

# THE FOREST HERMITAGE

August 2007 / 2550

# NEWSLETTER



## Coming Soon:

### **ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS**

At the Forest Hermitage at 10 a.m. on Saturday, September 8th. The AGM at 11 & after lunch, the DG. The one following will be on Saturday, December 8th, 2007.

Workshops are for Buddhist Prison Chaplains only, attendance otherwise is by invitation and Angulimala members only.

### **SPRINGHILL**

The annual Buddha Grove celebration is at 6 pm on Sept. 9th.

### **RETREATS at**

### **BHAVANA DHAMMA**

Ven. Manapo will lead weekend retreats on Sept. 14th - 16th; Oct. 5th - 7th; Nov. 2nd - 4th; Nov. 30th - Dec. 2nd. Places are few. To apply or inquire, email [enquiries@foresthermitage.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@foresthermitage.org.uk) or phone 01926 624564.

### **THE ENDING OF THE VASSA**

Falls on October 26th and so on **Sunday, October 28th**, we will celebrate from 10 a.m.

### **MEDITATION & DHAMMA TALK**

at The FOREST HERMITAGE.  
Every Monday & Friday at eight o'clock.

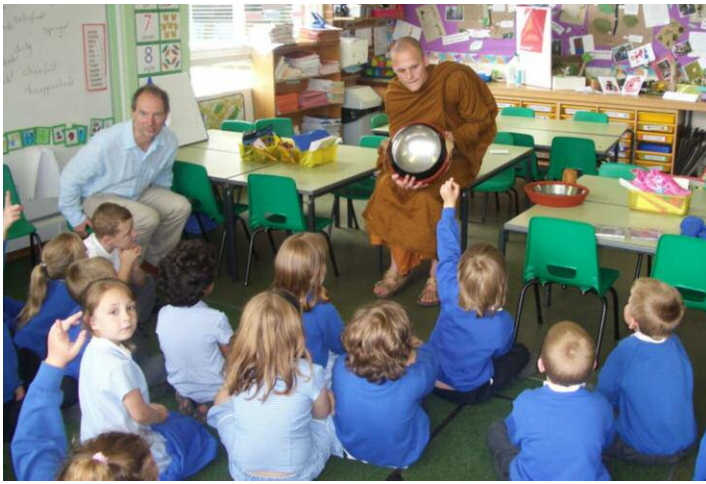
It is the spirit of *dāna*, freely offered generosity, which has kept the entire Buddhist tradition alive for more than 2,500 years.

These words can be found attached to a number of Dhamma books and leaflets which in various formats are made freely available as gifts to anyone who might wish to read them. They are important words at a time when there is increasing pressure and argument in favour of commercialising Buddhist teachings. But what happens when you put something up for sale? First, you suggest that whatever it is can be owned and secondly you generate desire. And what, in his first sermon that we celebrated again only a few weeks ago, did the Buddha have to say about desire? Desire is the immediate cause of suffering. And giving is the direct opposite of desire. I think I must have heard all the arguments in favour of charging but I still believe that once you start buying and selling the Dhamma, no matter how entertaining or witty, or poetic or profound, or well produced and nicely packaged it may be, it becomes tainted Dhamma and its meaning is blurred.

Making merit or doing things that are good and meritorious is certainly the most popular practice of most traditional Buddhists and one that is often sniffed at by people who think you're not a Buddhist if you're not meditating. The most favoured way of making merit is giving, probably because it seems easy enough to just pop into a shop, buy something and then run along to a temple with it. Undoubtedly some people do think that doing this they're amassing a sort of heavenly bank account where their merit is stored and from where they'll be able to draw on it in the future and that's how I've heard of it being taught. What a pity! Actually, making merit is a profound practice that helps you cleanse your mind. I call it an outside-in practice. Generally we think of what we see of another, their behaviour etc, as expressing what's inside, their inner attitude, and meditation is supposed to work on changing and improving that. So meditation is the inside-out training, and paying attention to what you do and how you do it is the outside-in practice. Unquestionably what you say, what you do and how you do it affects your inner attitude. If you keep on giving, even when you don't want to and even for the basest of motives, you still keep handing something over and someone benefits. In time that giving becomes your habit and in time it can wear away your selfishness and attachment. My advice is, do both; the inside-out practice and the outside-in.

In Thailand we see a lot of merit making and in the few days I spent there in July I saw even more than I usually do and most of it pointed in this direction. What happened is this, one bright June morning walking back across the fields with Ben, my big dog, I suddenly thought, with everyone else having a break, I wouldn't mind one myself. Of course the only place I could think of going was Thailand. When I mentioned it there was more enthusiasm for my going than I'd bargained for, such that I did wonder if they were glad to be rid of me! But no, someone had already had the idea of organising some merit making occasions in Thailand and sending me to be there when the offerings were made. My mentioning a break seemed the perfect opportunity. So, with some impressive organising and very little notice a few such events were arranged, articles and notices appeared in the Thai papers and I was off. I had three days in Bangkok, three days in the North-East and then for the rest of the time I was back in Bangkok.

Sunday, July 15th was the day that Tahn Manapo led his intrepid band of fund raisers up Snowdon on their sponsored walk. In Bangkok it was much warmer and we were far less energetic but like his our efforts that day were aimed at supporting the Dhamma here in the Heart of England.



While they toiled up Snowdon, I spent the morning in the middle of Bangkok at an event which Loketip, a Thai Dhamma magazine, hosted. There the meal was offered, I gave a talk and 127,000 Baht was collected. Loketip used to be considerable and generous supporters of ours years ago when we were struggling to pay the original mortgage on the Forest Hermitage. In those days whenever I was in Thailand I would be their guest. But I hadn't seen them for a long time and it was good to be back.

Early the following morning I sped off to a big school in Samut Prakarn, just outside Bangkok. This was very special, all 1,600 pupils and staff turned out to greet me, to listen to me, to take the Refuge and Precepts from me and to make the formal offering of the 250,000 Baht that they had collected in a very short time. It was a wonderful morning and I had never before given the precepts to so many.

The day after that was my 63rd birthday! I can't quite believe the number and somehow feel those numerals should be the other way round and even that I think would be too much and older than I feel. Just across from where I was staying was Thawsi School, a Buddhist school for infants and juniors. On my birthday morning I was invited over to listen to the children recite morning chanting and sit with them while they meditated for a few minutes. Then when we'd chatted for a little while, they put their play on for me. It was based on the well-known chant about the Buddha's wholesome victories and it was utterly delightful. Of course one of the scenes was about how the Buddha overcame Angulimala. A big lad came on moustaches painted on his face and a sword and quickly killed a couple of other characters before pursuing the Buddha around the stage. Then, as he circled the stage this young actor brought the house down by shamelessly playing to the gallery and giving each of the 'bodies' another poke with his sword every time he passed. The whole thing was done in a very formal Thai style with the Buddha represented by a child carrying a pole on which was suspended a banner with either an image of the Buddha walking or an image of him sitting. When it was over the children all sang Happy Birthday to me and then offered a lovely meal, some of which they'd cooked themselves. That morning another 10,000 Baht was offered. And in the evening I gave a talk to about 150 people at Charn Issara Tower where another 250,000 Baht was collected.

Later on when Matthew and Khun Praves went along to the bank to transfer whatever there was in the account, to everyone's amazement it amounted to over £15,000. That was a tremendous boost and with the £3,500 that the Snowdon walk raised it has meant that our debt to the bank has dropped significantly. I don't like going on about money but it does come in handy, especially when you haven't got much and you're trying

to do as much as we do here with the prisons and the schools and so on. We're so grateful for all your support. Anumodana!

The Snowdon walk was a sponsored walk with meditation somewhere near the top that Tahn Manapo led up the highest mountain in England and Wales. I can't say much about the actual walk because I wasn't there but of course I've lived with the organising of it for what seems months and I have been so pleased that it happened and not only because of what was raised but because of all that everyone concerned put into doing something so special together to offer help and support.

And the support that was being offered was, of course, for Wood Cottage, which we're still paying for and which, incidentally, I decided to rename. Wood Cottage sounded too much of a cosy holiday home, so I've called it Bhavana Dhamma because particularly with the excellent retreats that Tahn Manapo has been leading there it has become a very special place for the cultivation of the Dhamma.

A few days after getting back from Thailand I was off abroad again but this time it was by road and only a day trip to Scotland where I met with Angulimala's Scottish team of Buddhist prison chaplains. This year we met in Kilmarnock Prison courtesy of its Director and Chaplain, both of whom I had known before when they worked in prisons down this way. With multifaith not having quite the same meaning up there that it has down here, our chaplains don't all see much of the inside of a prison, so it was useful to meet in one and to have the guided tour afterwards.

The following weekend it was time to celebrate Asalha Puja, the occasion of the Buddha's first sermon, and to make the first of two trips to Essex, to the 21st World Scout Jamboree at Hylands Park where more than 40,000 scouts from all over the world were camped. I was invited by Professor Yongyudh, the Chairman of the World Buddhist Scout Brotherhood (WBSB), to lead an Asalha Puja celebration on the Sunday and then to return again the following Wednesday, August 1st, for Sunrise Day, the hundredth anniversary of Baden-Powell's first scout camp on Brownsea Island. On the Sunday I gave a short sermon in a gloomy and muddy tent about the significance of Asalha Puja and on Sunrise Day I spoke at length to a much larger audience gathered in the open air in brilliant sunshine about Buddhism and Scouting. I must say scouting's changed a bit since I last endured a scout camp at the tender age of eleven. There was no Dunkin' Donuts stall then like I saw at this Jamboree, I remember being taught to wind a ribbon of dough round a stick, plunge it in the fire and then when it was 'done', remove what was left of the stick and fill the charred remains with jam. It wasn't too bad.



Thankfully the cooking that's done by the Thais for the annual Springhill Buddha Grove Celebration is light years in advance of anything I ever managed so I'm confident that whatever else happens prisoners and guests will enjoy a feast on September 9th when we meet again to honour the first Buddhist shrine in a British prison and even perhaps the first in any prison in Europe or the West. Since 1992 when the Springhill Buddha Grove was created others have sprung up in prisons around the country and I heard that this year one was opened at a prison in the far west of that old penal colony down under!

The pictures are of the merit making at Sriwittaya School in Samutprakarn; Tahn Manapo talking to children at Newburgh Primary School; and the badge of the World Buddhist Scout Brotherhood.

**This Newsletter is from Ven. Chao Khun Bhavanavitesa (Ajahn Khemadhammo) OBE of  
The Forest Hermitage & Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation**

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