



Community

Summer 2001 / 2544

The Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 13



What is a lay Buddhist?

EDITORIAL

Why are you reading this?

This issue is full of questions!

Although I am sure that many of you are reading Community because you find the contents fresh, absorbing and helpful (and dare I say, entertaining), I suggest the 'deep' motive is because you are acting upon the 'religious impulse'.

A Buddhist description might be that Right Aspiration motivates us. As humans we are motivated to understand and find meaning in our existence. We aspire to understand why we suffer and to move away from suffering to find insight and peace. The story of the Buddha's search for enlightenment is a very pure, almost archetypal, summary of this drive that all humans possess in varying degrees. Starting from a privileged family background, with a wife and young child, the Buddha's aspiration to understand was brought into focus by his experience of old age, sickness, death and the sight of a wandering, robed samana. He left his comfortable existence to follow his aspiration to understand the truth of existence.

Right Aspiration cannot be satisfied by material success and wealth. Relationships, family, and work can be deeply fulfilling engagements; they do not, however, satisfy the religious impulse, although they may be the areas within which we have to learn our limitations, explore Dukkha, and develop insight.

It is this basic human characteristic of Right Aspiration which fuels attempts to support it through religious conventions. Organised religions are our human efforts to channel spiritual aspiration in skilful ways. They are useful as far as they truly encourage the religious impulse. Where organized religions become more concerned with their own survival than with the truth, and abuse power, then they become obstacles to Right Aspiration.

I think that the basic understanding of a religion as a way of supporting the natural aspiration to spiritual realisation has been lost over several hundred years in the developed west. Certainly the definition of religion in my dictionary is not one that I can agree with. Religion is defined as 'belief in, worship of, or obedience to a supernatural being or powers considered to be divine or have control of human destiny'. Other confusions abound. Religion is commonly seen as being

synonymous with morality or on having a monopoly on moral righteousness.

It is hardly surprising that the common view of organised religion amongst educated people of goodwill is often very negative. Young people in particular are often repelled by what they understand religion to be. Since we experience the religious impulse regardless of whether religions skilfully support it, we are living through a period of major decline in the established religions and a growth in alternatives.

Until we reappraise our understanding of the religious impulse, and separate it from its current identification with dogmatic attitudes and righteous morality, we cannot initiate reform and recover the word 'religion' from widespread associated negative perceptions.

From a Buddhist perspective we could take the view that Buddhism is a philosophy and be content with that. We can focus wholly upon our own 'patch' and our own practice and let history take its course. Or we can also look outwards. We can see ourselves as part of a much bigger community of people who may not regard themselves as following a religious path but who naturally aspire to the truth. We can engage more widely and play a part in reclaiming and redefining what it means to be religious.

The Community Newsletter, and more importantly, the growing network of Buddhist practitioners who we reach are a small but important part of the growth of alternative 'spiritual support initiatives' that may help to rehabilitate perceptions of religion in the UK and elsewhere. I am not suggesting that everybody becomes a Buddhist, but let us hope that the open-hearted and non-dogmatic approach, and the support for Right Aspiration found in Buddhism proves infectious.

I hope that in a few years time the definition of religion in my dictionary reads 'an organisation, enterprise, or body of non-dogmatic, non-superstitious, non-coercive, and practical teachings to help people to inquire into, understand, and realise their spiritual aspirations and full humanity'.

Chris Ward

What's in a name?

A question for lay Buddhists, Upasakas and Upasikas.

A simple response to the question of a name could be that names are not important. Yet our experience at Amaravati has been that some people have wanted to join the upasika association and others have not, simply because of the term 'upasika'. Some have participated in events and yet would never call themselves 'upasikas', whilst others have been very happy with the name whilst not fully aware of what it might mean. What is evident is that the perception of what the word might mean has an effect on how we see ourselves.

All of this is hardly surprising. Names and words do have meanings, and as human beings we are constantly giving meaning to our experience. They are a way of mentally labelling and categorising the phenomenal world to make some organisational sense of it and survive as organisms, individually and collectively. But names are to do with the conditioned world. From a position of 'absolute' reality they don't have any meaning at all, and perhaps this is one of the difficulties at the heart of the 'problem' addressed here.

'It seems that for some the number of precepts one takes is an indication of commitment to practice.'

The Buddha with his realisation of the characteristics of existence solved the problem neatly when giving himself a name. He called himself the Tathagata, meaning one 'thus come' or 'thus gone', or perhaps - 'thus becoming', and 'thus unbecoming'. Difficult for someone to emulate in a family or office context nowadays, but certainly a truer description of the process of existence in all its ever-changing forms. And in his case of course, the choice of name was a reflection of his realisation of the truth of existence.

So concern with an accurate description of what describes and has meaning for us in relation to our practice is perfectly valid. Whilst not making too big an issue of it, let us look at the words Lay Buddhist, Upasaka and Upasika.

A lay Buddhist could be described as someone who is not a monk or a nun, who is attempting to lead a generous, moral and mindful life according to his or her abilities, who is in broad or specific agreement with the Buddha's principles and teachings and who has taken the three refuges and five precepts.

As to the term 'upasaka' I first came across it some twenty five years ago when reading the books and translations in the "Ch'an and Zen Teachings" series by Upasaka Lu Kuan Yu. I was fascinated and inspired by the texts and his explanations and also by his photograph on the back cover, which showed a kind, calm, man. I remember thinking 'I wouldn't mind being like that myself'. After many years the term 'upasika' came into my life again with the setting up of the Upasika Training at Amaravati.

There was much talk about what this training was supposed to be. There was also some confusion about what the term itself actually meant. A few years ago, I asked Maurice Walsh whose knowledge of Pali was better than most. He confirmed that the original word in Pali had no plural form and was gender specific, i.e. *upasaka* was a male and an *upasika* was a female. The use of the term 'upasika' for the plural form, in the context of the western forest sangha tradition, was chosen in the female form in recognition of how women are now valued in society. As a linguist Maurice found it difficult to agree with this modern evolution of the Pali language, but he concurred with the translation of *upasaka/upasika* as meaning 'one who sits nearby', a person who had taken the

three refuges and observed the five precepts.

This confirms Nyanatiloka's Buddhist Dictionary definition which quotes the following translation from the Anguttara Nikaya Sutta after 'upasaka' i.e. a lay adherent, any lay follower who is filled with faith and has taken refuge in the Buddha, his doctrine and his community of noble disciples. His/her virtue is regarded as pure if he/she observes the 5 precepts. He/she should avoid the following wrong ways of livelihood: trading in arms, in living beings, meat, alcohol and poison.' This seemed to make it clear that in the Buddha's time it was understood to mean someone who has taken the three refuges and who lived by the five precepts and right livelihood .

*'there is no generally
recognized ordained nuns
tradition'*

But life is never this simple, especially after two and a half thousand years of tradition, for in Sri Lanka, as I have since found out, the term 'upasaka' and 'upasika' takes the meaning further. It is reserved for those lay individuals who have committed themselves to taking the Refuges but instead of just the five precepts, to living by the eight precepts. These are a condensation of the ten rules binding on all novices and monks which in addition to the five precepts also includes not eating food after mid day, being celibate as well as abstaining from dancing, singing, music, shows as well as from garlands, scent, cosmetics and adornments, and sleeping on high beds. In Sri Lanka therefore, an upasaka/upasika is regarded as someone who is more committed than someone on the five precepts who is regarded as an 'ordinary' lay Buddhist.

Furthermore, as a further sign of commitment upasakas/upasikas in Sri Lanka usually dress in white, thus differing from monastics by their dress as well as by not living by the 227 monastic rules. As I understand it, the term is egalitarian in that both genders are given equal status, unlike the monastic tradition that considers the fully ordained nun's tradition to have been broken several centuries ago.

These committed lay individuals tend to be highly respected. I heard, for instance, of a lay Sri Lankan who on joining some of our events was disappointed to find that we were not real 'upasikas' in that we

weren't all on the eight precepts, and as a result stopped participating. Some western participants have felt the same way. It seems that for some the number of precepts one takes is an indication of commitment to practice.

In Thailand, lay people on the five precepts are considered to be upasakas and upasikas. The late Ajahn Buddhadhassa, referred to his lay students on the five precepts as 'upasoks' (the Thai transliteration of the Pali 'upasaka' for men) and 'upasikas' (women). This would seem closer to the original meaning of the word as understood in the Buddha's time. But there is no fixed rule and it depends also on the context, for when staying on a longer term basis in a monastery, lay people often dress in white and observe the eight precepts, and they too are referred to as upasaka/upasikas.

Interestingly, there is also another category of lay follower in Thailand; female with shaved head and dressed in white, who are known as *mei chi*, which roughly translates as 'mother nun'. Observing the eight precepts they follow the monastic routine. Dedicating their life to the Dhamma, their core practice seems to be generosity in the form of service in support of the male monastic communities, meditating when time and duties permit. Many of them have an excellent knowledge of Dhamma teachings and a humility that often belies their depth of understanding. But like in Sri Lanka, the Theravadin tradition in Thailand places great importance on continuity of tradition and there is no generally recognised ordained nuns tradition.

So here in England we are considering what the various traditions have passed down the centuries and having to find our own way forward. The western lay community, whilst emulating the eastern ethnic communities in their support of the monasteries, generally appear to be more interested in meditation than in the traditional eastern social forms of relationship to the monastic Sangha. They also seem to find it harder to be explicitly deferential to monastics. And inwardly, as I can vouch for myself from the past, they often tend to have an idealised view of monastics. Lay Sri Lankan's and Thai's seem better able not to confuse the external form, towards which they are very respectful, and the individual in robes representing it.

The initial response of interest amongst the western lay community to the idea of a lay community was considerable, but much of it was lost in the difficulties in agreeing a name as well as the forms that this group should take. There was even talk of some sort of special clothing with which to identify an 'upasika'. That particular idea did not last long. Each monastery developed its own form of organised lay practice, with Amaravati's calling itself the Upasika Training, Chithurst's the Lay Forum and Harnham, as I understand it, staying simply with the term upasika. At Amaravati there was some struggle with the term 'Upasika' and 'Training', some finding it too formal and that it implied some esoteric group with aspirations to becoming a semi-ordained class of monastic.

But most importantly, a vehicle for lay practice was formed, and many persevered with it, encouraged by the support of the senior monastic community at Amaravati. So from formal ceremonies and the use of terms like Study Days, it has gradually developed in confidence, organising self led Study Days, (now increasingly being termed Days of Practice), as well as weekend retreats. Occasionally a monk or a nun is invited to join the group. At other times the group joins the resident monastic community for evening puja. The overall sense has been the development of a genuinely self respecting and self reliant lay community, part of a mutually supporting Four Fold Sangha.

Rather than offering an alternative to formal retreat settings, the lay/Upasika group at Amaravati sees itself rather to be providing a context for exploring practice from a lay perspective. It creates an environment lived in a spirit of generosity, morality and mindfulness, weaving in a mixture of silence and interactive communication which encourages an inner silence in the midst of occasional activity which can be translated to the more testing environment of daily life.

On lay weekend retreats, individuals can choose to be either on the five or eight precepts which encourages a respectful acceptance of each others decisions and allows newcomers to observe and consider their individual position in relation to commitment and relinquishment. The same applies to devotional practices such as chanting and bowing. These are explained, but the decision to participate is left for the individual to explore.

This way of meeting has started to encourage many more newcomers, many of them new to Buddhism itself, largely because of word of mouth that communicates the spirit of friendship, enquiry and mutual respect that pervades our gatherings. This has led to a rich mix of long standing meditators and beginners, each benefiting from each other's presence and participation. The overall atmosphere of these gatherings is peaceful and inspiring; usually finding the right balance between formality and relaxation as well as good practice and naturally expressed devotion.

Thinking about all the discussions about our name reminds me of a story about two spiritual seekers for truth. Well versed in their texts and teachings, they embarked on a search for a realised master in their tradition. Having heard of a hermit living on an island in the middle of a lake they made their way there. They were warmly welcomed but were somewhat disillusioned at his ordinariness and apparent lack of familiarity with some of the texts, and especially a sacred word significant to their practice. Having spent some time together during which they shared their knowledge with him they decided to continue their search. As they rowed away from the island a bit disappointed, they were somewhat startled to find the hermit run across the water towards them and ask "what was that special word again?"

So perhaps the important thing to remember in all this is that names and labels are just that. Wisdom, purity of intentions and open heartedness cannot be measured, but can be recognised, aspired to, and realised more fully in our individual lives.

Nick Carroll

The Welcome

*When your guests are welcome
They don't creep in at the back door*

*When your guests are welcome
They don't jump out on you from behind*

*When your guests are welcome
They leave of their own accord*

Martin Evans Sept 2000

What is spirituality?

For many years have I been intrigued by the differing notions of spirituality. What do people actually mean when they talk about spirituality? The word 'spiritual' is derived from the Latin root 'spiritus' and can be found in the Greek word pneuma, meaning breath, as in the breath of life, life energy, or soul. I decided to ask friends and acquaintances what they understood by 'spiritual'.

David: For me it has to do with wisdom of the heart. Truth behind the facade, of how things really are. Living on a moment to moment basis.

Mike: Spirituality is the pursuit of happiness through non-material means, i.e. attitude in relationships.

Mica: Being spiritual means seeing my life as a soul journey. Staying with what is, whatever is revealing itself without avoiding anything.

Karen: Spirituality means to me: feeling connected with others in a loving and authentic way. How we are in relationship with the others to something that is bigger than me, like group consciousness or the collective unconscious. My perception of spiritual experience is authentic being-with-the-other in mutuality and furthermore living up to my potential.

Gary: In the best sense the search for that which transcends selfishness in two ways: One, as becoming unselfish; two, as transcending both selfishness and unselfishness. In the worst sense: new age claptrap, power-games, repressions, holier than thou type chauvinism.

Gunther: For me there is nothing mystical or other worldly about spirituality. The life of the spirit, or soul, refers merely to functions of the mind. Hence spirituality is an intrinsic dimension of human consciousness and is not separate from the body.

Barry: Spirituality is not anything outside, it is pure awareness, pure presence, seeing familiar things for the first time.

Margaret: Non-cerebral, wholeness, spaciousness, wisdom, connecting with the whole being in relation with others.

Isabel: Being with other people, because I don't believe in God I see spirituality in a wider sense where everything is included in everything else, an understanding of something that goes on for you as a person who explains irrational things, not touched by emotional things. Spirituality can be seen in a lot of different things, i.e. creativity, or how you respond to people. Response to other people is a big one.

Jeff: Spirituality is a search for a greater and deeper reality, a transcendence beyond the self as well as a new community beyond my own individuality. Spirituality is not an exclusive exploration of our inner world and inwardness, but is closely interwoven with all other dimensions of human experience, including social and political life.

Thus spirituality is not a permanent retreat from the world into a monastery, the desert, the cave or even the silence of one's own heart and mind, but arising out of the midst and depth of experience. Spirituality implies the very point of entry into the fullness of life by bestowing meaning, value and direction to all human concerns.

Vicky: For me spirituality means connecting to universal energies, which I have experienced as healing energies, but also hold knowledge on which we can draw to make sense of our lives. I see my spiritual practice as a way of improving or developing humankind to a level where people are happily serving their chosen communities and live in peace and harmony alongside each other. Drawing on the creativity that each human has and their potential to express and live to create conditions that enrich our experiences.

So what does spirituality mean to you?

Vicky Assling

The Sutta

Are all questions worthy of answers?

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi at Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. Then, as the Venerable Malunkyaputta was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in his mind: "There are questions that are undisclosed, set aside, ignored by the Blessed One, such as -- 'The cosmos is eternal,' 'The cosmos is not eternal,' 'The cosmos is finite,' 'The cosmos is infinite,' 'The soul & the body are the same,' 'The soul is one thing and the body another,' 'After death a Tathagata (*a Buddha, a fully realized one*) exists,' 'After death a Tathagata does not exist,' 'After death a Tathagata both exists & does not exist,' 'After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist'.

I don't approve, I don't accept that the Blessed One has not disclosed them to me. I'll go and ask the Blessed One about this matter. If he answers all these questions to me then I will live the holy life under him. If he does not answer to me then I will renounce the training and return to the householders life."

"Malunkyaputta, if anyone were to say, 'I won't live the holy life under the Blessed One as long as he does not disclose to me that "The cosmos is eternal,"...or that "After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist,"' then the man would die and those things would still remain undisclosed by the Tathagata.. "

"It's just as if a man were wounded with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives would provide him with a surgeon, and the man would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble warrior, a priest, a merchant, or a worker.' He would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know the given name & clan name of the man who wounded me...until I know whether he was tall, medium, or short...until I know whether he was dark, ruddy-brown, or golden-colored...until I know his home village, town, or city...until I know whether the bow with which I was wounded was a long bow or a crossbow...until I know whether the bowstring with which I was wounded was fiber, bamboo threads, sinew, hemp, or bark...until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was wild or cultivated...until I know whether the feathers of the shaft with which I was wounded were those of a vulture, a stork, a hawk, a peacock, or another bird...until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was bound with the sinew of an ox, a water buffalo, a langur, or a monkey.' He would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was that of a common arrow, a curved arrow, a barbed, a calf-toothed, or an oleander arrow.' The man would die and those things would still remain unknown to him. "

"Malunkyaputta, it's not the case that when there is the view, 'The cosmos is eternal,' there is the living of the holy life. And it's not the case that when there is the view, 'The cosmos is not eternal,' there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, 'The cosmos is eternal,' and when there is the view, 'The cosmos is not eternal,' there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, & distress whose destruction I make known right here & now. "

Selected passages from the 'Cula-Malunkya Sutta - The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya' - Majjhima Nikaya 63

Greed, Hatred and Delusion:

a weekend for Lay people at Amaravati.

At the end of September 2000, lay practitioners gathered in the retreat centre at Amaravati for a weekend of practice, discussion, study, silent reflection, body work and encounter around the themes of greed, hatred and delusion - the three great snares or enemies of the spiritual life. This was the first such weekend that I had attended. Previously I had come to the deeply moving and thought-provoking study day on suffering, centred on the immense pain caused by the civil war in Sri Lanka. I had found it a truly valuable opportunity to deepen and extend understanding and practice in the company of others walking along the same way.

So, where better for such a gathering as a Lay weekend to meet than in the shadow, as it were, of the monastery - a shadow that seemed, for me, to give warmth and protection alongside that indefinable sense of spaciousness and freedom that always come to the heart and mind there?

One of the predominant feelings I had over the weekend, was of being curiously at the heart of Amaravati, even though we did not participate in any of its routine and had no dealings with the monks and nuns - other than an exchange of smiles while walking outside or Ajahn Sumedho's visit to us on the Sunday afternoon. During the closing session, when we had the opportunity to express our response towards and gratitude for aspects of the weekend, one of the participants commented that to be on a Lay weekend in the midst of the monastery had something of the feeling of pupils left to their own devices in the classroom after the

teacher has left! Yet that presence beyond our immediate doors and horizons was not felt as a restraint from which we had been cut loose, but rather as a mature place of refuge, a holding force of truthfulness and clarity.

We might say that greed, hatred and delusion are the fabric of which the world is largely woven - except that would be to dismiss a sick and suffering world that has need of compassion, not judgement and it would also be to pretend that the darkness lies only outside ourselves, not within. Clearly we and the world are intimately connected, for whatever foolishness, ignorance and self-centredness are manifested outside ourselves, we can know and understand by observing the arising of such tendencies within the mind. This is the field of battle, to use the images of war that are only appropriate to an extent, for violence cannot succeed in the way that compassion does, it is with our own minds that we have to deal and this is the path, the journey. This is why it is so valuable for those who are walking that path to gather together for support and encouragement. We had not come to study greed, hatred and delusion as subjects of academic or 'theological' interest, but rather as real issues that arise for us all in all our lives and that are as relevant now as they were at the time when the Buddha was teaching.

What were the constituents of our study and practice over the weekend? The format was democratic and our programme was drawn up in a 'brainstorming' session at which ideas were contributed. This enabled people to contribute areas of their own interest and expertise. Someone facilitated a group on verses about

greed, hatred and delusion in the Dhammapada, arising out of a project that is re-ordering the teachings under separate subject headings for daily reflection. Someone else led a group looking at the Kalama Sutta, the teaching in which the Buddha addresses a group of ordinary country people and asks them about their own experience of whether greed, hatred and delusion lead to benefit or harm. These groups led to rich discussions in which people shared something of their own experience and understanding. There was also a discussion group on anger and one on illness. There were sessions on yoga, healing massage and an ancient physical aid to meditation called the 'eight brocades'. There was a walk through the fields of Great Gaddesden in the gently cascading rain. There was, in short, much to engage the mind in wholesome and skilful ways.

But beyond it all, of course was the sense that this was still not it, that however wholesome and skilful, the path to freedom did not lie in unconscious absorption into such activity but rather in seeing it as a tool to be used for awakening. It was to this constant act of waking up to the nature of the mind, the nature of all things, that Ajahn Sumedho seemed to be urging us when he came to speak with us towards the end of our weekend - towards the spaciousness and ultimate refuge of our true nature. This is why Amaravati, the 'deathless realm', exists and this is why we gather there.

In common, I am sure, with all the other participants of the Lay weekend, I would like to express my real gratitude to all those who contributed to making it possible.

Catherine Spencer.

Connections

News from the branch Viharas and Monasteries of the Forest Sangha tradition in the UK

Harnham:

The foot and mouth outbreak has had a major impact on the life of the monastery, although of course, not the magnitude of tragedy that it has been for many others.

The most obvious consequence of this situation for the lay supporters of the Monastery has been restrictions on visiting Harnham (It is necessary to drive through 2 fields to reach the hamlet which is situated in the middle of grazing land). However, some individuals have been able to make trips with much needed dana and the Hexham Study group has been meeting together on Sundays evenings to compensate for not being able to attend the usual Puja at the monastery. For the first time in twenty years there has not been the usual Wesak celebration. This opportunity to jointly celebrate the spiritually based community was sorely missed by the monastic community, the Trustees and many supporters. However, in Yorkshire, the Leeds group held a small gathering at the home of a supporter near Skipton, and were very pleased to invite Tan Punnyo and Samanera Bodhinando to join them in the celebration.

There have also been immediate financial consequences of the forced isolation of the monastery. The foot and mouth outbreak has exacerbated the impact of the loss, some time ago, of the guest house, so that the General Fund for the running of the monastery has become seriously depleted. Trustees have highlighted that a deficit of about £1,500 per month currently exists in meeting day to day running costs of the monastery, so any financial support at this time is greatly appreciated.

With supporters stretching from Scotland to Yorkshire, Harnham monastery provides a spiritual focus for people across a wide geographic area. A new retreat house is in the early stages of conversion, but it could be four years before it is completed. Current foot and mouth restrictions are also likely to persist through to the autumn. In the

meantime we are focusing on innovative ways to maintain our community. The Trustees will be meeting in June to look at different ways in which we can maintain connections between supporters and encourage new networks across the 'parish'. All ideas and suggestions are very welcome.

Contact: *Richard Hopkins, Chairperson of Trustees. 0131 652 6320*

Chithurst:

Even though the doors and windows have yet to be installed, the Dhamma Hall made a superb centrepiece for our Wesak celebrations on Sunday, May 13th.

We were indeed blessed with the weather. The sun shone brightly, sending a shaft of light to illumine the Buddha Rupa from above. Flowers in profusion decorated the shrine, and the roof timbers in their natural wood soared and arched overhead. To complete an inspiring scenario, a blackbird proclaimed his territory from the trees above.

One was moved to reflect on the relationship between the Triple Gem, the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and the Dhamma Hall. Whilst the former offers us that freedom from craving and ignorance, the latter (a finger pointing to the moon?) encourages, reinforces and facilitates our journey to that realisation.

Finally, the walled garden and ornamental pond made a beautiful setting for the rice pindapat, the offering of the meal to the monastic Sangha, and the meeting of new and old friends - the very essence of the Holy Life.

Meanwhile, the morning and evening puja, the vital totality of the monastic routine, continues its ageless round, a backcloth or 'canvas', depicting some recurring motif in an ancient tapestry.

Our Lay Forums continue to be a popular format

for discussing Dhamma; the last meeting discussing 'Discovering the Dhamma'. The next two meetings will debate 'Obstacles along the Way' (May) and 'Metta, Loving Kindness in Practice' (June).

Barry Durrant.

Hartridge, Devon:

We were fortunate this year to enjoy a Wesak celebration at Hartridge on April 29th led by Venerable Natthiko - a very happy occasion well supported by about 50 lay people and organized by Douglas Jones.

April 29th was also an auspicious day as it saw the arrival of the new lay resident/manager, Paul Walker, who came from Amaravati. Paul has already made his mark on the monastery with his friendly, welcoming presence and the work he has done in the house and grounds. He is at present updating the skills list and would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to offer help in any way.

Hartridge monastery is a place that offers support to both the monastic and lay communities. Venerable Natthiko stayed for a weeks retreat from the end of April and Venerable Punnyo is on retreat for the whole of June.

The monthly visits by the nuns and monks, and their guidance, are very much appreciated by lay folk. Sisters Thanya and Anandabodhi came at the end of May and it was lovely to have nuns teaching at Hartridge again. We were also pleased to welcome Ajahns Karunika and Nyanarato at the end of March. In this way, the teaching of the Buddha Dhamma is kept very much alive and well at Hartridge.

One of the added advantages of all these visits is that we get to meet a lot of different members of the monastic Sangha and so get to get to hear the teachings in many ways. Future plans at Hartridge include visits by Venerable Kusalo and Kittisarro and Thanisara. There will also be working days in the house and grounds when lay supporters can come together and lend a hand in the spirit of generosity.

Details: *Sati Sati 01305 786821 Paul Walker 01404 891 251*

Vipassana Meditation Days and Retreats with teachers from Gaia House

London

16 Sept	Martine Batchelor
28 Oct	Christina Feldman
18 Nov	Stephen Batchelor
16 Dec	Catherine McGee

Venue: Golders Green
Cost: £8 (£5 concessions)
Pay in advance to London Retreats, 67 Stafford Gate, Potters Bar, Herts, EN6 1PR

Oxford

8 Sept	Catherine McGee
17 Nov	Stephen Batchelor

Contact: Anne-Lise Clift, 01865 316546 (before 9pm)

North Wales

26 - 28 Oct Yanai Postelnik
Venue: Tigonos Centre, near Bangor
Contact: Annee Griffiths, Twll Cawwn, Llandegfan, Menai Bridge, Anglesey LL59 5PG Tel: 01248 716655

Summer Camp, Dartmoor 24 - 29 August

with Yanai Postelnik & Brad Richecoeur
Silent mornings of Insight Meditation and Qigong, afternoons discussion groups with an emphasis on dharma community, evenings around the campfire.
Families welcome. Beautiful secluded location with large heated practice space.
Cost: £80 - £100 including food.
Contact: Brad 01364 631185

Backpacking/Walking Retreat, French Pyrenees

Sept 1 - 8th with Yanai Postelnik & Martin Aylward
A contemplative week walking, sitting, cooking, in the mountains and forest.
Contact: Gail & Martin, Tapovan Forest Retreat, Marseilles, 11300 Festes, France
Tel 330 468 318 773
email tapopvan@mac.com

Desert Retreat, Mitzpe Ramon, Israel Oct 2 - 8

An opportunity to spend a week in silence, walking and sitting outside in the raw beauty of the Negev Desert.
Contact Insight Society, PO Box 1479, Hod Hasharon 45114, Israel. Tel +972 53 432-217

AUA News

The Amaravati Upasika Association Annual General Meeting will take place on 1st December as part of the Day of Practice. The committee will be presenting the following motion for agreement:

Motion 1. To increase the committee tenure from 2 to 4 years.

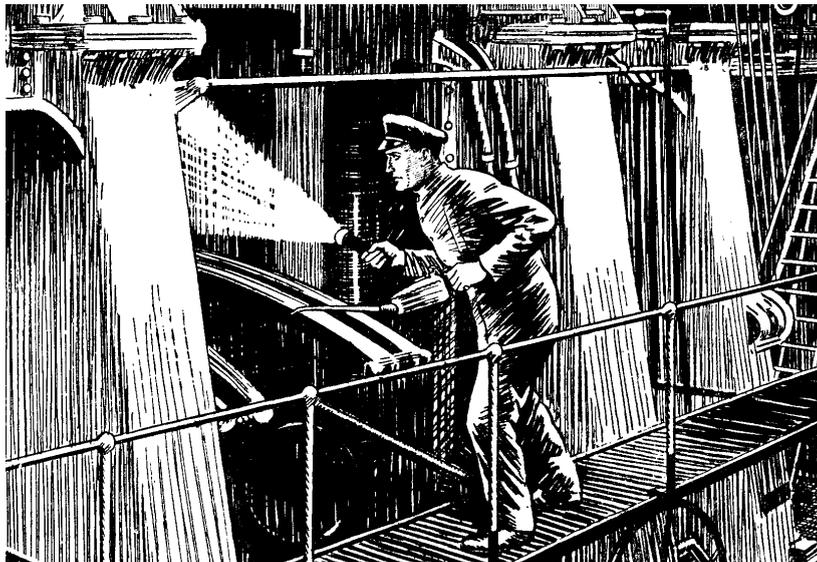
The increase of the committee tenure is to minimise the disruption caused by a change of committee. Given the voluntary nature of the AUA Committee and the many demands upon our time, anything which allows us more time to organize events and produce the Community Newsletter is regarded as helpful.

The AGM provides a good opportunity for feedback on past events and suggestions for future activities.

Another background debate that has occurred in committee meetings is whether the name of our association is the most appropriate one. Some suggestions for a new name have included:

1. Amaravati Lay Buddhist and Upasika Association (ALBUA)
2. Amaravati Lay Buddhist and Upasika-Upasaka Association (ALBUA)
3. Upasika-Upasaka of Amaravati Association (UAAA)
4. Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (Amaravati Upasika Association) (ALBA)

Or we could leave things as they are. If anyone feels strongly for or against a name change or particularly likes or dislikes any of these suggestions please email (upasika@btinternet.com) or write to the AUA at Amaravati.



The Retreat Centre showers required constant attention.



The Amaravati Upasika Association was formed to foster and encourage good Buddhist lay practice. It does this by providing a lay forum for all those interested in the Buddhist path in the form of one day and weekend events, as well as other informal gatherings. At the heart of good dhamma practice lies a commitment to enquiry. Whether you are interested and just beginning, or whether you have been practising for some time, there is the space and opportunity to develop all aspects of the Buddhist path in a supportive lay context.



Dear Friends,

I wonder if any of you would be willing to share your reactions and reflections on the foot and mouth outbreak. I have been struggling to try and keep a smidgen of equanimity in the midst of it all - for here we truly are in the midst of it all.

What little protection I find in our small valley in Tyne & Wear is shattered each time I visit my family in Cumbria. Palls of smoke on the sky-line; waking at 2 am to close the bedroom windows and shut out the sickly smell; the intermittent thundering of covered lorries following yellow MAFF signs; JCBs churning up the farmland my grandfather worked and grew up on.

It has been pretty hard to find a balance between compassion and becoming overwhelmed with grief, anger and simple horror. It's not just the suffering of the animals that has been so painful. The Cumberland News features a page of 'In

Memorandum' - farmers families thanking those who have supported them through the crisis. Some think this hypocrisy, but many farmers have long-standing dairy herds or keep sheep for wool and their animals are indeed 'much loved'.

I think there is something very profound in our psyches which revolts at senseless killing - who know what repercussions this may have for individuals and for the countryside. Some people have taken their own lives. Many, I suspect, have woken up to the reality of the farming industry. Others, like my family, have become vegetarian. Last Sunday they watched from the bedroom windows as the army and police cordoned off the village and shot the 3 dairy cows and their calves on the village green.

Suffering, compassion and equanimity. They are the focus of my practice at the moment. I would very much like to hear of the experiences and insights of other readers of Community.

Chris Blain Spring 2001

Amaravati Walks and Talks

Four walks are offered in the coming months but with Foot and Mouth restrictions only slowly being lifted it would be advisable to check before you come.

Two 'longish' walks will take place on 26th August and 14th October. We suggest that everyone brings a packed lunch. Jeffrey on 0207 221 9330 will provide details.

Two 'shorter' walks will leave from the monastery at 9.30 am on 19th August and 2nd September. Once again a packed lunch is suggested.

We will hopefully return by 2pm enabling us to attend Ajahn Sumedhos talks. For details on these 'Walk and Talks' please contact Tony on 01582 512669

books books books books books books books books books

A Selection of Books on Buddhism

This is a general review of a selection of good books on Buddhism. It is not exhaustive. As the vast majority of books available on Buddhism seem to be of Tibetan orientation, and as this article will be taking a leaner, Theravada standpoint, I feel my task a great deal easier. My selection will prefer older books and I have tended to be conservative.

In relation to the Theravada tradition, Dhamma books fall into various categories:

- i. canonical texts ascribed to the Buddha (e.g. the *Digha Nikaya* – see below)
- ii. post-canonical texts, such as the *Visuddhimagga (The path of Purification)*, trs. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Buddhist Publication Society; c. £20+) and *Abhidhammatta Sangaha (A Comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma)*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi; Buddhist Publication Society; 1993; c. £15) along with commentaries and sub-commentaries.
- iii. works by modern scholars and writers
- iv. works by modern teachers

For those with deep pockets and hearts to match *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (Teachings of the Buddha) by Maurice Walshe, Wisdom Publications (Translator; Hardcover - 648 pages; 1996; ISBN: 0861711033; c. £25.00) and *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* by Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Translator), Bhikkhu Bodhi (Editor), Wisdom Publications (Hardcover; 1995; ISBN: 086171072X; c. £75.00) represent two very accessible presentations of the

earliest canon. You can also access canonical material through *The Dhammapada*. This is available in many translations, most not very good (especially the Penguin Classics edition which is a virtual write off!). The version translated by Narada published by the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation 1993, may be obtained from Amaravati (Herts. UK). In some senses, the *Dhammapada* is the one book you'll ever need.

In a related genre, I would strongly recommend *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works, Their Legacy* by Nyanaponika Thera, Hellmuth Hecker (Contributor), Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications (Editor; Hardcover - 448 pages; 1997; ISBN: 0861711289; c. £25.00) which is a taste of the path brought to life by the Buddha's contemporary disciples based on canonical texts, including at least two businessmen and a loving couple not to mention the Buddha's chief disciples. This book can be obtained piecemeal from the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS) in Kandy and through their distributors in Britain. The BPS currently headed by Bhikkhu Bodhi represents a high standard in the presentation of Dhamma material and most of their books are both simple and a delight to read.

One widely available gem which includes a diversity of older material is - *Buddhist Scriptures* (Penguin Classics) by Edward Conze, Viking Penguin (Editor, Thomas Wyatt; Paperback - 349 pages; Reprint edition, 1959; ISBN: 0140440887; c. £7.00). The Conze

book is canonical material of both Theravada and Mahayana, with a little post-canonical material e.g., *Milindapanha*. It combines the deeper aspects of the Buddha's teaching with an emphasis on lay practice and represents an excellent introduction to the world of Buddhism.

Ever since its release in 1990 *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* by Peter Harvey, Cambridge University Press, (Paperback - Published 1990; Cambridge University Press c. £10.00) has been something of a best seller in terms of a student textbook. It is comprehensive and authoritative and should suite academic perspectives. Professor Harvey has since produced further books on Buddhism, representing good scholarship with a warm appreciation of the subject under scrutiny. Appearing during 2000 was his *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics – Foundations, Values and Issues*, Cambridge University Press. On a similar vein as a lighter general introduction would be *The Foundations of Buddhism* by Rupert Gethin, Oxford University Press (Paperback - 320 pages; 1998; ISBN: 0192892231; c. £8.00).

One of the best and most comprehensive short descriptions of Buddhism is by Mr L. S. Cousins in *A New Handbook of Living Religions* by John R. Hinnells (Editor), Penguin (Paperback - 912 pages; 2nd edition 1998; ISBN: 0140514074; c. £9.00).

A very good book dealing with the nitty gritty of ordinary affairs from a Buddhist perspective especially geared to the lay practitioner (including death, sexuality and rebirth) is *Modern Buddhism* by Alan and Jacqui James, Aukana Press (ISBN 0 9511769 1 9; c. £7.00). This book is unique and written by committed practitioners.

Rajith Dissanayake

Helping at Amaravati Kathina Day - 28th October

Dear Friends,

Did you know that traditionally, Kathina Day is organised and run by lay supporters? Kathina is a lay offering not only of the Kathina cloth and all sorts of provisions and food, but also an offering of running the whole day. The Kathina sponsors provide the cloth, the flowers, gifts for the visiting senior Sangha, produce and mail-out the invitations, and supply the programme sheets. But it is rare that the sponsors have the time and resources to also organise and run the day, so the more offers of help from lay people, the better and more joyful an occasion Kathina Day is.

As the co-ordinator of lay help last year at the Amaravati Kathina Day, I'd like to thank all those Upasikas who volunteered, whether as stewards, carparkers, washers-up, etc. With your help the day went really well, and many people commented on the lovely atmosphere - which must have been something to do with your cheerful, efficient presence.

Well - Kathina Day this year at Amaravati is on 28th October. I wonder if you'd like to put that date in your diaries now. I know it's quite a way ahead, but the next issue of Community may come out too close to the event to give you enough notice.

I hope many of you will volunteer your help again. And if you haven't volunteered before, why not give it a try this year? There are three ways you can help:

- being a teamleader
- being a helper
- being a co-ordinator

Maybe you might see helping at Kathina Day each year as part of being an Upasika? It would be lovely to build up a group of people experienced in helping to run Kathina.

If anyone fancies having a go at co-ordinating it, you might like to shadow me this year. I have co-ordinated Kathina a few times now, and it would be good to pass on what I have learnt to one or two people. But it is quite a big job - as you can see the co-ordinator starts working now!

If you would like to contact me with any offer of help in whatever shape or form, my telephone number is 01442 872058 or my email address is dpjones@totalise.co.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you!

All good wishes,

Diana Jones.

Amaravati Lay Weekend 28 - 30 September 2001

Creativity and Buddhist Practice

This weekend will be an opportunity to explore and contemplate the meaning and expression of creativity in our lives, and to examine the place of art in our Buddhist practice. You can choose from an exciting variety of workshops both practical and reflective, which we hope you will find fun as well as illuminating! - and all within the peace and spaciousness of Amaravati, in the company of like-minded people.

So come and make it a special weekend - whether or not you think you are creative!!

Complete the booking form inside this issue, or ring for details from Santoshni Perera 01442 228 493 or Chris Blain 01207 563 305

NOTICES

UK Meditation and Study Groups

Bath	Catherine Hewitt	01225 405235
Bedford	David Stubbs	01234 720892
Berkshire	Penny Herrion	01189 662646
Belfast	Paddy Boyle	02890 427720
Billericay	Rob Howell	01702 482134
Brighton	Nimmala	01273 723378
Bristol	Lynn Goswell (Nirodha)	0117 968 4089
Cambridge	Gillian Wills Don Jones	01954 780551 01223 246257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	01227 463342
Dublin	Eugene Kelly Rupert Westrup	Eire 285 4076 Eire 280 2832
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen Walters (Sati Sati)	01305 786821
Edinburgh	Muriel Nevin	0131 337 0901
Glasgow	James Scott	0141 637 9731
Harlow	Palmutto	01279 724330
Hemel Hempstead	Chris Ward (Bodhinyana Group)	01442 890034
Hexham	Robert Bluck	01434 602759
Leeds	Daniella Loeb Anna Voist	0113 279 1375 01274 691447
Leigh-On-Sea	Gool Deboo	01702 553211
Liverpool	Ursula Haeckel	0151 427 6668
London Buddhist Society	58 Ecclestone Sq, SW1	0207 834 5858
Hampstead	Caroline Randall	0208 348 0527
Notting Hill	Jeffrey Craig	0207 221 9330
Maldstone	Tony Millett	01634 375728
Midhurst	Barry Durrant	01730 821479
Newcastle	Andy Hunt	0191 478 2726
Norwich	Elaine Tattersall	01603 260717
Pembrokeshire / S.Wales	Peter & Barbara (Subhudra) Jackson	01239 820790
Portsmouth	David Beal	02392 732280
Redruth	Daniel Davide	01736 753175
Southampton	Ros Dean	02380 422430
Stevington / Sussex	Jayanti	01903 812130
Stroud	John Groves	0796 7777742
Taunton	Martin Sinclair	01823 321059
Watford	Ruth	01923 462902
Woking	Rocana	01483 761398

Donations and Mailing list

If you do not wish to remain on the AUA mailing list please let us know. This enables us to reduce the size of mailings and to save money.

If you wish to continue on the mailing list then you need do nothing. However, any contributions you can make to cover the production of the newsletter and the three or four mailings each year would be greatly appreciated. Donations are essential to keep the presses rolling.

Please send donations to:

AUA, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ, England

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE: 31st August 2001

SEND to: The Editor, Community Newsletter c/o Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ (It reduces production time if you can send your contributions in electronic form, either on a 3.5 inch floppy disc in PC format as a basic text file or Word file format, or included within an email – but typed or hand written is fine).

*RING: Chris Blain on 01207 563 305
E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com*

Community Newsletter via Email

We are now able to send Community as an attached Acrobat pdf file via email. This is a very quick and economical way of reaching many people and is especially useful for non-UK recipients. The pdf file looks virtually identical to the printed version, except that it is in colour. It can also be printed locally. We are aiming at a target file size of up to 1mb, so download times should not be more than a few minutes. If you wish to receive Community via email then send your email address to :

Upasika@btinternet.com

Amaravati Creativity and Practice Weekend 28 - 30 September 2001

Can you offer a workshop around either music, movement/dance, or drama/mime?
We would very much like to hear from you to discuss any ideas.

Ring **Chris Blain** on **01207 563 305**

Amaravati Lay Events - 2001

One day or weekend retreats provide an opportunity to spend time together exploring themes relevant to practice and daily life. Whether you are just starting or are an experienced practitioner, you are very welcome to participate. No booking is required for one day events which commence at 10am in the summer months and 9am in the winter months.

June 2nd 'The Five Spiritual Faculties'

June 29th - July 1st 'Right Livelihood'

July 28th 'The Four Noble Truths'

September 28th - 30th 'Creativity and Buddhist Practice' *

October 27th 'The Noble Eightfold Path'

December 1st 'A Day of Practice'

Weekend Events (please send SAE to 'Lay Retreats' at Amaravati for booking form)

For further information please contact either:

Nick Carroll 0208 7409748

Chris Ward 01442 890034

*Santoshni Perera 07775 532023 or Chris Blain 01207 563305 (for Creativity Weekend)

Editorial & Production Team

Chris Ward, Chris Blain,
Tony Spinks, Nick Carroll

The Community Newsletter is put together and published as an offering to others. All views and comments are personal.

Community on the Internet

This Newsletter and other Upasika information can

be found on the internet at:-

<http://www.triplegem.com>

or

<http://www.btinternet.com/~upasika/>
Please note that the current site is out of date and being redesigned.

Hopefully the new site will be accessible within a few months.

The Bodhinyana Group

Wednesdays 7.30 – 9.30 pm in the Bodhinyana Hall

We meet at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery to chant, meditate, and discuss the subject for the week. Meetings are open to both new and more experienced practitioners. We aim to cover basic Buddhist concepts and teachings and to relate these to our lives in the world with partners, families and work. These meetings provide an opportunity for lay-practitioners to discuss and share reflections on the teachings and our own experience.

The Autumn 2001 meetings are:

<i>12 Sep</i>	Getting off the wheel (Patikasamuppada),
<i>19 Sep</i>	What is the mind how can we control it?
<i>26 Sep</i>	Austerity and Indulgence
<i>3 Oct</i>	Do we need to suffer before Enlightenment?
<i>10 Oct</i>	What is right view and wrong view? (Ditthi)
<i>17 Oct</i>	Engaging with other Religious Traditions?
<i>24 Oct</i>	Humour and Buddhism
<i>31 Oct</i>	Mara and the Buddhas Enlightenment
<i>7 Nov</i>	Meditation - Share your experiences
<i>14 Nov</i>	Do we believe in Kamma?
<i>21 Nov</i>	Poetry – Bring a Favourite
<i>28 Nov</i>	What is Mindfulness?
<i>5 Dec</i>	Jati, Jara, Marana. (birth, aging and death)?

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 890034

Radmila Herrmann 01494 864905