the present moment. The idea of "three months" becomes just a thought which happens now, rather than a prospect to be got through. If one lives one step at a time, then "three months" will take care of itself.

The generous and loving support we have received over this period gives one every incentive to apply oneself and be worthy of such generosity. Three or four days a week Ajahn Amaro, Venerable Vajiro and I receive food from people living nearby, who have committed themselves to supporting us for the three months. This never fails to be a quiet and beautiful event. However, although one tries to indicate that half a bowlful will be perfectly adequate, one can sense the anxiety in our donors' faces if they are not given enough opportunity to load us up with all the things they have spent the morning lovingly preparing. Some of my disquiet about wastage was allayed though, when I noticed that wherever I threw away the leftover rice after the meal, it was gone by the next morning. One day I was washing my bowl and leaned out of the window to tip some water away and was surprised to -see it fall on two equally surprised small brown mice, who were just beginning to tuck in to the day's leftovers. From then on I would often watch them darting out of their little holes within minutes of my putting the food down for them. It was most amusing watching a mouse deal with a long piece of spaghetti, rather like watching someone eating a telegraph pole!



One feature of the retreat which has taken up a great deal of time and attention has been learning the Patimokkha, the monks' 227 observances, which are recited in a formal meeting every fortnight. The rains retreat is the traditional time when the Vinaya, the monastic discipline is studied and the three month period of solitude is the time chosen by many monks to undertake to learn the Patimokkha. It entails some weeks or months of sustained effort to learn by heart several thousand words of the scriptural language, so I had begun to study a little Pali some months before, in the hope of being able to actually understand what I would be chanting. This was also to try to make it more of an interesting task than the grind it became for several of the monks who have already learnt it.

At the Outset the prospect is really quite daunting. The speed and fluency that is expected and the sheer volume of material to be learnt make one seriously doubt one's, capabilities. I had learnt a little prior to the retreat, and had seen how what starts off seeming difficult changes as one progresses; so the thing to do seemed to be to begin, go steadily and not make any plans about when to complete it. Studying the context of each rule beforehand, reading the background stories in Pali and English than going through the rule itself word by word, sentence by sentence, until it was clearly understood; seemed to prepare the mind to receive and digest it all. Venerable Suviro, who had recently learnt it himself, gave generously of his time to discuss the process Of learning and give encouragement. Gradually it began to take shape.

This manner of retaining information by rote learning preserved the scriptures for the first few hundred years and as things continued I began to reel a sense of partaking in something ancient, profound and very precious. It is because of the efforts of thousands of unknown individuals who, out of love and respect for the teachings, took it upon themselves to protect and preserve them, that we can still practise with them today. There are others for whom one feels gratitude—the great 5th century commentator Acariya Buddhaghosa who revived the study of Pali in Sri Lanka, and the Pali Text Society, whose pioneering efforts over the last century have made available most of the Pali Canon in English. I was in fact using translations by Ajahn Amaro's cousin - I B Horner.

After six weeks of quite concerted effort, the time came to lay aside the books and dictionaries; the 227 rules were all in place, and it remained to polish and practise them. It was also time to disengage the mind from so much thinking about things - worthy things though they had been - and turn back much more to silence, stillness, emptiness. Thoughts about the importance of Pali study, our tradition, the necessity of having a firm theoretical grounding before teaching and so on, which had all come to seem important, righteous, and real, started to fade in significance as this whole mental world which had come into being began to break up and pass away. From this I reflected again upon how interest and attention give things life, but there comes a point when it begins to turn compulsive - and your mental creations turn back upon and assail you with their urgency, importance and righteousness, and start demanding your attention. It's not that Pali isn't worth studying after all, but it seems right to keep a balanced perspective and treat our conventions in the same way a mountain climber would his climbing equipment - learning to understand, take care of and maintain it, but above all use it for what it's meant for, and not get caught up in taking pride in it for its own sake.

So at this point, with twelve days left, that whole episode seems like a distant dream. Has this really been two and a half months? Just a few memories remain - mostly of moments of joy in people's kindness or of mistakes made and wrong turnings taken along the way, that turned into learning experiences. The times when the mind might have been perfectly composed and still leave no trace. There's no feeling of having attained anything or got anything - learning the Patimokkha is maybe the exception, There is simply the ever-new realisation that one has arrived again at this moment, now. Was there ever. will there ever be, anything else?





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## A First View of Buddhism

*Arnold Handley works as a journalist, writing features for popular newspapers. His reason for coming to Amaravati was not primarily for any self-discovery or out of interest in Buddhism. He came to get a story. What he got was a little more....*

I rise at 4 a.m. and walk under a fading moon towards the communal hall. The world is still and cold. I slip my shoes off in the entrance, go inside, then sit and wait.

People come in: I can just make out their shapes in the darkness. By about 5 o'clock I know that there must be thirty people around me but there is no noise, no movement. Somebody lights a candle, and that's all. I am inside myself, yet there is the comfort of being in a crowd.

The voices start to chant. It is a deep monotone that sets up sympathetic vibrations in my chest. I don't know what they are chanting but I like the sound. When it stops, I also like the silence.

I am in a Buddhist monastery; one of the twenty or so that accept visitors in Britain. You can live there for a while or stay for a weekend or just drive over for an hour's lesson in meditation. There is nothing to pay: you give what you feel like.

"I worked in a town centre," says Richard, a security guard, "but the noise got on top of me. So I've come here for a time. Living on my savings and, when I get my act straight, I'll go back and get a security guard job again."

But there are Christian retreats: why not go to one of those?

"Because I don't believe in God", says Richard.

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I realise that the getting up before dawn, the listening to chants, the meditation, the very philosophy of buddhism itself...are no more than tools to help me sort myself out.

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Neither did the Buddha. Two thousand five hundred years ago, maybe in a close parallel with our royal family, he gave up his role as a prince to find some purpose in life. Then, at the age of eighty, he died -- as we all do. No rising from the dead, no flying up to heaven: he just died, an ordinary man, and an extraordinary one.

He was probably the only religious leader who neither claimed to be a god nor said that he was a mouthpiece of God. He certainly was the only priest who told his followers not to believe a word he said. You shouldn't believe something just because there are years of tradition behind it, nor should you blindly believe everything that you read in print.

So why visit a retreat?

Says architect, Marion: "I don't intend to become a Buddhist. I'm here this weekend because it's ..." and she seems to put capital letters on the words "a Good Place To Be."

"It is to make some sense of our lives. There are things in life that we want and don't get, and things that we get and don't want," says Tom, a pharmacist - Then he shakes his head to deny that this is what he really means, and re-phrases it with a very Buddhist expression - "We are here because we choose to be here."

And I realise that the getting up before dawn, the listening to chants, the meditation, the very philosophy of buddhism itself...are no more than tools to help me sort myself out.

For instance, there is only one meal, at 10:30 in the morning, and it's eaten in silence. At first, this is disconcerting. Then I realise there is no demand to make smart, over-the-table conversation: no need to play a charming host. So I relax. After the meal, I can work if I like, and, as I emulsion paint a wall-it's not my wall, there's no deadline to finish it. So I relax still more. There is meditation in brushstrokes.

Before meditation classes, it helps if you have done yoga. Because as soon as you sit cross-legged and compose yourself, your nose starts to itch. So you need a technique to focus your mind briefly on the itch, then...and this may sound daft to anyone who hasn't tried...to breathe it away. You find after a quarter of an hour, you are also having to breathe on agonised ankle joints!

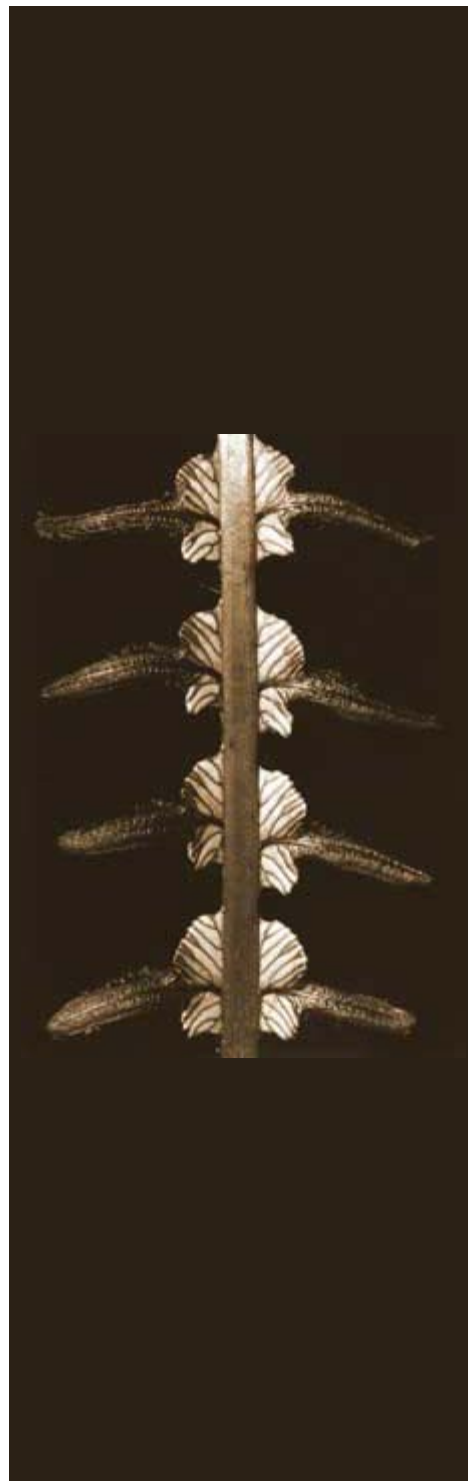
After the session, people ask questions that range from the magnificent. "What is the meaning of Self?" to the jokey, "Why do I keep getting a tune on my brain?" As the questions go on, you begin to think that, maybe, there are no answers.

The aim of meditation, say the monks, is to get beyond thought. You can't think your way out of a persistent problem: you just have to empty your mind and set the problem free. Then it will no longer nag you.

And as I walk and meditate, a great well of tears bursts inside me. Yet I am able to think: This is sorrow. I am not being harmed; there's no pain. If self-awareness brings happiness, maybe it can also bring sorrow. And I've met that before. So I cry and, when the tears stop, wipe my eyes and carry on walking. No bother.

About the monastery there is such a silence that I am reluctant to destroy it. As I talk, I listen to the silence in between my own words. And when it comes to the end of a sentence, I hang on to that silence for a minute before breaking it with sentence two. And my listeners smile because they too know what I am feeling.

"In my family, nobody listens." says P.E. teacher Jo, "I'll be talking to somebody but all they are doing, is waiting for a gap so they can jump in with their opinions. It is not talking: it is



two monologues running simultaneously".

"You have to be nice to yourself," say the monks. "Don't keep blaming yourself for things going wrong."

"That's the opposite to Western ideas," says 80-year-old Muriel, "we are not supposed to praise ourselves. We are brought up to feel guilty."

"Why run yourself down?" comes the reply, "The earth itself isn't a perfect circle; it doesn't keep perfect time going round the sun. We have atomic clocks that are more accurate than Time. So why should you worry about not being perfect?"

So I recharge my batteries with a weekend of silence. I say goodbye to the monks and they predict: "This won't be enough for you. We don't run a crash course in self-awareness."

I get into my car and find all the traffic on the main road going too fast. Then halfway home the car has a breakdown, which is annoying.

Well...I think...there's no way I can repair a wheel bearing. But I can handle annoyance.

I am beginning to think like a buddhist.



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## Working With Nature

### Celebration of Faith and the Environment

*Humanity's relationship with the environment is an area in which there is a need for increased understanding, both for the welfare of the individual and of the planet.*

We'd like to draw attention to a forthcoming event that focuses on the relationship between spirituality and ecology. We have received an invitation from the World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly the World Wildlife Fund) to participate in a Celebration of Faith and the Environment, which is to be held in Centerburg from Friday 15th September to Sunday 17th September 1989. This is a follow-up to the Assisi Event of 1986, which saw the establishment of the Network on Conservation and Religion through an interfaith pilgrimage to Assisi in which, amongst others, the Pope, the Dalai Lama and the Archbishop of Canterbury took part. Since then, educational programmes and conservation projects - have been launched by the Network; the Canterbury Festival will be the major display of the Religion and Environment theme for 1989, and will receive extensive media coverage.

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The restoration of a whole ecological network will, of course, take decades to accomplish.

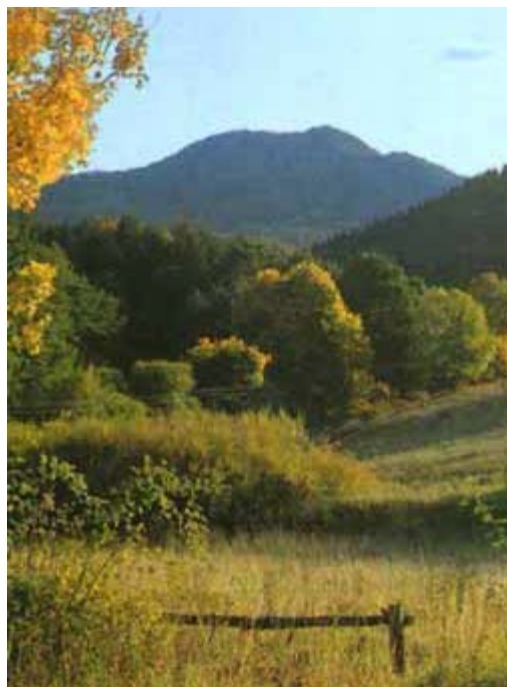
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Together with this invitation comes a request to present - through music, word, drama, exhibitions, workshops and worship - the Buddhist attitude towards Nature. Venerable Sucitto (at Amaravati) has been asked to co-ordinate contributions from the Buddhist community. Of particular interest are things that can be displayed, that create an immediate and accessible impression - for example, paintings, sculptures, or even some form of pageant, etc. September seems like quite a way in the future, but we'd like to be clear about what we're going to present by the spring of 1989. We hope that many people will participate, as it could be a very rewarding experience for the individual and also have a significant effect on the society in general.

Meanwhile, in Sussex ...

A Close relationship with Nature has always been a fundamental aspect of Sangha life: and over the years, projects at Chithurst have received a lot of support from people coming out to work on tree and wildflower planting. Last September saw the final stage of the "Ancient Meadows" project, whereby the former paddocks are being sown with native wild flowers, as part of the general plan for restoring the natural ecological balance of the 180-acre forest monastery. Re-establishing wildflowers attracts butterflies, which attract birds and so on.

Work in Hammer Wood continues to transform this area, which had become sterile through commercial forestry practices. There have been major tree planting drives in the past few years, and gradually birds and small mammals are returning to the forest: but the restoration of a whole ecological network will, of course, take decades to accomplish. Help with simple and sensitive forestry work is always very much appreciated.



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## Returning Homeless

*Dhammapala, the vihara in Switzerland, was opened in May of this year with Ajahn Tiradhammo as Abbot, accompanied by Venerable Chandapalo, Sister Cittapala and Anagarika Ernesto. Sister Cittapala was born in Switzerland and has spent most of her life there, so she was the natural choice as a nurse for the baby monastery - at least until the abbot learns some German, and the locals feel at ease with the Sangha.*

Often I am asked how it feels to return to Switzerland as a Buddhist nun, after having lived here before as a mother and housewife, and as a nurse for nearly years. First of all I realised how much deep love there is in my heart for the Swiss, a love which is no longer concentrated only on family and friends, but towards all as being one big family. At the same time a lot of compassion arises for their struggle, and - I would say - almost unnecessary suffering. Switzerland is a very rich, well-organised and beautiful country, with its impressive mountains, glaciers, lakes, forests and wildflowers, and has a high standard of living and apparent security. Crime is quite rare and one sees hardly any violence: there is no sense of danger in going alone through the towns in the evening in Switzerland.

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When there is no higher goal in their lives than possessions and sense-pleasures, people feel lonely and depressed.

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The Swiss are very diligent and hard-working; relaxation is only allowed on holidays or Sundays, when one is definitely not to do any gardening or house-cleaning. Activities for the preservation of nature are widespread, and there is an increasing awareness towards health food: smoking and drinking are less socially acceptable. The government is busy organising walking weekends and several programmes to educate people in preparation for their lives after retirement. However, the work ethic is so deeply ingrained that they are rarely able to stop; often they only exchange one form of activity for another. All kinds of sports, and gymnastic exercises, are highly praised activities: but if done properly one does not give up until completely exhausted.

Of course, this kind of attitude becomes very obvious on retreats also: "Unless I sit and meditate hard I won't get anywhere!" Perfection is the upheld ideal. Generally people become very tense and distressed, their minds plagued with conflicts, worries, anxiety and depression, until they no longer notice the natural beauty that surrounds them.

So Switzerland is spiritually quite poor. When there is no higher goal in their lives than possessions and sense-pleasures, people feel lonely and depressed. The senses get over-stimulated, but the heart is often dried-up with a nameless longing, or feelings of boredom and meaninglessness. So, more and more people are looking for something higher without actually knowing what they are

searching for.

Certainly there is a gradual recognition of the need for change. The country does have many Christian churches and monasteries, but people are turning instead to psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and astrologers and trying to solve their problems through group therapy, astrology yoga, sacred dance, therapeutic touch, massage etc. The list is endless.

What are people looking for when they come to the Vihara? Many of them have done several retreats, with different teachers. One of the common difficulties that people have is in extending their Dhamma practice from the specialised retreat situation of silence and minimal activity, into their normal lives in the outside world. Someone once said that a few days after retreat it felt like being enmeshed once again in a net of habits. The struggle between the desire to return to the peaceful retreat situation and the demands of the family and work, evokes frustration and despair.



So what can a little monastery such as Dhammapala provide in such a situation? Well, it can serve as a source of refreshment and inspiration, a place to go for a breather. It may bring up the best in one's mind, perhaps a reflection on the structures and priorities of one's daily life, a reminder to live more simply and to give more time for meditation and contemplation. Association with those who practise the Dhamma supports one's determination, and creates an opportunity to rise above self-centredness. Noble qualities may arise, the wish to serve and to offer dana, which results in a more joyful life.

One day, here at Dhammapala, I asked a guest who likes to come and stay for several days at a time, what this occasion meant for her. "I don't have to come here to be anyone, or to play a certain role" she replied, "I can just be as I am and feel accepted. Listening and watching how you deal with each other, and function as a group with different situations or difficulties is very pleasant to my mind. I can feel that there is no oppression, but just a relaxed and open, harmonious responding to whatever is required in the present situation." Along these lines she continued: "It gives a feeling of refuge, that whatever happens there is this peace-island to come to"

Several years ago, when I was still a nurse and housewife, going to Chithurst monastery was each time a deeply moving experience for me. I was always very impressed that the Buddha did not want people to just believe anything he, or other teachers, said, but to investigate and find out for themselves. Part of the beauty of the Buddhist teaching is its clarity and simplicity. It points directly to the path of deliverance, leaving it up to us to make the necessary steps and to look closely where we put our feet. If my heart is open and sensitive, if there is composure and awareness, then I am able to see the truth of this very moment.

Well, the fruits of the practice are obvious indeed: great joy fills my heart, and gratitude in being no longer bound by the endless search for happiness and pleasure. I experience that sense of freedom much more strongly here, where I am more exposed to old habits and memories than I was in England-, and this provides the necessary space to live in the immediacy of the present moment. So, although we are hoping that the Sangha will firmly take root in Switzerland, I feel that whatever else happens, if we practise "letting go" things

will take their natural course.





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## EDITORIAL

### Ten Years On

Nineteen Eighty-Nine sees the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Chithurst monastery. In 1979 there was enough support and faith to send fifteen of us down to West Sussex to begin work on building a place for men to live as bhikkhus. With that came the opportunity and the effort to focus on a detailed training in the ways of the Holy Life.

Ten years later we're still working on those areas, but the project has broadened out. There's enough interest and need in Britain to keep at least the four of our monasteries busy. Monks are still up on the roof with hammers, but there are nuns up there too, and the Sangha is also contributing towards school education, Dhamma literature, and environmental awareness. And it's encouraging to notice that people are coming to these monasteries from all over in order to be part of a Dhamma environment.

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Each new situation, culture or viewpoint creates a further  
exercise for body and mind.

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The training in conduct has spread to include guidance and support for Ten-Precept nuns: meanwhile the monastic conventions have been slowly assimilated by lay people of different cultures. Each new situation, culture or viewpoint creates a further exercise for body and mind: this is the way that the Sangha is educated and strengthened by the world.

The Newsletter, also entering its tenth year, has become part of the monastic environment. A newcomer to the tradition of forest monasticism it yet bears the same hallmarks as the dhutanga robes: it is made out of scraps. And like the rest of the Sangha, it aspires to support the practice of those with commitment and to encourage the interest of those who are beginning. Being portable and detachable gives it some advantages, so this time we made it bigger to help with the gap left by the Sangha's two month withdrawal into retreat. Admittedly it a meagre substitute, but may it serve you well. Enter freely and reject whatever is not suitable.

*Ajahn Sucitto*

