



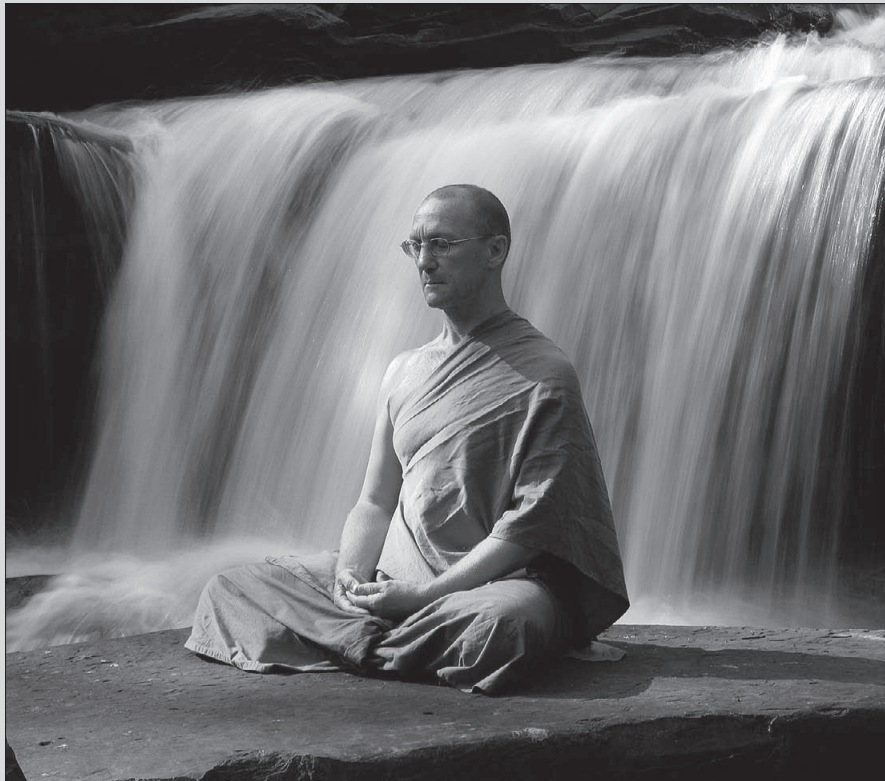
FOREST SANGHA

newsletter

www.fsnewsletter.org

October 2009 2552

Number 88



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Newsletter

AS THIS ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER IS FINALLY BEING PREPARED FOR PRINT, it's once again a good time to reflect on change. From its home-spun beginnings in the eighties right up till this year, the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* has, more or less, been appearing quarterly – emerging from the make-do editorial efforts of monastic volunteers and their donated typewriters, copy machines and computers.

Over this time, the FSN has served many people in many ways. For a long while, for people who were not in a position to come regularly to a monastery to hear Dhamma Talks, the newsletter (along with cassette tapes from the now defunct Amaravati Cassettes) was virtually the only access they had to new Dhamma offerings from the Sangha. Likewise for news and announcements.

In recent years this has all changed, with the Internet providing easier and more effective means for all this and more. From the vast range of new and archived Dhamma material available from the many monasteries and teachers in our worldwide Sangha, to the frequently updated announcements and schedules posted on monastery websites (as well as the fact that all of the monasteries aside from Amaravati now have their own individual newsletters), many of the functions we used to rely on the FSN to provide are now being served in that way.

With all of this, along with inevitable fluctuations in appropriately skilled and available Sangha personnel, our ability to continue producing the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* four times a year has been in question for some time. This year the January issue barely got done, April's newsletter came out closer to May, the July edition was cancelled altogether, and here I am finishing up the October issue at the end of October – replete with dates for all the *Kathina* ceremonies that will have already happened by the time it's printed and posted.

This is not to complain but to flag for all our regular readers that things for the FSN next year will most likely be changing. While it's not yet entirely clear, it looks now like Amaravati will follow the other monasteries in providing local updates and announcements through a small newsletter of its own, and the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* may become an annual periodical. Please stay tuned. We plan to produce the next issue (January 2010) as usual, and full details of any changes for next year will be published there. And before then, when

ATTENTION PLEASE

IMPORTANT CHANGES AHEAD!

Next year we will be making some significant changes, both in how often we produce the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* and in how Amaravati keeps people informed of monastery news (probably via a small, more regular newsletter).

Soon we will want to confirm our mailing lists.

Please stay tuned. Announcements with full details will be made on the fsnewsletter.org and amaravati.org websites, as well as in the next *Forest Sangha Newsletter*, to be published as usual in January 2010.

Thank you

we have more finalized plans, there should be relevant announcements posted on both the FSN and Amaravati websites: www.fsnewsletter.org and www.amaravati.org respectively.

This issue of the FSN features part of a chapter from a new book published by Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro. *The Island* collects and comments on scriptural descriptions of *Nibbana* (sanskrit: *nirvana*; liberation, awakening), the goal of the Buddhist path – or what Luang Por Chah called 'the aim of all this difficult practice we put ourselves through.' Ajahn Sumedho provides an introduction to the subject of *Nibbana* for the book, and it is reproduced here.

There have been some significant Sangha movements coming to fruition this year, one of which was the decision of one of the most senior nuns, Ajahn Upekkha, to leave the monasteries where she's lived for over 20 years in order to continue living as a nun in London. Her main focus involves visiting hospitals and hospices, sharing her practice with people who are close to death. Sister Dhammadira asks Ajahn Upekkha about her new situation in an interview on page 9.

And this year the move to begin a branch monastery in California for the siladhara nuns' community has finally gone ahead. Ajahns Anandabodhi, Metta and Santacitta will be starting an all-nuns monastery in the San Francisco Bay Area, from November onwards. Here they offer their observations of how it all came about.

The Grapevine still has up-to-date announcements, and please remember to check the newly-available dates for Amaravati Retreats in 2010.

With all best wishes from the Sangha,
Jayanto Bhikkhu

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Contact – Write to Newsletter Editor, Amaravati or email: editor@amaravati.org

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The Island

Over ten years ago, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro, co-abbots of Abhayagiri Monastery in California, conceived the idea to compile an anthology of the Buddha's teachings on Nibbana from the Pali Canon. Many times during the past five years, publication of the resulting manuscript, *The Island*, seemed to be just a few months away (after a while, the abbots began to quip that the book should be retitled '*The Horizon*'). This July the book was published at last and is now available for free distribution both in digital and printed form. If you'd like a copy, please visit the following page at the Abhayagiri website: www.abhayagiri.org/main/book/1788.

Reproduced here is the introduction by Ajahn Sumedho to *The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbana*, followed by a section adapted from one of the book's chapters.



Introduction – by Luang Por Sumedho:

A DIFFICULTY WITH THE WORD 'NIBBANA' IS THAT ITS MEANING IS BEYOND THE POWER OF WORDS TO DESCRIBE. It is, essentially, undefinable. Another difficulty is that many Buddhists see Nibbana as something unobtainable – as so high and so remote that we're not worthy enough to try for it. Or we see Nibbana as a goal, as an unknown, undefined something that we should somehow try to attain.

Most of us are conditioned in this way. We want to achieve or attain something that we don't have now. So Nibbana is looked at as something that, if you work hard, keep the *sila* (virtue; training), meditate diligently, become a *samana*, devote your life to practice, then your reward might be that eventually you attain Nibbana – even though we're not sure what it is.

Ajahn Chah would use the words 'the reality of non-grasping' as the definition for Nibbana: realizing the reality of non-grasping. That helps to put it in a context because the emphasis is on awakening to how we grasp and hold on even to words like 'Nibbana' or 'Buddhism' or 'practice' or 'sila' or whatever. It's often said that the Buddhist way is not to grasp. But that can become just

another statement that we grasp and hold on to. It's a Catch 22: No matter how hard you try to make sense out of it, you end up in total confusion because of the limitation of language and perception. You have to go beyond language and perception. And the only way to go beyond thinking and emotional habit is through awareness of them, through awareness of thought, through awareness of emotion. 'The Island that you cannot go beyond' is the metaphor for this state of being awake and aware, as opposed to the concept of becoming awake and aware.

In meditation classes, people often start with a basic delusion that they never challenge: the idea that 'I'm someone who grasps and has a lot of desires, and I have to practise in order to get rid of these desires and to stop grasping and clinging to things. I shouldn't cling to anything.' That's often the position we start from. So we start our practice from this basis and, many times, the result is disillusionment and disappointment, because our practice is based on the grasping of an idea.

Eventually, we realize that no matter how much we try to get rid of desire and not grasp anything, no matter what we do – become a monk, an ascetic, sit for hours



and hours, attend retreats over and over again, do all the things we believe will get rid of these grasping tendencies – we end up feeling disappointed because the basic delusion has never been recognized.

This is why the metaphor of ‘The Island that you cannot go beyond’ is so very powerful, because it points to the principle of an awareness that you can’t get beyond. It’s very simple, very direct, and you can’t conceive it. You have to trust it. You have to trust this simple ability that we all have to be fully present and fully awake, and begin to recognize the grasping and the ideas we have taken on about ourselves, about the world around us, about our thoughts and perceptions and feelings.

The way of mindfulness is the way of recognizing conditions just as they are. We simply recognize and acknowledge their presence, without blaming them or judging them or criticizing them or praising them. We allow them to be, the positive and the negative both. And, as we trust in this way of mindfulness more and more, we begin to realize the reality of ‘The Island that you cannot go beyond.’

When I started practising meditation I felt I was somebody who was very confused and I wanted to get out of this confusion and get rid of my problems and become someone who was not confused, someone who was a clear thinker, someone who would maybe one day become enlightened. That was the impetus that got me going in the direction of Buddhist meditation and monastic life. But then, by reflecting on this position that ‘I am somebody who needs to do something,’ I began to see it as a created condition. It was an assumption that I had created. And if I operated from that assumption then I might develop all kinds of skills and live a life that was praiseworthy and good and beneficial to myself and to others but, at the end of the day, I might feel quite disappointed that I did not attain the goal of Nibbana.

Fortunately, the whole direction of monastic life is one where everything is directed at the present. You’re always learning to challenge and to see through your assumptions about yourself. One of the major challenges is the assumption that ‘I am somebody who needs to do something in order to become enlightened in the future.’ Just by recognizing this as an assumption I created, that which is aware knows it is something created out of

ignorance, out of not understanding. When we see and recognize this fully, then we stop creating the assumptions. Awareness is not about making value judgments about our thoughts or emotions or actions or speech. Awareness is about knowing these things fully – that they are what they are, at this moment. So what I found very helpful was learning to be aware of conditions without judging them. In this way, the resultant *kamma* of past actions and speech as it arises in the present is fully recognized without compounding it, without making it into a problem. It is what it is. What arises ceases. As we recognize that and allow things to cease according to their nature, the realization of cessation gives us an increasing amount of faith in the practice of non-attachment and letting go.

The attachments that we have, even to good things like Buddhism, can also be seen as attachments that blind us. That doesn’t mean we need to get rid of Buddhism. We merely recognize attachment as attachment and that we create it ourselves out of ignorance. As we keep reflecting on this, the tendency toward attachment falls away, and the reality of non-attachment, of non-grasping, reveals itself in what we can say is Nibbana.

If we look at it in this way, Nibbana is here and now. It’s not an attainment in the future. The reality is here and now. It is so very simple, but beyond description. It can’t be bestowed or even conveyed, it can only be known by each person for themselves.

As one begins to realize or to recognize non-grasping as the Way, then emotionally one can feel quite frightened by it. It can seem like a kind of annihilation is taking place: all that I think I am in the world, all that I regard as stable and real, starts falling apart and it can be frightening. But if we have the faith to continue bearing with these emotional reactions and allow things that arise to cease, to appear and disappear according to their nature, then we find our stability not in achievement or attaining, but in being – being awake, being aware. Many years ago, in William James’ book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, I found a poem by A. Charles Swinburne. In spite of having what some have described as a degenerate mind, Swinburne produced some very powerful reflections:

(Continued on page 5)

From the preface to *The Island*:

What is presented here is an attempt by Ajahn Pasanno and myself to put together a small compendium of these 'essence teachings' of the Buddha, as they appear in the Pali Canon and have been conveyed by the lineages that rely upon them (the Thai forest tradition in particular), in the hope that they will be of benefit to those who rejoice in the liberation of the heart. All the other references that are made herein, whether drawing on Thai forest meditation masters, modern science, classical literature, Northern Buddhism or whatever, are made solely to help illustrate the meaning of the Pali – it is the faith of the editors that the Buddha's words can speak for themselves and this work has been compiled with that intention.

~ Ajahn Amaro

The following excerpt has been adapted from Chapter 12:

KNOWING, EMPTINESS AND THE RADIANT MIND

By Ajahn Pasanno & Ajahn Amaro

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF TERMS USED IN PALI THAT REFER TO THE QUALITY OF AWARENESS OR KNOWING; sometimes the particular usage is dependent on the coarseness or refinement of that state, sometimes it is indicating a particular attribute it has, and sometimes the choice of word seems solely stylistic.

The Buddha regularly employed a speaking style of setting forth a variety of terms and allowing the meaning to arise from the whole constellation. An obvious case in point comes in the Buddha's first teaching, the Discourse on the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dhamma; herein he describes his awakening to each of the aspects of the Four Noble Truths with the words:

'Vision arose, understanding arose, wisdom arose, knowing arose, light arose ...' (*Cakkhum udapadi, ñanam udapadi, pañña udapadi, vijja udapadi, aloko udapadi.*) ~ *Samyutta Nikaya* 56.11

Of these five terms, the middle three are most often used to refer to awareness, particularly in its transcendent mode. Having said this, one should also qualify the usage of the word 'pañña' (wisdom, discernment) – in many instances it refers more to a mundane quality of intelligence rather than to anything higher.

When it is conjoined with the adjective *lokuttara* (supramundane, transcendent), especially in the ancient Commentaries, it then automatically rises to the same level as 'ñāna' and 'vijja,' together with another term not mentioned in this list, 'añña' – usually meaning the understanding gained by those who have realized enlightenment.

There are a number of other words and phrases which point to the same area of mind but which carry various other colourations of meaning; these are such words as *sati* (mindfulness), *sampajañña* (clear comprehension), *appamada* (heedfulness), *paññacakkhu* (the eye of wisdom), *yoniso-manasikara* (wise consideration), *dhamma-vicaya* (investigation of states of experience) and *vimamsa* (intelligent reviewing).

(Continued on page 6)

'Here begins the sea that ends not till the world's end. Where we stand,
Could we know the next high sea-mark set beyond these waves that gleam,
We should know what never man hath known, nor eye of man hath scanned...
Ah, but here man's heart leaps, yearning towards the gloom with venturous glee,
From the shore that hath no shore beyond it, set in all the sea.'

~ From *On the Verge*, in *A Midsummer Vacation*

I found in this poem an echo of the Buddha's response to Kappa's question in the *Sutta Nipata*:

Next was the brahmin student Kappa: 'Sir,' he said, 'there are people stuck midstream in the terror and the fear of the rush of the river of being, and death and decay overwhelm them. For their sakes, Sir, tell me where to find an island, tell me where there is solid ground beyond the reach of all this pain.'

'Kappa,' said the Master, 'for the sake of those

people stuck in the middle of the river of being, overwhelmed by death and decay, I will tell you where to find solid ground.

'There is an island, an island which you cannot go beyond. It is a place of nothingness, a place of non-possession and of non-attachment. It is the total end of death and decay, and this is why I call it Nibbana [the extinguished, the cool].

'There are people who, in mindfulness, have realized this and are completely cooled here and now. They do not become slaves working for Mara, for Death; they cannot fall into his power.'

~ *Sutta Nipata* 1092–5 (Ven. Saddhatissa trans.)

In English, 'nothingness' can sound like annihilation, like nihilism. But you can also emphasize the 'thingness' so that it becomes 'no-thingness.' So Nibbana is not a thing that you can find. It is the place of 'no-thingness,' a place of non-possession, a place of non-attachment. It is a place, as Ajahn Chah said, where you experience 'the reality of non-grasping.' ☸

'If you don't know where you're going, you'll wind up somewhere else.'

~ Yogi Berra



In the forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism, particularly as it has been practised in Thailand in the last hundred years or so, a great primacy has been given to the quality of awareness itself – it is seen as the *sine qua non* of both the path and the goal of the spiritual life.

Certainly, in the monastic life, considerable emphasis is given to purity and precision in ethical discipline, and the austere *dhutanga* practices are encouraged. For the lay community, a similar stress is placed on the need for moral integrity, as well as the practices of devotion and generosity. In Buddhist training, however, the development and practice of awareness is firmly at the centre of things for those who are intent on liberation. Numerous masters have emphasized repeatedly that it is this very quality, in its role at the core of insight meditation (*vipassana*), that frees the heart.

We have grouped these three qualities – knowing, emptiness and the radiant mind – together for this chapter as the environment of pure awareness is cultivated through a realization of emptiness, and then embodies that characteristic as a result of its perfection. Radiance is another of the principal qualities that manifests as that knowing is purified.

These three attributes weave through each other and are mutually reflective and supportive. In a way, they are like the fluidity, wetness and coolness of a glass of water: three qualities that are distinct yet inseparable. It is because of the inseparability of these three, and the continual overlapping of teachings referring to each of them, that they are being investigated together here. As the reader will discover, each of the passages lends itself to individual contemplation – contemplation that will slowly reveal many layers of meaning and interrelationship. Sometimes one teaching will seem to confirm another, at other times they might seem to contradict – this is the flavour of Buddha-Dhamma.

It is always up to the individual to take the teachings, apply them, bring them to life and then discover how they mesh via direct knowledge, rather than forcing them to align, in Procrustean conformity, with favoured presuppositions and habit patterns: 'Is the mind empty or is it full of light? Is wisdom the light or the emptiness? Both? Neither?' Ajahn Chah once said: 'We call the mind empty but actually it's full of wisdom, maybe that's it!'

It's never a matter of trying to figure it all out, rather we pick up these phrases and chew them over, taste them, digest them and let them energize us by virtue of their own nature.

'One who wishes to reach the Buddha-Dhamma must firstly be one who has faith or confidence as a foundation. We must understand the meaning of Buddha-Dhamma as follows:

'Buddha: the One-Who-Knows (*poo roo*), the one who has purity, radiance and peace in the heart.

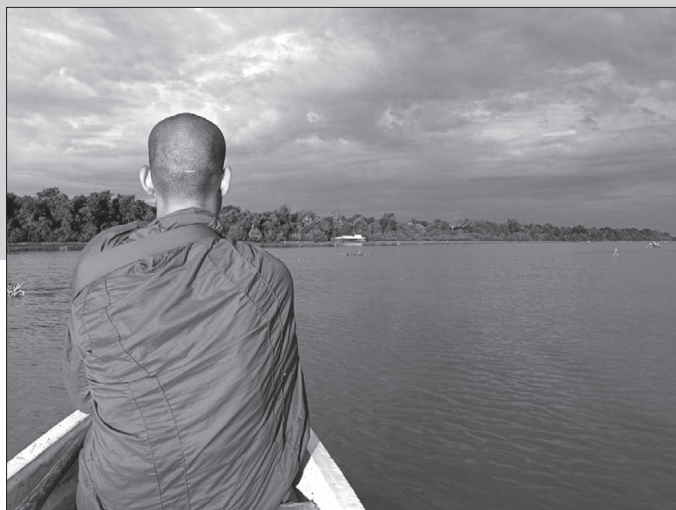
'Dhamma: the characteristics of purity, radiance and peace which arise from morality, concentration and wisdom.

'Therefore, one who is to reach the Buddha-Dhamma is one who cultivates and develops morality, concentration and wisdom within themselves.'

~ Ajahn Chah, *Fragments of a Teaching* in *Food for the Heart* pp 43–44

Buddha-wisdom is the ultimate subject; Dhamma is the ultimate object; the field of their interplay is supremely bright; all these elements are empty of self. Enlightenment, liberation, depends on the recognition of the radical separateness of awareness – 'the one who knows' as Ajahn Chah would phrase it – and the world of the five *khandhas*. Having said that, it's also crucial to note that the phrase 'the one who knows' (*poo roo* in Thai) is a colloquialism that has different meanings in different contexts. It can be used (at one end of the spectrum) for 'that which cognizes an object,' to (at the other end) 'supramundane wisdom.' Most often it is used in simple concentration instructions, where the meditator separates awareness from the object and then focuses on the awareness. The separate awareness of full awakening is of a different order altogether.

A comparable model that Ajahn Chah often used to illustrate this area is that of the relationship of mindfulness (*sati*), clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) and wisdom (*pañña*) to each other. He would liken these three to the hand, the arm and the body respectively: *sati*, like the hand, is simply that which picks things up, cognizes them; *sampajañña*, like the arm that enables



the hand to reach for the desired objects and move them around, refers to seeing an object in its context, seeing how the object relates to its surroundings; pañña, like the life source which is the body, is the seeing of things in terms of *anicca-dukkha-anatta* – uncertainty, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. The hand and the arm have their functions but without the body they are powerless.

Training the heart to rest in these various dimensions of knowing, and desisting from entanglement in any aspect of the khandhas, seems to be the central method of many teachers. For example:

‘The heart knowing the Dhamma of ultimate ease sees for sure that the khandhas are always stressful. The Dhamma stays as the Dhamma, the khandhas stay as the khandhas, that’s all.’

~ Ajahn Mun, *The Ballad of Liberation from the Five Khandhas*, ll 180–86, (Thanissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

‘When you see that Dhamma, you recover from mental unrest. The mind then won’t be attached to dualities. Just this much truth can end the game. Knowing not-knowing: that’s the method for the heart. Once we see through inconstancy, the mind-source stops creating issues. All that remains is the Primal Mind, true and unchanging. Knowing the mind-source brings release from all worry and error. If you go out to the mind-ends, you’re immediately wrong.’ ~ *ibid*, ll 408–21

The relationship of this quality of awareness to the conditioned realm is embodied in Ajahn Chah’s analogy of oil and water, an image he used very often.

‘This is the way it is. You detach. You let go. Whenever there is any feeling of clinging, we detach from it, because we know that that very feeling is just as it is. It didn’t come along especially to annoy us. We might think that it did, but in truth it just is that way. If we start to think and consider it further, that, too, is just as it is. If we let go, then form is merely form, sound is merely sound, odour is merely odour, taste is merely taste, touch is merely touch and the

heart is merely the heart. It’s similar to oil and water. If you put the two together in a bottle, they won’t mix because of the difference of their nature.

‘Oil and water are different in the same way that a wise person and an ignorant person are different. The Buddha lived with form, sound, odour, taste, touch and thought. He was an *arahant* (Enlightened One), so he turned away from rather than toward these things. He turned away and detached little by little since he understood that the heart is just the heart and thought is just thought. He didn’t confuse and mix them together.

‘The heart is just the heart; thoughts and feelings are just thoughts and feelings. Let things be just as they are! Let form be just form, let sound be just sound, let thought be just thought. Why should we bother to attach to them? If we think and feel in this way, then there is detachment and separateness. Our thoughts and feelings will be on one side and our heart will be on the other. Just like oil and water – they are in the same bottle but they are separate.’ ~ Ajahn Chah, *The Training of the Heart in Food for the Heart*, pp 157–8 (adapted)

Upasika Kee Nanayon was another of the great teachers of the 20th century in Thailand. She was distinguished not only by her incisive wisdom but also by her uncompromising approach to Dhamma practice and teaching. She describes the quality of awareness as:

‘An inward-staying unentangled knowing, all outward-going knowing cast aside.’

~ Upasika Kee Nanayon, *An Unentangled Knowing*, p 33, (Thanissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

In the employment of such terms as ‘the one who knows,’ it is important to understand that this is a colloquial usage and in no sense is some kind of ‘true self’ or ‘super-entity’ implied – it’s merely a convenient figure of speech. If we start looking for ‘who’ it is that is aware we rapidly end up in a tangle.



When we speak or think about the quality of awareness there is also a subtle danger of the mind trying to cast it into the form of some kind of immaterial thing or process. The word 'awareness' is an abstract noun, and we get so used to relating to ordinary objects through conceptualizing about them that we allow the habit to overflow; thus we can end up conceiving awareness in the same way. The heart can be aware but to try to make awareness an object, in the same way that we would a tree or a thought, is a frustrating process. Ajahn Chah's most common phrase in warning against this was to say:

'You're riding on a horse and asking, "Where's the horse?"'
~ Ajahn Chah, in *Venerable Father*, Paul Breiter, p 154

Or Ajahn Sumedho's favourite:

'Just like the question "Can you see your own eyes?" Nobody can see their own eyes. I can see your eyes but I can't see my eyes. I'm sitting right here, I've got two eyes and I can't see them. But you can see my eyes. But there's no need for me to see my eyes because I can see! It's ridiculous, isn't it? If I started saying "Why can't I see my own eyes?" you'd think "Ajahn Sumedho's really weird, isn't he!" Looking in a mirror you can see a reflection, but that's not your eyes, it's a reflection of your eyes. There's no way that I've been able to look and see my own eyes. But then it's not necessary to see your own eyes. It's not necessary to know who it is that knows – because there's knowing.'
~ Ajahn Sumedho, *What is the Citta?*, Forest Sangha Newsletter, Oct. '88

This very type of error is the reason why it's perhaps wiser to use a term such as 'knowing' instead of 'transcendent wisdom' or 'awareness.' As a gerund it is a 'verb-noun,' thus lending to it a more accurate quality of immanence, activity and non-thingness. The process of Awakening not only breaks down subject/object relationships, as we have already discussed, it also breaks down the very formulation of 'things,' in order to speak more accurately of 'events being known in consciousness.'

Some years ago Buckminster Fuller published a book entitled 'I Seem to Be a Verb'; more recently, and more expansively, Rabbi David Cooper published 'God is a Verb' – both of these being attempts to counteract the flood-tide of formulation of reality as 'things' that the untrained, conditioned mind is prone to generating.

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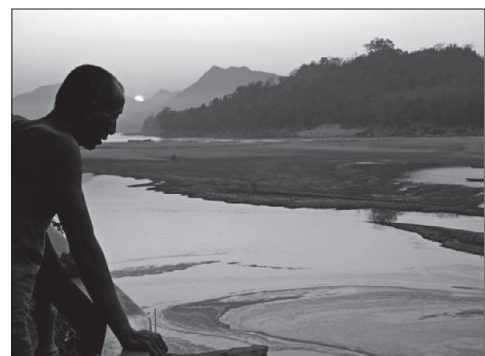
To round things off, here are some words of Ajahn Chah that encompass some of these themes.

'About this mind ... in truth there is nothing really wrong with it. It is intrinsically pure. Within itself it's already peaceful. That the mind is not peaceful these days is because it follows moods. The real mind doesn't have anything to it, it is simply (an aspect of) Nature. It becomes peaceful or agitated because moods deceive it. The untrained mind is stupid. Sense impressions come and trick it into happiness, suffering, gladness and sorrow, but the mind's true nature is none of those things. That gladness or sadness is not the mind, but only a mood coming to deceive us. The untrained mind gets lost and follows these things, it forgets itself. Then we think that it is we who are upset or at ease or whatever.

'But really this mind of ours is already unmoving and peaceful... really peaceful! Just like a leaf which is still as long as no wind blows. If a wind comes up the leaf flutters. The fluttering is due to the wind – the 'fluttering' is due to those sense impressions; the mind follows them. If it doesn't follow them, it doesn't 'flutter.' If we know fully the true nature of sense impressions we will be unmoved.

'Our practice is simply to see the Original Mind. We must train the mind to know those sense impressions, and not get lost in them; to make it peaceful. Just this is the aim of all this difficult practice we put ourselves through.'

~ Ajahn Chah, *Food for the Heart*, p 41 ཐཱ

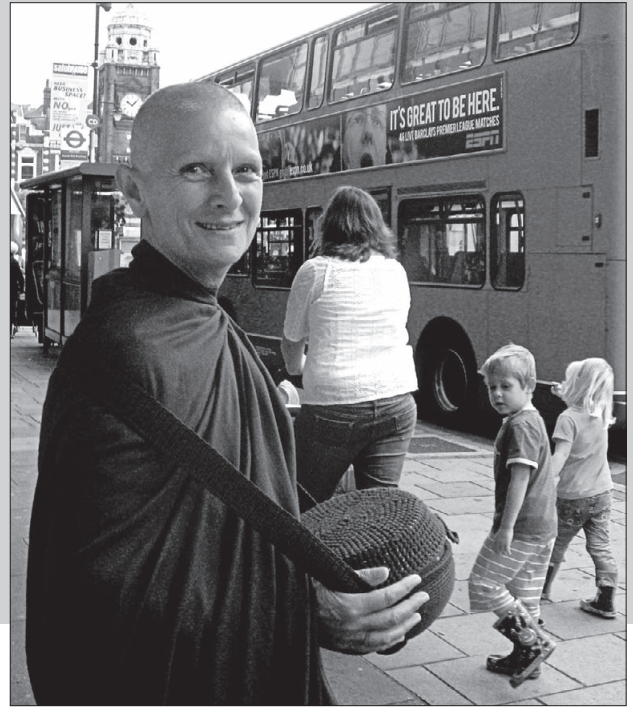


Freedom Pass

An interview with Ajahn Upekkha

This past spring Ajahn Upekkha, a senior nun in the siladhara community who has practised in our monasteries for over twenty years, decided to make a leap of faith she had been considering for some time: to leave the communal life of the monasteries in order to share her practice with people who are close to death. She left with the blessing and good wishes of all – we wish her every good fortune and fruit of the Path.

Sister Dhammadhira recently asked Ajahn Upekkha about her new direction in the following interview.



Ajahn Kovida, senior nun at Cittaviveka Monastery, wrote the following by way of introduction:

Earlier this year Ajahn Upekkha made a long-planned move to London, to offer Dhamma teaching in hospices. Out of gratitude to her and as a preface to this interview, I'd like to acknowledge her leading role as a senior nun. Over many years she has shared her compassion and integrity of practice with the community. Through her role as Novice Nun she helped newcomers to undertake the training. Her wise counsel and her metta will be greatly missed. We all wish her well. ~ Sister Kovida

What made you decide to live in London?

The inspiration came a few years ago when people started to ask me to help them when they became terminally ill. They were not all Buddhists but as a last resort they would come to the monastery and this is where I would meet them. I found these encounters very powerful in my own practice, as a reminder of what the Buddha teaches about the dying of the 'self'. It isn't easy. When people are terminally ill they are cornered and have to face the reality of death. They would often find it very difficult to integrate this new experience in their lives. As samanas we are encouraged to contemplate impermanence and death as part of our practice. If the opportunity arises, I may view a corpse or visualize myself as being a corpse. Even so, it is possible to understand death intellectually while missing a deeper level of application in one's daily life. I know this because while I am present and at ease in many situations – allowing the natural flow of life to occur – there are still situations where I'm afraid to be exposed. Then, the sense of self becomes solidified in the body and mind again. Anxiety arises when one feels the need to protect something or someone. At these

times, I am not able to die in the sense of the Buddha's teaching because I am still attached to the idea of who I think I am or what I think the world should be. So in taking care of people who are really cornered, I find it helps me to reflect in my own practice and is a good support.

The second motivation for me came from seeing that there is not much support for people who are going through the process of being in this world and going to the next. I wanted to make myself available to offer that. I've been moved by the openness and trust that develops in relationships with the dying person and their families.

Were there experiences in your background, even before you came to the monastery, which gave you a sense of the significance of the dying process?

When I was younger, I had a brush with death when I suddenly came down with a mysterious illness and the doctors didn't know what was wrong. Even before that, what actually brought me to the monastery was my sister's death. She was one year younger than me, only thirty-four years old when she died. At that time I used to think I had plenty of time to develop my spiritual life



Ajahn Upekkha on
almsround in London

and that there was no rush. But when my sister died, I realized that this is not necessarily true. For her, it was quite a difficult process because she didn't accept it straight away. She was fighting it; she didn't understand why it should be her. She had a lot of anger and fear. In the end, she died peacefully, but it was quite a difficult process. I thought to myself at the time, I don't want to die like that. I don't want to learn everything at the last minute. This is what brought me to the monastery. I thought I had plenty of time but really I may not. Then my mother died, followed by three of my brothers. None of them had the same kind of death. All were different. Fortunately, in the end, they all died peacefully.

Now that I'm in my sixtieth year, I'm eligible for a 'Freedom Pass', a pass which allows seniors free travel on London transport services. I thought, 'Wow, what a good opportunity!' This pass would make it easier for me to get around without depending as heavily on the support of others. Before, when I would visit sick people, especially if they weren't Buddhist, I would find it uncomfortable to mention they needed to buy my ticket for me to be able to come see them. In addition, this 'Freedom Pass' has another meaning for this transition I'm making. It reminds me to find my freedom in this path of practice, in preparing for my own transition at the end of this life. So I find this phrase very good and an interesting reflection. Do I really have my freedom pass? I don't think I'm there yet, but getting closer. I hope to help people to get their freedom pass to Nibbana. This is my wish.

How has the transition from living in the monastery to living in the city been for you?

For the first couple of months, I was quite enthusiastic and had the energy to come. I have a great friend who helped to make it possible by offering me space in her flat until I found something else. Other friends also helped in whatever ways they could. I felt very good and straight away made contact with St. John's Hospice. Also, the Royal Brompton Hospital contacted me to see if I'd be interested in working in the chaplain program. I felt so welcomed by both places. To be wanted is a very nice feeling and it encouraged me to trust that everything would be OK.

The transition is not easy. After living in the countryside all my life, especially for the past twenty-four years

in the monastery, the thing I find the most difficult is the noise. I tell myself that I am bigger than the noise. Moving through the crowds of people on the streets, taking the underground, etc. ... I try to remind myself in my everyday actions that this is the time for practice. Inside myself I say, 'May I be well. May all beings be well. May I be free from suffering. May all beings be free from suffering.' I'm

doing this all the time when I'm sitting on the tube or when I'm walking, so this way I don't feel so affected by what is going on around me. I can see now, after being in London for two months, I am starting to feel a little more fatigue physically. My heart is still happy, but I experience more fatigue, so I have to find ways to take care of myself. Going to a park just to see the green trees and grass helps me. On the level of relationship, I get support from the Hampstead group and many other friends – both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. I've recently been invited to stay at a friend's house in Wimbledon. On one level, I miss the friendship of the sisters. I can see how this is important. The Buddha talked about the importance of *kalyanamitta*. Friendships that have developed over a long time don't just go away and I hope when I get more settled I will visit the monastery on a more regular basis.

What has it been like going pindapat (almsround) on the streets of London?

I wasn't sure how going on pindapat would be since usually here in the UK I have gone together with another nun. When I started I was a bit hesitant, but quickly I began to see it as standing meditation. I would focus on seeing the world passing through and began wishing all beings well: 'May I be well and free from suffering. May you be well and free from suffering.' Relaxing into that, I have found that very quickly people come and want to put money in my bowl. After acknowledging their generosity, I have to explain that I can't accept money. 'Then, what do you want?' they ask, and I explain that it is food that I need. Some people walk away while others go into the shop and get food. I was surprised at how quickly people connected with what I was doing, and very moved by the generosity and support I received. This built up my trust: Yes, this does work! Every day different people would come and more and more was offered. I had to carry a rucksack with me to put it all in. I find it especially touching when children come and put food in my bowl and I'm moved to see how they really like it when I offer them a blessing. Others say how much they appreciate my presence or 'How wonderful. You warm up my day' or 'You make my day happy.' Others are surprised that I don't want money. They say, 'That is a wonderful thing

to do.' Then they leave and not offer me anything. Or they say 'Good luck' and go off. But what's so nice is to see how they connect. They come and want to talk about their lives – what they worry about, their experience of getting old, their vegetable garden or whatever. I've realized how important it is just to be there and make myself available. That is what I want to do. I never lived in a big city before this, but I feel very contented as though this is where I should be.

How has your experience in the city been compared to monastic life in terms of the daily routine and the structures that you were used to?

Right now I'm not into a regular routine, but when I settle down to one location, I will be able to organize my time better. I will then be able to decide how I can meet people in a way that would be beneficial for them and for myself. My intention is to start very slowly – to be one day in the hospice and one day in the hospital. On Friday evening, I can offer meditation followed by a question and answer session for those interested. I'm happy to do that. Maybe, I will do a little bit of counselling for one or two people. That is how far I want to go, because I want to keep some time for myself for my meditation practice and for exercise. I hope to have two days a week totally free so I can have a break. This is my wish.

You've been volunteering your time at the Royal Brompton Hospital for about one month so far. How has that been?

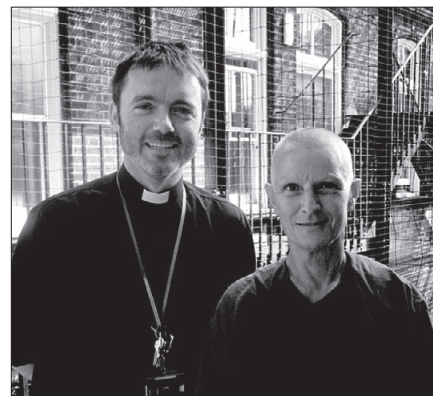
I've been working alongside Reverend Robert, the young chaplain. He is an Anglican priest, also quite new to this position. Previously, he worked for eight years as a hospice chaplain. He is an incredible, kind and open-minded person and we get along very well. He introduced me to the doctors, nurses and staff who were all very welcoming. For the hospital, this is a new experience. They want to explore how it will be for me to support those with cystic fibrosis, an inherited disease that limits one's lifespan to a maximum of thirty years. It is very difficult for the families, often the families break down and there's a lot of guilt and emotional distress. For the person who has the disease, it is very difficult for them emotionally, having a lot of fear and anxiety that comes with knowing that they have no future. These are the people I am going to work with. The doctors and nurses welcome my support as they are often stressed and find they don't have the time or skills to deal with these kinds of emotional issues. They hope that I will be able to ease the relationship between the patient and their families. Basically, it's a combination of mediating and helping in the process of transition so they will be able to better understand what

life is 'for'. Essentially, this is done through being a loving presence. Later on I will start a meditation class for patients and staff that are interested. We are in the planning stages for this now and hope to find a suitable time that works for the nurses to come also.

Most people who read this article may not actually have a terminal illness or be in a life-threatening situation. Nonetheless, our lives are still filled with uncertainty. How can we all practice with the uncertainty we find in our own lives?

What the Buddha teaches is to stay in the present moment. This is the place we realize Nibbana. To be with this is not easy when we feel caught in our habits of mind and wish to control. When Ajahn Chah said, 'Die before you die,' he was talking about not identifying with who you think you are, your character or your views and opinions, who you think you should be or how the world should be. All this has to be seen for what it is and then let go of. As human beings we have to go through this process of being born, growing up and dying. The most important thing is what we make of it mentally. The most difficult thing to work with is what we create in terms of who we think we are. If I think I am this person – I am kind, intelligent, I'm a nun – then what am I left with if I let go of these things? At this moment, I am just this body-mind that is standing or walking, eating or drinking or moving. There is nobody there. The next moment I don't know; I may not be breathing. I don't know. Of course, this is the most difficult thing to integrate. I can't plan it. I can't just say, 'I want to be free' and then I'm free. It needs to be a direct experience.

It's not something that we can make happen. It's really by practising this mindful attention and awareness that I begin to recognize that I'm not my thoughts. I can watch the tendency to worry about the future. For example, now that I have come to London, I may not know where I am going to be tomorrow. I just need to come back to the present moment. I am here now. I am breathing. I have a shelter for the night and I have received the food I needed. I'm healthy. I have everything I need right now. I don't need to know more than that.



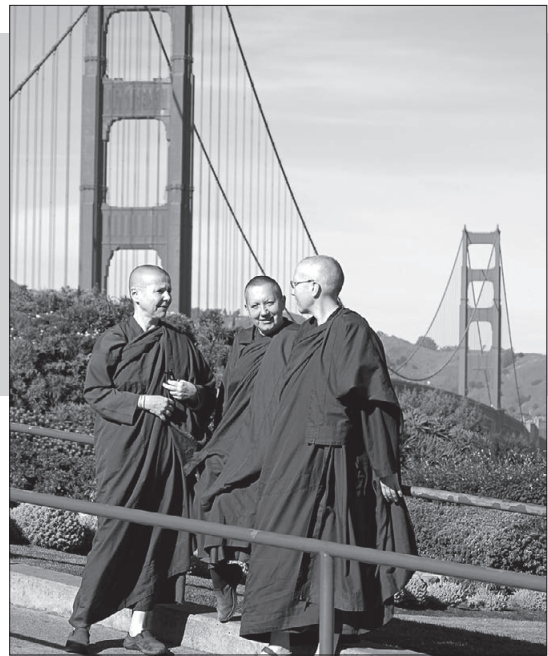
Reverend Robert and Ajahn Upekkha

I can imagine people might read this and think, but wait a minute, I do have to plan things. I have a family to feed, I have to think about their educational needs, I want to go on holiday at this time, etc. ... If I don't plan, how are things going to happen? How do you consider future possibilities?

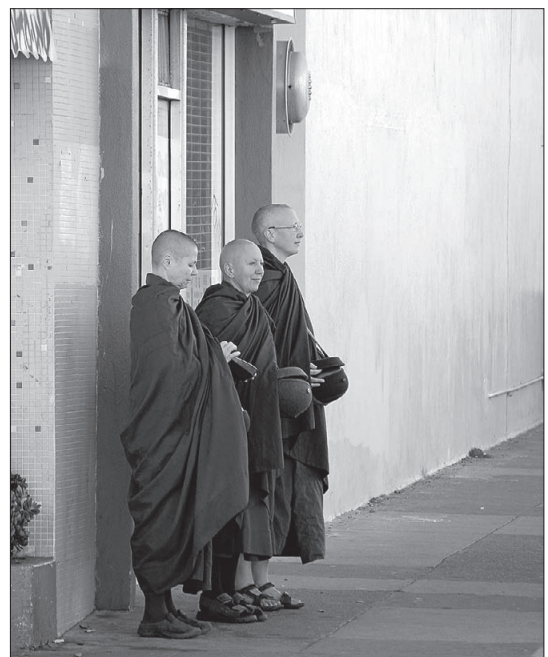
Well, of course we have to plan. For example, in my diary it says that tomorrow I am going to the hospital at 10.30 in the morning. In the afternoon, the program says I will do a guided meditation with questions and answers. Every Wednesday I plan to go to the hospice. I schedule to meet these friends at this time, go on pindapat at that time. It's all planned. If I am alive and not sick I will do these things. But I have to know that it might not happen. I might get sick or die or lose my key and not be able to get out of the house. Whatever happens that might stop me from doing these things, I'm not going to get upset about it. I try to stay composed and mindful and present to what is happening. If I feel irritated or frustrated, I just know this feeling in my body. I remind myself that this is the way life is. We don't always get what we want. Life is bringing me experiences that I don't expect. I can't stop or control that. Sometimes people have a hard time accepting this. They ask, 'Why me?' We see people around us dying all the time – in our families, amongst our friends or in war. But strangely enough when it happens to us, we say, 'Why me?' But why not?

So when something comes up and I can't do what I planned, instead of getting upset, I see that this is the reality of how life is in the moment. Sometimes the children are sick or the boss is angry or the weather is like this. We're not going to get everything we want. Sometimes things flow very well and at other times we face obstacles. This is normal. Nobody is against me. People can think that somebody is against them. Maybe they blame God or feel as though they deserve to be sick. They feel that they are not good enough. When I hear this from patients in the hospital, I feel very sad. By being present and listening to them, my wish is to radiate loving-kindness. We are learning to accept the way life is. We are not punished by anybody. Through this experience, we can learn something. We can grow. We can find a deeper level of freedom. Gradually, we come to understand that it's not about what happens to us but how we relate to it. When we understand the way life is, we are no longer living in a dream world. This is what it means to be free. ॐ

Ajahn Upekkha may be contacted via the Chithurst nuns' email:
cbmnuns@cittaviveka.org



Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco Bay



On almsround in San Francisco



Seeds in the Bay

Establishing a training monastery for nuns in California

At the beginning of April the siladhara community received the final go ahead from the Elders' Council to establish a place for nuns in California. This will be the first nuns-only monastery in the tradition of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho outside of the UK.

Ajahns Anandabodhi, Metta and Santacitta, three senior nuns from Amaravati, have been invited by the Saranaloaka Foundation to come to California by the end of this year.

How did this all come about?

Ajahn Santacitta: For over 20 years nuns from Amaravati and Chithurst have been travelling and teaching in the US. This led to the creation of the Saranaloaka Foundation in 2004. 'Saranaloaka' means 'refuge in the clear light of awareness', a powerful reminder of what really matters.

Ruth Denison, a well known Dhamma teacher in the U.S., intuited many years ago how crucial it is that nuns have their own basis of support. She wanted to help establish a trust and approached Jill Boone, who is now president of the foundation.

Ajahn Metta: About two years ago we received an email from Jill asking if any of the senior nuns at Amaravati or Chithurst were interested in starting a nuns' monastery in California

Three of us at Amaravati, Ajahns Anandabodhi, Santacitta and myself came together and looked at this possibility. Having each lived in the Sangha for more than 15 years we felt interested in taking a new step. We shared our dreams and visions and thought, well, it might be possible for this to manifest, somehow. It felt worthwhile to put our energy into this, and a vision started to form.

A place where women can train as anagarikas and siladhara and where we can live together and see how it works without the presence and support of the monks. As a community we came to the point where it felt important to put our focus into something new and to see how community life would unfold in a separate nuns'

community. There are so many monks' communities around the world and they seem to flourish, why should we not give this a try?

Having met and discussed this together, we introduced the idea to the whole siladhara community. Until now the siladhara have lived only in the UK. This felt like a big step forward. After some consideration the nuns agreed.

We met with Luang Por Sumedho and were encouraged by him. He was very supportive and rejoiced in our idea of establishing a monastery for nuns in California. Without his support, teachings and guidance during all the years of our monastic life, we would have never even considered to begin a monastery for siladhara in the US. His encouragement and support for this new project is very uplifting for all of us.

Later in 2007 I went to co-teach a retreat with Ajahn Amaro. While in California we had our first supporters' meeting at Abhayagiri. Our vision seemed to fall onto fertile ground. By meeting people who were inspired, it started to take more shape and colour.

Ajahn Anandabodhi: In January 2008 Ajahn Santacitta and I spent two months travelling up and down the West Coast, visiting groups and supporters. Within a short time it became clear to us that there was real interest in having women teachers and strong support for a nuns' training monastery to be established in the near



From Left: Ajahns Santacitta, Metta and Anandabodhi

future. Already at that time it looked like it would be in California.

Ajahn Metta: In January and February this year we went back to California, with Sr Sumedha joining us in February. It was amazing to see the enthusiasm and support for what we were doing wherever we went. I felt deeply touched to see how people responded to our presence. It went far beyond any expectation I had ... in fact it was astonishing and humbling. Saranaloka had rented a beautiful house for us in San Francisco, close to the ocean, that turned out to be an ideal temporary *vihara*. We were given *dana* meals frequently and generously, and our supporters offered us transport to go for teachings, etc.

Ajahn Anandabodhi: The warmth and welcome we met was far beyond my expectations. Very quickly the rented house took on the atmosphere of a *vihara*. Visitors often thought it had been a *vihara* for years. Once a week we went on almsround to the local area and our bowls were filled with peoples' generosity. Often people would come unexpectedly at meal times, bringing food offerings and staying on afterwards to speak about Dhamma. Even our



most simple evening *pujas* were graced with people, local and not so local, who would come just to sit together in silence. It was truly heartening to see how our presence as *samanas* was valued.

Ajahn Metta: Many different 'Dharma groups' invited us to give teachings in the Bay Area, and some of these were really large. We also had many people coming to the *vihara* for our Friday evening gatherings, Saturday meditation workshops and for informal gatherings over tea. It was a place to which people could easily come, even by local transport, from the city.

Ajahn Santacitta: For *Magha Puja* we visited Abhayagiri Monastery in Redwood Valley. The whole community

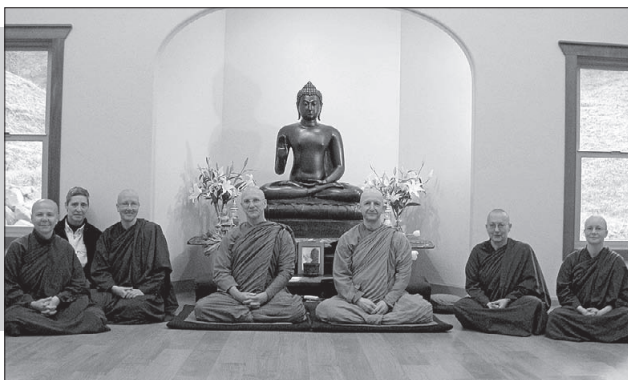


received us with a lot of kindness, and the abbots, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro, encouraged us in our intention to establish a place for nuns. It is the monastic way of life, the teachings and a living embodiment of the Buddha's way, which people value so much. Most monastic teachers are men, and women are looking for role models, women living the *samana* life who can communicate teachings relevant to their lives and circumstances.

Ajahn Anandabodhi: Most of the Saranaloka Foundation board members came from near and far in February to meet with us and to experience the *vihara* first hand. We were then officially invited to return at the end of this year, to start a monastery for *siladhara* in the wider Bay Area. We are delighted to accept this invitation! The next day we met with the board and the local supporters, all of us together for the first time. We decided the next steps and how to take our vision forward.

Ajahn Metta: At the end of this year we will return for a permanent stay. We'll start again in the small *vihara* where we stayed earlier this year. While in California many people came to us with questions like: would it be possible to build a monastery with a closely related lay community? Would it be a place where men are also welcome? Certainly this is our intention. In the long term we would like to establish a rural place, with land in a quiet area conducive for monastic life, where women and men can join us for shorter or longer periods of time. Our vision is for the monastery to be of benefit especially for North American women who wish to come and train with us as *samanas*, as well as for our own group of sisters in the UK through staying connected and exchanging our experiences.

Ajahn Anandabodhi: Now that the time to return is approaching we have a sense of furthering what we have already begun. The *vihara* will be called Aloka *Vihara*, in connection with the first residence for nuns at Chithurst monastery, Aloka Cottage, now the women's guest house. It will be rented by Saranaloka until such time when land becomes available for a more permanent nuns' monastery. The supporters' meetings have continued in our absence, with local people getting together to share

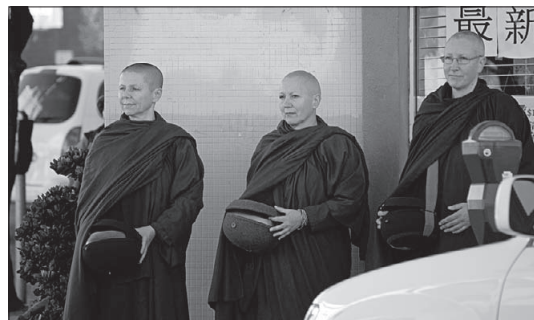


Visiting Abhayagiri Monastery, California, earlier this year



a meal and some time of practice and to see what steps can be taken to enable the vihara to open again on a long-term basis. We've heard about the sense of community that's naturally evolved among the women and men who've been part of these meetings; it's wonderful to see the development of community around the wholesome intention for people to live in alignment with Dhamma.

Each new beginning invites an ending. We are handing over our duties and responsibilities to other sisters and saying our goodbyes to family and friends. People often ask us 'Why America?'. The answer is simple. The time is ripe for nuns to begin to branch out from Amaravati and Chithurst monasteries, both of which are dual communities with both monks and nuns. The Saranaloka Foundation in the U.S. has come forward to offer the support for such a move, by stewarding donations for a nuns' community and taking on the responsibility for providing or coordinating the provision of the four fundamental requisites for the samana life: food, lodging, medicine (health care) and cloth. It has taken a group of people, in this case women, to come together and offer their time, skills and patience to set up a charitable (non-profit) organization and to respond to what needs to be done. The welcoming local support and interest also makes this a fertile ground on which to establish a community.



Ajahn Santacitta: We are very grateful for what we have received over the years of training under the spiritual guidance of Luang Por Sumedho and the Sangha at Amaravati and Chithurst. It is a great privilege for us to use what we have learned for an endeavour that is so timely and worthwhile. ॐ



From the Saranaloka Foundation:

If you are interested in staying informed, please visit our website: www.saranaloka.org. Saranaloka relies solely on dana (donations) for its ability to support the siladhara community. The foundation also arranges and coordinates teaching engagements for the nuns.



A new website called *Dhamma Moon* (www.dhammamoon.org) will soon be up and running, featuring poetry from the Sangha and others. The website will be edited by Ajahn Sucitto and Ajahn Abhinando, who sent along the following poems.

From Ajahn Sucitto:

The Rains Retreat

1

Parched summer sky:
but let my vows rain through
and every leaf and all places be washed
that your radiance spread its span
and the eye of all things open –
unadopted, coolly present.

Aug. 2

2

Beautiful regard:
late summer evening.
Among the tremors of intent
the martins' wings flick the pond
with the harmonies of vanishing.

Aug. 23

3

Leaving October
a bright moon after the storm
in and out of the clouds.
Morning will bring more rain,
present the shining of dead leaves;
and, like the richest seeing,
a mist that penetrates the bone.

Oct. 23

From Mahapanyo Bhikkhu:

A Pole

A pole, for creepers, but big ones
I make here with my skeleton.
Straight as I have never been
I break into the earth now,
then death
and the plant will wind themselves around me.
In years to come you still find me
here, changed, but with the same bones.
I have organs made of wood
with sap running inside them,
young shoots hold the spine and all together
and a smooth, green skin are my leaves.
From the skull sprout a couple of buds,
and during the day I see the world with flowers
that close themselves at night.
Moss grows on me to indicate
the North, impossible now
to miss the one direction
I want to take.
The wind
the forceful wind goes over me
and caresses and shakes me.
It almost seems as if I am singing
with that leaf between my jaws.

Glossary – Some of the Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the *Forest Sangha Newsletter*

Please note: Pali diacritics have been omitted throughout the newsletter. Below are brief descriptions of how these words are being used in this issue of the FSN; they are not full definitions. Often used, many have not been italicized.

Ajahn (Thai): Senior monk or nun; literally 'teacher'. Used for those with ten vassas or more, regardless of their role in the community.
anagarika: A male or female postulant in the preliminary noviciate stage.
bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk
Buddha: Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.
dana: Giving, generosity; offering, alms.
dhutanga: Voluntary ascetic practices.
Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.
kalyanamitta: Spiritual friend; a mentor or teacher of Dhamma.
Luang Por (Thai): A title of affectionate respect (lit. 'Venerable Father').
metta: Loving-kindness
kamma (Sanskrit: karma): Intentional acts that result in states of being.

puja: Devotional observances such as chanting and offering incense.
samana: One who has entered the Holy Life; religious recluse or wanderer.
Sangha: The community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns; alternatively, those who have realized liberation (Ariya Sangha)
siladhara: A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.
sutta: A discourse by the Buddha or his disciples.
Tan (Thai): A common title of respect.
Theravada: The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.
Vassa: The three-month summer 'Rains Retreat'; a mark of how many years ('vassas') a monk or nun has been in robes.
vihara: A monastic dwelling.



AMARAVATI

Amaravati Kathina – 1 November

This year's Kathina at Amaravati is a Royal Kathina offered by the King of Thailand. It is being organized by Khun Wanthana

Web developer needed

It's possible we may need help with developing and maintaining the Amaravati website. Someone with some programming experience would be ideal. If you think you might be interested, please write to [monasterysecretary at amaravati dot org](mailto:monasterysecretary@amaravati dot org)

Family events

2009

Young Persons' Retreat: 27–29 November

Creative Retreat: 18–20 Dec. (age 18+)

2010

Rainbows Weekend: 30 April–3 May

Rainbows Weekend: 25–27 June

Family Camp: 21 – 29 August

Young Persons' Retreat: 26–28 November

Creative Retreat: 10–12 Dec. (age 18+)

Booking forms and further information about these and all family events can be found at

www.family.amaravati.org or

contact: [familyevents at amaravati dot org](mailto:familyevents@amaravati dot org)

Lay events 2009–10

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association:

These events provide an opportunity to practise together and explore themes relevant to practice and lay life. Events are led by experienced lay teachers or the Sangha.

Days of Practice (DoP) – no need to book 9.45 a.m. for 10–5 p.m. (Please bring a ready-to-eat packed lunch)

Retreats – advanced booking essential* 5.30 p.m. Fri. – 4 p.m. on the last day.

31 October 2009: Day of Practice

12 December 2009: Day of Practice

16 January 2010: Winter Day of Practice

15 February: Winter Day of Practice

6 March: Winter Day of Practice

3 April: Day of Practice

21–23 May: Weekend Retreat (Nick Carroll)

5 June: Day of Practice

16–20 July: Five-day Retreat (Martin Evans)

14 August: Day of Practice

18 September: Day of Practice

1–3 Oct. : Weekend Retreat (Nick Carroll)

13 November: Day of Practice

18 December: Day of Practice

*Retreat booking forms and event details can be found on our website: www.buddhacommunity.org

Buddhist Women's Network

6 Dec. 2009: Afternoon retreat, Carlisle, led by Chris Blain. (Contact: 01434 322176)

13 Dec. 2009: Day Retreat at Amaravati – *Ways of Being*, led by Alison Moore

2010

12–14 Feb.: Weekend Retreat, Pennines, led by Chris Blain. (Contact: 01434 322176)

7 March: Day retreat at Amaravati

23–25 July: Weekend retreat at Amaravati

19 December: Day retreat at Amaravati

For details: [jennijepson at yahoo dot co.uk](mailto:jennijepson@yahoo dot co.uk)

ARUNA RATANAGIRI

Harnham Kathina – 11 October

Winter Retreat helpers

If you are interested to help with the next Winter Retreat at Harnham (cooking, cleaning, meditating...), staying for a period of at least two weeks, please contact the monastery on 01661 881 612 or at [sangha at ratanagiri dot org.uk](mailto:sangha@ratanagiri dot org.uk)

Looking for a Web developer

Aruna Ratanagiri is looking for an experienced Web developer to help create a new website. Experience with CMS would be a bonus. If you have time please contact our IT manager, Alex Ewing on 07726 562 835 or at [ar at drivingmenuts dot co.uk](mailto:ar@drivingmenuts dot co.uk)

Retreats at Harnham

Kusala House Retreats 2010

Mixed Retreat 13–15 Nov. (2009)

Led by Ajahn Abhinando

Mixed Retreat 22–25 April

Led by Ajahn Tiradhammo

Mixed Retreat 14–21 May

Led by Ajahn Sucitto

Mixed Retreat 31 July–7 August

Led by Ajahn Abhinando

Mixed Retreat 4–7 November

Led by Ajahn Amaro

Sutta Study Day – 8 Nov.

With Professor Peter Harvey

9.30 to 16.00, with a shared vegetarian lunch.

Volunteer cooks wanted – please let us know if you'd like to help cook for a retreat this year.

Kusala House, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland, UK

For more information and booking for these events please contact Kath Ann Jones at:

[kusalaretreats08 at gmail dot com](mailto:kusalaretreats08@gmail dot com)

or by phone at +44 (0120) 728–3361

or see: www.kusalahouse.org

CITTAVIVEKA

Chithurst Kathina – 18 October

This year's Kathina at Cittaviveka will be offered on behalf of the Buddhist community by Dharmani & Amara Makalanda (020 8366 5743, cbmkathina09@mail.com) and Sita & Jeeva Siriwardena (020 8364 2486)

Winter Retreat helpers

There are a few spaces for lay men and women on the Winter Retreat at Cittaviveka. The practice involves being part of a group of six or seven serving the Sangha through such duties as cooking and making tea. There will be ample time for meditation in the group or in solitude, and an opportunity to receive teachings and discuss Dhamma. We ask for a minimum commitment of three weeks to a month. Applicants should have experience of retreats and a working knowledge of monastic life and protocols. If you're interested please write to 'Winter Retreat', Cittaviveka (monastery address is on the back page), by December at the latest.

Forest work at Cittaviveka



From 8–27 November the community at Cittaviveka will focus on work in our large forest. We especially appreciate the help of male volunteers who can help with simple woodland tasks: stacking logs, planting trees, and clearing undergrowth. We will be working as a core group of 6–8 men with others joining us for periods. The core group will spend all day in the woodland; it's also possible to spend the evenings and nights in one of the forest dwellings. The weekends will be reserved for quiet time and meditation. If you'd like to help, please write to 'Forest Work', Cittaviveka (address on back page), or phone (01730) 814 986.



HARTRIDGE

Devon Kathina – 25 October

DHAMMAPALA

Winter Retreat helpers needed in Switzerland

Dhammapala Monastery offers the opportunity for experienced Dhamma practitioners to support the 2010 Winter Retreat of the resident Sangha during January, February and the first half of March. Ideally we would like to invite people for one month, but there can also be space for those who can only stay for two weeks.

Besides the helping duties, which are entirely around kitchen activities and house cleaning, there will be plenty of time for individual Dhamma practice in the magnificent mountain environment (1200 metres altitude). Applicants can direct their inquiry to Margrit at: [info at dharmapala dot ch](mailto:info@dharmapala.ch)

BODHINYANARAMA

News from Wellington, NZ

From Ajahn Tiradhammo:

Shortly before the Rains Retreat Ajahn Uttamo moved on from New Zealand to take up residence in Sri Lanka. He was replaced by Ajahn Meng, arriving in the New Zealand Winter from sizzling Thailand.

This year three monks, Ajahn Tiradhammo, Ajahn Meng and Ven. Nyanadassano, together with Anagarika Horst, spent a very peaceful Rains Retreat at Bodhinyanarama.

The kitchen project slowly moved along, and is still some way off completion (see the photo gallery on our website). Our intrepid volunteer carpenter, Leo, has twice postponed his departure to see the project along, which has been assisted by many generous helping hands, especially from our Burmese and Laotian supporters. Donations in funds and material are still flowing in. We expect it should be completed in good time for the arrival of about a dozen Senior Ajahns for the 25th Anniversary Celebration on 20 December 2009, which many people are joyfully anticipating.

NEW NUNS' MONASTERIES

California

In November and December Ajahns Anandabodhi, Metta and Santacitta will be making their move to the San Francisco area in order to establish a new nuns' monastery there with the blessings of the Sangha. For more information see the article in this newsletter, and visit: www.saranaloka.org

A monastery for nuns in Scotland

Over the past few years there has been a growing sense of need for a place where nuns can live and practise together as a community, in addition to the already established dual communities at Amaravati and Chithurst. A search has now begun for a property in Scotland that can be used as a residence for siladhara and anagarikas. If you would like to know more about this venture, please email: [sunandavihara at amaravati dot org](mailto:sunandavihara@amaravati.org)

PUBLICATIONS

Dhamma Moon

Ajahn Sucitto and Ajahn Abhinando are editing a website for poetry which will soon be accessible at www.dhammamoon.org. If you like poetry, please have a look!

Looking for graphic designers

The Sangha is hoping to gather a list of volunteers with graphic design/typesetting experience who may be able to help with future publications. If you think you might be interested, please contact [editor at amaravati dot org](mailto:editor@amaravati.org)

Dhammapada Reflections

Over the past two years, each fortnight Ajahn Munindo has sent out a verse from the Dhammapada with a short reflection. Fifty-two of these verses with commentary (one verse every week for a year) have been compiled into a small book called *Dhammapada Reflections*. From mid November the book should be available for free distribution at the UK monasteries.

Kathinas 2009

Supporters of the UK monasteries invite you for

Kathina celebrations on Sunday,

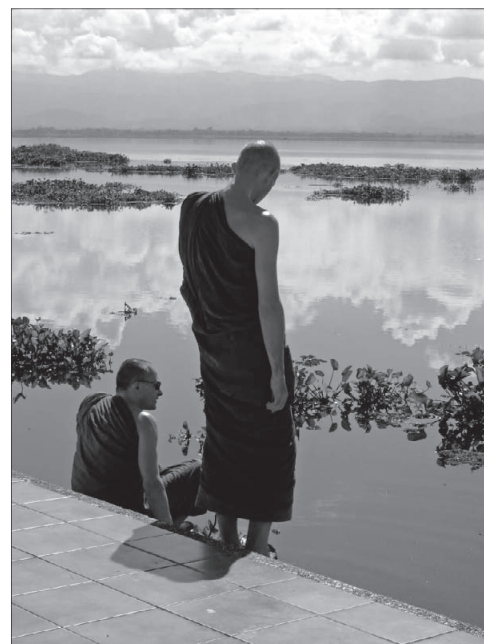
11 October ~ Aruna Ratanagiri

18 October ~ Cittaviveka

25 October ~ Hartridge

1 November ~ Amaravati

Kathinas usually begin sometime after 10 a.m.
Please check monastery websites for more details.
Everyone welcome!



Introduction to meditation

Workshops at Amaravati ♻ Saturday afternoons 2–4 p.m.

Meditation instruction for beginners, with an opportunity for questions and dialogue

Feel free to come along – no booking is necessary

Classes are held in the Temple

Places for Practice

Groups and contacts

England

Bath	Anne Armitage	(01225) 859217
Banbury	Sarah Wallis	(01295) 278744
Bedford	David Stubbs	(01234) 720892
Berkshire	Anthea West	(01189) 798101
Brentwood	Richard Burch	(01277) 626225
Brighton – Bodhi Garden (www.bodhigarden.org):		
	David Glendining	(01273) 723378
Bristol	Lisa Daix	(0117) 935 0272
Cambridge	Dan Jones	(01223) 246257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	(01227) 463342
Carlisle	Jean Nelson	(01228) 546259
Chichester	Tony Halter	(01243) 672126
Cookham, Maidenhead		
	Emily Tomalin or David Lillywhite	(01628) 810083
East Dorset Buddhist Group (veronica_ferry@talktalk.net):		
	Veronica Ferry	(01202) 730232
Hemel Hempstead – Bodhinyana Group:		
	Chris Ward	(01442) 890034
Kendal Fellside Centre, Low Fellside:		
	Sumedha	(01539) 729793
Leeds Area		
	Daniela Loeb	(01132) 791375
	Anne Grimshaw	(01274) 691447
Liverpool	Ursula Haeckel	(0151) 427 6668
London Buddhist Society,		
	58 Eccleston Square, London SW1	(0207) 834 5858
London Hampstead		
	Caroline Randall	(0208) 348 0537
	Ann Booth	(0207) 485 0505
London West	Nick Carroll	(07973) 372 391
Maidstone – Alokabodhi Buddhist Group:		
	Shirley (01622) 203751 or Bee (01622) 726414	
Newcastle	Ian Plagaro-Neill	(0191) 469 2778
Newent-Glouce.	John Teire	(01531) 821902
	email: john.teire@virgin.net	
Newmarket		
	Richard Prangnell & Rosie Hitchins	
	01638 603 286, rprangnell@gmail.com , www.bodhimanda.org	
Norwich	Robert Coggan	(01953) 451741
Penzance	Lee	(01736) 799170
Portsmouth	Medhavi	(02392) 732280
Redruth	Vanessa	(01209) 214031
Sheffield	Greg Bradshaw	(0114) 262 1559
	email: greg.bradshaw@btclick.com	
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati)	(01305) 786821
Southampton	Robert Elliot	(02380) 612838
Steyning, Sussex	Jayanti	(01903) 812130
Stroud	John Groves	(07967) 777742
Surrey-Woking	Rocana	(01483) 761398
Taunton	Annie Fisher	(01278) 457245
Teeside	John Doyle	(01642) 587274
Totnes	James Whelan	(01803) 865667

Outside England

Co. Clare, Ireland: Sunyata Centre	(+353) 61 367 073
Cork, Ireland	Paddy Boyle (+353) 21 462 2964
Dublin	Rupert Westrup (+353) 01 280 2832
Edinburgh	Neil Howell (0131) 226 5044
Glasgow	James Scott (0141) 637 9731
Machynlleth, Wales	Angela Llewellyn (0165) 051 1350
Pembrokeshire, S. Wales	
	Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson (01239) 820790
A Coruña, Spain	David Williams (+34) (981) 432 718

Amaravati Retreats

2009 – Remaining Retreats

R13	6–8 Nov.	Weekend	*Ajahn Santacitta
R14	13–22 Nov.	10 Days	*Ajahn Sundara
R15	4–6 Dec.	Weekend	*Ajahn Sukhacitto
R16	Dec. 27–1 Jan 2010	6 Days	*Ajahn Nyanarato

**Fully booked – waiting list in operation*

Retreat Schedule 2010

R1	16–20 April	5 Days	Ajahn Paññasaro
R2	23–25 April	Weekend	Ajahn Gandhasilo
R3	7–16 May	10 Days	Luang Por Sumedho
R4	May 28–1 June	5 Days	Ajahn Candasiri
R5	11–13 June	Weekend	Ajahn Jutindharo
R6	18–20 June	Thai Weekend	*Ajahn Ratanawanno
R7	2–11 July	10 Days	Ajahn Vimalo
R8	July 30–8 Aug.	10 Days	Ajahn Vajiro
R9	3–15 Sept.	13 Days	**Luang Por Sumedho
R10	24–28 Sept.	5 Days	Ajahn Jayanto
R11	8–10 Oct.	Weekend	Ajahn Kovida
R12	15–24 Oct.	10 Days	Ajahn Sundara
R13	5–9 Nov.	5 Days	Ajahn Thitamedha
R14	19–21 Nov.	Buddhist/Christian Weekend	Ajahn Aloka & Brother Nicholas
R15	3–5 Dec.	Weekend	To be confirmed
R16	Dec. 27–1 Jan. 2011	6 Days	Ajahn Candasiri

***For experienced meditators – must have done at least one 10-day retreat*

**Thai speakers only*

General Guidelines

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It's advisable to do a weekend before doing a longer retreat. Due to high demand:

- There is a limit of three retreats per person per year;
- Places for Ajahn Sumedho's retreats will be allocated by lottery at the end of 2009. Priority will be given to people who have not taken part in his retreats during the last two years.

Booking Procedure

Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form, which can be obtained by:

- Downloading from the website
- Emailing or writing to the Retreat Centre

Please note that bookings cannot be made over the telephone.

Start and Finish Times

Registration is from 16.00–19.00 on the first day of the retreat. The orientation talk is at 19.15. Weekend retreats end at 16.00, longer retreats at lunchtime. Attendance is expected for the whole retreat.

Donations

No advance booking fee is required. The Retreat Centre is funded solely through donations. Donations are invited at the end of the retreat.

Contact Information

Retreat Centre, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery,
Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts., HP1 3BZ, UK
Telephone: +44 (0)1442 843 239

Email: retreats@amaravati.org

Website (for updated information): www.amaravati.org



Forest Sangha Newsletter



If undelivered, please return to:

Amaravati Monastery, St Margarets, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, HERTS. HP1 3BZ England, UK

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Observance Days

These days are traditionally given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome: contact the individual monasteries for specifics, as routines vary.

Moon phase	○ FULL	◐ HALF	● NEW	◑ HALF
OCTOBER	4 (Sun)*	12 (Mon)	18 (Sun)	26 (Mon)
NOVEMBER	2 (Mon)	10 (Tue)	17 (Tue)	25 (Wed)
DECEMBER	2 (Wed)	10 (Thu)	16 (Wed)	24 (Thu)
DEC./JAN.	31 (Thu)	8 (Fri)	15 (Fri)	23 (Sat)

* Pavarana

Associated Monasteries

BRITAIN

Amaravati Monastery

St Margarets,
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ
Tel: +44 (0144) 284 2455
Fax: (0144) 284 3721
Retreat Info: 284 3239
www.amaravati.org
Stewards:
English Sangha Trust

Aruna Ratanagiri

Harnham Buddhist
Monastery
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland
NE20 0HF
Tel: +44 (0166) 188 1612
Fax: (0166) 188 1019
www.ratanagiri.org.uk
sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk
Stewards: Harnham Buddhist
Monastery Trust

Hartridge Monastery

Upottery, Honiton,
Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (0140) 489 1251
www.hartridgemonastery.org
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust

Cittaviveka

Chithurst Buddhist
Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield,
Hampshire GU31 5EU
Tel: (0173) 081 4986
Fax: (0173) 081 7334
www.cittaviveka.org
Stewards:
English Sangha Trust

ITALY

Santacittarama

Località Brulla,
02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)
Tel: +39 (0765) 872 186
Fax: +39 (06) 233 238 629
www.santacittarama.org
Stewards:
Santacittarama Association

SWITZERLAND

Dhammapala

Buddhistisches Kloster
Am Waldrand,
CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 6 752 100
Fax: 033 / 6 752 241
www.dhammapala.org
Stewards:
Dhammapala 31921-201-5

U.S.A.

Abhayagiri Monastery

16201 Tomki Road,
Redwood Valley, CA 95470
Tel: +1 (707) 485 1630
Fax: +1 (707) 485 7948
www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards:
Sanghapala Foundation

AUSTRALIA

Bodhinyana Monastery

216 Kingsbury Drive,
Serpentine 6125 WA
Tel: +61 (08) 95 252 420
Fax: +61 (08) 95 253 420
www.bswa.org.au
Stewards: Buddhist Society of
Western Australia

Buddha Bodhivana Monastery

780 Woods Point Road,
East Warburton,
Victoria. 3799
Tel: +61 (0) 359 665 999
Fax: +61 (0) 359 665 998

Vimokharama Hermitage

PO Box 152 Kallista
Victoria, 3971

CANADA

Tisarana

Buddhist Monastery
1356 Powers Road, RR #3
Perth, Ontario K7H 3C5
Tel: +1 (613) 264 8208
www.tisarana.ca
Stewards:
Tisarana Buddhist Monastery

Arrow River

Forest Hermitage
Box 2, RR 7, Site 7
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 5V5
Tel: +1 (647) 477 5919
www.arrowriver.ca

Birken

Forest Monastery
PO Box 5
Knutsford, B.C. V0E 2A0
Tel: +1 (778) 785 6059
meditate@birken.org
www.birken.ca

NEW ZEALAND

Bodhinyanarama Monastery

17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Lower Hutt 5019,
tel: +64 (0)4 563 7193
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz
Stewards: Wellington Thera-
vada Buddhist Association

Vimutti Monastery

PO Box 7
Bombay 2343
+64 (0)9 236 6816
vimutti.atba@gmail.com
www.vimutti.org.nz
Stewards: Auckland Thera-
vada Buddhist Association

THAILAND

Wat Pah Nanachat

Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubun Rajathani 34310
www.watpahnachat.org
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write to Amaravati.

Please also see the Sangha portal website:
www.forestsangha.org