



Community

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The Upasika & Upasaka Newsletter

Issue No. 14



The Rangoli Mandala - in sand—at the Creativity weekend at Amaravati

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EDITORIAL

Creativity and War

As I write this I am still digesting the rich experience of the recent Creativity Weekend at Amaravati. The success of the weekend was a direct result of the detailed and complex efforts of a small group of organisers, combined with the good-will and support of all who attended, and the special magic of Amaravati. One of the comments which I particularly recall is that it 'was like summer camp without the kids!'.

My memories of this pleasant event sit uneasily against the horrifying attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the war against terrorists in Afghanistan and the complex reaction of Islamic voices from around the world. This is an unfolding situation which looks likely to strongly influence global politics over coming months and years. I find myself alternately indignant, fearful, bewildered and saddened by much of what is described in newspapers and on the television.

Suddenly, the uncertainty and instability inherent in worldly conditions has been highlighted in a very violent way, and religion has become enmeshed with evil acts from deluded people. Once again we are at war, although the war is a strange one involving an impoverished and desolate country, fanatical terrorists and a feeling that part of this conflict is between the modern western global democratic / materialist / consumer outlook and various complex flavours of a pre-modern Islamic way of life. Another key factor is the glaring inequality in the availability of the basic necessities for life which we find across the world.

Creativity is closely linked with insight; indeed an insight is a creative realisation of the truth. When greed, hatred and delusion become so dominant that war results, then creative insight is the source from which skilful action can arise to move towards resolution of the conflict.

I find it all too easy to get caught up in blaming people, ideas, religions and governments when conflict erupts. And also to be fascinated with reports of ever heavier bombing raids and high-tech weaponry. There is something deeply fascinating about the progress of a war which probably reflects displaced anxiety as well as an inherited instinct for self-preservation. This is part of my conditioning as a male human descended from

ancestors who must have experienced and survived (at least long enough to reproduce) countless wars. Some of them may have been lucky; others were presumably skilful warriors. I need to accept this potential for anger and violence within myself and to be compassionate towards it—knowing it and allowing it cease. The capacity for hatred and violence is part of the human condition as is the ability for insight and right action.

So, as at the time of the Gulf, Bosnian and Kosovan conflicts, my focus as someone practising the Buddha's teachings is to develop mindfulness; develop compassion; to offer what limited material assistance is possible; and to let go of my desire for the world to be a perfect place. The underlying causes of this particular conflict look deep and complex. They impact upon religious forms and the way religion is regarded; they affect Islamic people living in the west, and they impact upon the very idea of western liberal, democratic, and secular government.

Our global interdependence is all too obvious as we move forward into the 21st century. Actions that we, and our elected representatives take now, will play a pivotal role in leading towards a peaceful, multicultural and tolerant future, or towards one which is divided and driven by greed, hatred and delusion.

Chris Ward

Final thoughts

Have thoughts, or no thoughts
they come and go
like the wind through leaves
the leaves flutter and then are still
and when it's time, they fall
that's all.

Martin Evans

Creativity Weekend

On the 29th - 30th September 2001, a Creativity and Practice Weekend took place at Amaravati. This is the first time that such an event has been organised under the auspices of the Amaravati Upasaka and Upasika Association and it proved to be a rich and interesting experience. Chris Blain, Santoshni Perrera, and Anna Badar provided much of the organisational drive. The weekend itself benefited from having Zoran as chief cook and the presence of accomplished workshop leaders. Nearly fifty people attended and we could not provide space for all who wanted to come. The following photos provide a pictorial record of the weekend.



Santoshni and friends creating the rangoli mandala



Chris Blain with a cup of tea



Anna Bader undertaking silk painting.



Jean with silk painting.



The creative cooking group



Pang with his Symbols in Buddhist Art group.

Painting with oils—a creative impasse?



Painting with oils—reflection and activity



Some visible end-products from the weekend



Zoran practising steam inhalation before breakfast



Chinese Ink Painting

Words for the Heart

A reflection on attending the Creative Writing Workshop led by Linda France at the Creativity Weekend.

Linda advertised her workshop with the words - 'Writing can be a useful way of getting in touch with yourself and a powerful tool for transformation. This session in creative writing is for absolute beginners and those with more experience. We will explore different ways of working with words to deepen awareness.'

A long time ago I used to write poetry. Then I stopped to diversify into making sculpture -which I see as poetry in three dimensions. It was a good thing that I stopped. The poems were full of angst, and meant a lot to me, but probably not much to anyone else reading them. So I chose to attend Linda's workshop as a move towards finding a new starting point.

Linda started the workshop by asking us to make a list of ten things that we liked. She proceeded to lead us

stage by stage through a process that would finish with a seven line poem. She was reassuring in her expectation of us, and told us that no one would see what we had written - the sharing at the end was voluntary. I know that this helped me to relax, knowing that part of the process was not going to entail 'going into pairs and discuss with your partner what you had written'. That could have been very embarrassing!

Linda gave us tasks which I felt were manageable and not too daunting. I felt that the nature of what came out of contemplating 'what we like' encouraged us to celebrate our lives, to write from the heart, and to look closely at those things we value - maybe those things we are attached to as well - and to attempt to express the specialness of our experience. So my thanks to Linda, and also to say how much I appreciated the pamphlet of poems that she gave to each of us at the end of the workshop.

Carole Blackwell

What Is ? DCCCXXXIII

*I turn off the news,
Shut my book
Open my mind
And step into the garden.
What I see, hear, smell, taste, touch
Is so ordinary
And so extraordinary.
A world content to live without haste
Under sunshine and showers:
Earth, shrubs, trees, flowers,
The rhythm of worm, snail, slug,
Woodlouse, butterfly and bee.
Birth, death, co-existence in harmony.
No planning for distraction,
Change, new developments
But a continuous involvement
In what is:
The cyclic action of being
What one is.*

Shouldn't this be enough?

This, the flow of life and the knowing.

Catherine Hewitt

WINTER WANDERS

Should you be visiting Amaravati on the Sundays of 30th December or 20th January you might like to go on a short walk. After the meal offering and clear up [about 12.25] we will meet in the car park.

Please remember - footpaths can be muddy - bring suitable footwear and some warm and waterproof clothing.

If you want any further details please contact:

*Tony on 01582 512669 or
tony.spinks1@ntlworld.com*

The Path Re-viewed

From a lay Sangha perspective.

Part 1

Most of us live in a world that involves personal, often intimate relationships; having and bringing up children, looking after elderly parents; having a job, travelling by public transport or car and daily exposure to television, films or radio. Our lives include money transactions, financial planning and ownership or rental of some form of accommodation. All of this involves interaction with a variety of different people with various points of view, religions and lifestyles. We travel and see other cultures. We experience and explore all sorts of sensations, perhaps mind-altering substances as well as sensual experiences. If we have the time and interest we may also explore literature, philosophy, art, music, not to mention hobbies or sports. And on occasion we will question and try and make sense of all of this. We will compare ourselves with others, and often, despite all the comforts and possibilities on offer, we find that we are not especially happy despite all that we have or can do. So we explore different paths of enquiry, perhaps psychological or spiritual, all in our search for well being.

Whatever our personal experiences and journeys may have been up to this point, many of us have ended up enquiring into the Buddhist path, one, which in the case of the Forest Sangha tradition, is predominantly orientated around a monastic community. How interesting that one should be attracted to a renunciate monastic community, one that practices non-ownership, celibacy and minimal exposure to 'worldly' sensations. A lifestyle that few of us want to live in full time, despite the 'good' retreats that we may experience. Ten days of renunciation at a time is usually enough.

So what are we attracted to in the monastic tradition? The form? One, which focuses so strongly on the monastic and which relegates the layperson to what appears to be an exclusively secondary supportive role? The rituals? Although similar to those found in other religions, rituals that are different enough from,

say, theistic ones, in terms of content and intention to make them acceptable? Well, for some that may be very much a part of it. But in many cases it is also a *felt recognition* of and an attraction to what happens to and around individuals who commit themselves to pursuing a path of renunciation as part of a *deeper commitment and enquiry* into life. Perhaps it is the experience of goodness that arises in and around individuals whose lives are dedicated to greater simplicity.

'what is our relationship to this monastic tradition?'

The monastic life is certainly not an easy one and any real contentment that arises in those living it, does so only after a lot of letting go has taken place. This certainly doesn't include all individuals in the monastic life, for monastic life is a training ground for human beings as they are, and not simply a residence for fully realised beings to come to live their lives out

in. But, as a collective practice of acceptance and contentment with little, attempting to live in generosity and harmony with others in a community, it models something within all of us, something universal that can be realised in many, perhaps any, context.

When we practice within a tradition, we are effectively practicing within a form. Traditional forms have a useful and necessary function. They provide continuity, a recorded tradition of teachings and injunctions, with the *potential* to help. Practised well, the monastic life is not intended as a refuge from what is feared. Quite the opposite, it is designed to provide a framework and a communal context for living whereby these fears, that *all* of us have to a greater or lesser degree, are actually faced, lived through and ultimately transcended, so that they can be lived with fully, in transparency. A good monastic community can provide a context where the cultivation of awareness is heightened by renunciation. So for us living a lay life, what is our relationship to this monastic tradition?

For lay people a monastic community provides the opportunity to come into contact with those who have made a big commitment to realising wisdom and compassion.

It is immensely helpful; indeed, it feels like a blessing, if a tradition has individuals within it who have realised this potential in themselves, for then it becomes a living tradition. We are fortunate to be in touch with the Forest Sangha tradition as it is practiced and taught in the western tradition, where many of us sense this 'aliveness' that both embodies and transcends the form, where it is a living tradition. But where does this leave us, those who are not monastics?

We have to face a truth. As lay people *we do not* live in the monastic community. For many of us with aspirations towards realising wisdom and compassion, it is easy to idealise the monastic way of life, but, if we are truthful, often *only in contrast to what we don't like in our lay lives*. Such as, having an imperfect job, being in an imperfect relationship, living in an imperfect environment, being surrounded by imperfect people who do not understand us, having to pay bills, having to fulfil responsibilities we would rather be without, having to commute.

So where do we find this perfect lifestyle, this perfect place? In a monastery? I wonder. I suspect that for many if not most of us, a few months of daily life as an anagarika, let alone a couple of years worth, would make us long for a bit of commuting, an intimate relationship (or two), ones own time to have a lie in on the odd morning and not miss breakfast, as well as to have some of the excitement and variety of social life with a bit entertainment thrown in for relaxation.

Obviously there are tremendous advantages in being in the company and presence of like minded people, being exposed to the qualities of more refined and developed individuals, hearing their personal and often inspired reflections and observations on Dhamma, living a lifestyle that is structured to provide the basics for survival yet also providing constant reminders and opportunities for the practice of awareness and mindfulness. Different conditions can be more conducive to inner cultivation and transformation than others. We can speculate on and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of this or that lifestyle. But at the end of the day, hopefully not the end of our lives, we will have to come to terms with the fact that we have to live, work and practice with what we have now. This is our starting point. This is what the Buddha encouraged.

We can only realise transformation by accepting full

and uncompromising acceptance and responsibility to what we are and where we are in our lives. It is here that we find both the beginning and the end of our path, The Path.

It is here, in our lives, that we find and realise the first noble truth, *suffering*, be it physical, emotional or mental. And indeed it is here, in our lives, that we find the second noble truth, the craving or *thirst* for being this, or not being that, or not wanting to know either of them. It is here and only here that we realise the third noble truth, the truth that one can see through all of this, know it all for what it is, thus bring everything **as we knew it** to *an end*, including the suffering. This transforms our **continuing** suffering. It transforms it not by running away from it, not by trying to escape suffering like a fugitive always on the run from some 'other'. But by living it fully, living in-sight of how things are, in equanimity with it.

*'So where
is this
perfect
lifestyle?'*

And our suffering is where we are in our lives, where we find the fourth noble truth of the eight-fold path in our daily life. Here we get know our understanding, our intentions, our relationships with others in speech, activity and

livelihood. Here we get to see what effort we put into our inner life of observing, of witnessing from moment to moment our experience of sensations, of feelings, of states of mind and of thought processes that flow through consciousness. Here we experience our ability to focus, our ability to increasingly include all levels of phenomena from the gross to the most subtle, and beyond, all in our field of awareness. This brings us full circle back to where we are, embodied, here, **now**.

All this is not easy. Present day lay life has an unequalled complexity of challenges and it is in those challenges that we have to find the answers. So it is helpful to re-visit our individual paths in the light of the Eight-fold path, in order to evaluate it and know it fully for ourselves.

So in re-viewing the path it is good to ask ourselves some questions. What is our relationship to the monastic way of life and how does it inform our life? What is our understanding of the eight-fold path and how does it relate to our daily life? What is sitting practice really all about and does it solve our problems? These and other questions we hope to explore further.

Nick Carroll

'The Path Re-viewed' will continue in the next issue of 'Community'. Ed.

He Who Laughs Lasts?

Adapted from the introduction to the Cartoon workshop at the Creativity and Practice Weekend

A sense of humour seems to be a major characteristic of our human emotional life, although recent studies also suggest that dogs laugh, and there is a growing view that the animal world in some way shares a similar consciousness to humans and something of our sense of fun. However, the rudimentary sense of fun possessed by the animal kingdom is greatly elaborated by human language and the complex social interactions we experience. A cursory glance at the number of words related to humour and the importance afforded to it by many philosophers, scientists, writers (and religious leaders) makes it clear that this is a very significant aspect of our emotional life.

A 'GSOH' (good sense of humour) also appears to be widely appreciated and much valued in potential partners. Many of us would feel very uncomfortable with the thought that we lacked a sense of humour.

Humour plays an important role in establishing and maintaining close relationships; it adjusts our level of stimulation; and it often accompanies moments of insight. When we suddenly realise the truth, this is frequently associated with an outburst of emotion; joy, laughter, and perhaps tears.

The value we place on laughter can be exemplified by the importance attached to babies first smiles and the joy this brings to parents.

A comic moment and the laughter associated with this can also be very helpful in teaching situations or in group discussion. Laughter wakes people up, acts as a 'brain reset' mechanism and aids memory.

I notice that Ajahn Sumedhos talks are often laced with a wonderful humour, and the fruits of Buddhist

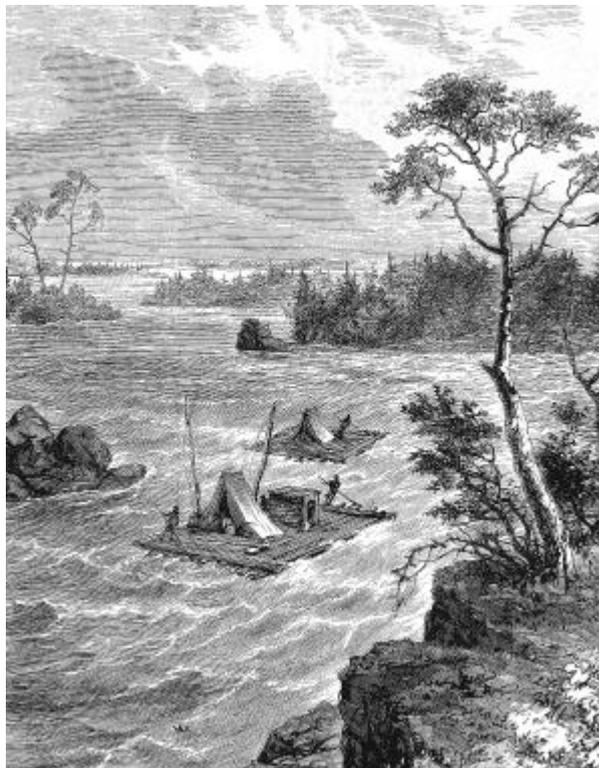
practice can be a radiant joy and ease which naturally leads to light-hearted and humorous moments.

One of the great benefits of cultivating a humorous view of life is that it helps us to avoid taking ourselves and our lives too seriously. It helps us to lighten up and to accept our own and others imperfections. Life is often absurd and a sense of humour helps us to accept this. It is all too easy to be swept away by an obsessive intellectual attachment to a noble ideal – and to lose touch with our own humanity. Sometimes we need to

laugh and play to avoid becoming 'the compulsive and intense zealot defending our ideal from corruption'. Charlie Chaplin said that 'humour is a kind of gentle and benevolent custodian of the mind which prevents us from being overwhelmed by the apparent seriousness of life'.

Why then does religion tend to have a problem with humour? The difficulty arises not so much from a humorous discourse or shared joke, but from two concerns. One is the fact that humour can be used to subvert authority or faith – and this is a particular concern with cartoons and jokes - and the other is that humour can appear to impede or contradict the serious nature of the spiritual quest. How can we be sincere if we are having fun?

The 'religion' that most of us are familiar with and have been conditioned by is the western religious form, which almost invariably arises from an authoritarian basis. Christianity in particular is an example of an ancient authoritarian and hierarchic organisation – especially in the Roman Catholic form - which has found difficulty in tolerating humour. Authoritarian regimes depend primarily on establishing varying degrees of control over people by the use of fear, indoctrination, intimidation and the control of information. Mockery, satire and



'Is this what they mean by becoming a stream-enterer?'

humour is deeply subversive to authoritarian organisations.

(For a fictional elaboration of this, read - 'The Name of the Rose' by Umberto Eco).

There is something in us which wants to expose pomposity and hypocrisy and sanctimonious attitudes, to bring down the petty tyrants - and humour is a powerful way of doing this. We must also acknowledge that religions are a rich source of absurd and weird behaviour. Humour is used to redress the balance; to reveal the repressed truth.

This is not simply a recent use of humour. Where people are allowed freedom of expression, there are many cases of authority or conventions being subjected to satire when it has been perceived to be corrupt or absurd in some way, and there is a case for viewing this as a way to keep institutions healthy - as a check and balance on abuses of power or as a stimulant for the reform of outmoded structures. However, humour can be abused for propaganda purposes, or can be motivated by ill-will, so we have to consider the intention behind the act.

What about Buddhism? There are some key differences between Buddhism and western religious traditions. Buddhism generally does not adopt an authoritarian approach. A lot of the monastic rules and the relationship between ordained and lay Buddhists is specifically intended to avoid wealth, power and independence accumulating in the hands of a few senior monastics. Power is distributed to the various Sanghas. The truth is seen as available to all and not requiring priests to mediate on our behalf.

More fundamentally, the organisation, precepts and even the teaching itself are not regarded as 'the truth'. The Buddha taught that his teachings could be compared to a raft for crossing the river of suffering. When the river has been crossed, the raft could be put down. Buddhism does not regard religious teachings or organisation as ultimately important or as the 'truth'. They are tools to be used. This is a profoundly subversive view. All teachings are viewed as impermanent human creations to be used as necessary and as having no ultimate value.

Because Buddhism teaches us not to be attached to rites and rituals, and because it avoids preaching and is non-authoritarian, it is not a natural target for ridicule and mockery. However, many of us respect and revere religious forms and mockery of these can be hurtful. And although Buddhist teachings are likened to a disposable

raft, if we mock these teachings, it is rather like destroying parts of the raft in mid-stream before we have reached the safety of liberation. Mocking the teachings can also be a form of procrastination which we use to avoid engaging fully with the spiritual quest.

Buddhist teachings themselves point to the need to understand our intentions. What is the intention behind our actions? The moral guidelines - the five precepts - are the main framework for lay people and Right Speech is the most directly relevant to humorous jokes or cartoons.

Right Speech is based upon direct, truthful, clear and non-aggressive use of language aimed at creating harmony and avoiding gossip, slander, and harsh language. Another way of considering this is communication which is appropriate to time and place. Considering the appropriateness of our communications enables us to be flexible and adapt skilfully to the situation. Frivolous speech in one context may be seen as the normal form of communication in another. Indirect use of language may be useful as a diplomatic way of getting a message across. Acting in our world with its many forms of communication requires great skilfulness. We have to adapt and refine our communication according to the situation, and humour does have an important part to play.

If we do create a cartoon or joke which reflects on the Buddhist path we must consider our intention carefully and avoid any 'victimisation' - especially of our spiritual friends, both ordained and lay. Is the intention simple amusement? Is it satire, which might encourage a fresh look at some aspect of life? Is it a shared joke? Is it to exemplify an insight? Is it a harmless play on words; a pun, or laughing at our own absurd behaviour? Is it making a serious point in a humorous way? Is it educational? Might the joke be misunderstood?

One of the risks of humour is that it tends to be culturally related. What amuses one group may be unintelligible or offensive to another. Humour is often deliberately ambiguous and complex, so misunderstanding can happen - as in not 'getting the joke' or in generating offence. So humour is risky and means we have to develop our skill to maximise the good side and reduce the risk of offence.

So, perhaps we can develop skill in using and enjoying humour,

.....provided that we proceed with cushion!

Chris Ward



To all involved in the Creativity and Practice Weekend.

I felt that I could not let this really wonderful weekend pass without putting pen to paper to say a very big thank you.

So much work done by the leaders of the various groups, work in the kitchen, shopping, organising - a massive effort. I am certain that we all went back to our various homes with an enormous sense of warmth and gratitude. So, if possible may it happen again at some future date!

Joan Peaty

Dear Editor

During the Upasika retreat in April, I took the opportunity to visit the library at Amaravati. Along with the wide-ranging collection of books, the library has a complete set of "Community". It was interesting to read through these and to see how things have developed over time (particularly for someone like myself, who has only recently become involved in Upasika events).

One obvious development is that the name of the newsletter has changed. In addition its content has increased. A closer look at some of the earlier issues indicates that the Sangha now have less involvement with study days and retreats, although teachings such as those given by Ajahn Candasiri in April are still a very welcome feature.

Issue 3 of the newsletter includes comments and feedback on a weekend retreat. From this it is apparent that some ideas have been developed, some retained in their original form and some have simply stayed as ideas.

The changes that have taken place are a reminder of how everything is subject to anicca. Within all

the changes, however, the essential purpose of the Upasika community - to provide an opportunity to enhance individual practice, to deepen understanding of the Dhamma and to develop contact between like-minded people - remains constant.

It will be interesting to see how things continue to develop. Perhaps one day in the future someone will take time out to visit the library and to flick through the first 50, or 100, issues of "Community"?

Keith Hammond

Lay Week-end Retreat at Amaravati

on the subject of

Mind and Body?

from Friday 12th April at 5.30pm until
Sunday 14th April at 4pm

Make a note in your diaries!

All are welcome to join us to reflect upon the relationship between mind and body.

Advance booking is essential. For booking forms and programmes please send SAE to -

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

*For specific enquiries, contact Nick Carroll on
0181 740 9748 or Chris Ward on 01442 890034*

Verses from the Dhammapada

“He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”;
in those who harbour such thoughts hatred is not appeased.

“He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”;
in those who let go of such thoughts, hatred is appeased.

books books books books books books books books

'The Diversity of Life' by Edward O. Wilson - Penguin New Edition 2001 - price £8.99

This is not a book about Buddhist practice, but a book written by an eminent zoologist in 1993 which examines current scientific understanding of the history of the diversity of life on Earth. As such, it focuses upon an area of conditionality that lies within some of the Buddhist *niyamas*. The 'kamma' that we commonly refer to is one of five *niyamas*. The other *niyamas* cover the laws of conditionality found in the plant and animal realms, heredity, and in basic human psychology rather than the area of intentional acts and their results.

We may sometimes consider whether all of the conditions that we are currently experiencing now; at this moment, are the ripening of intentional acts that we have undertaken in the past. My understanding of the *niyamas* (please correct me if I have misunderstood this) is that many of the conditions we experience now are unrelated to past intentional acts, but are governed by the complex and impersonal workings of the other conditioned 'realms'. So genetics, evolution, laws of bio-diversity, and psychology all contribute directly and indirectly to the conditions that each of us experiences now (or indeed whether someone has turned the heating on in the room we occupy). I find this helpful. Although I can see that good intentional acts lead to good results, the idea that everything that I currently experience is a direct result of past actions sounds deterministic and wrong. Just as

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds
sang.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth steal away,
Death's second self, which seals up all in rest.

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more
strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

William Shakespeare

the idea that my intentional acts play no part in generating my current experience would also be a wrong view. Given the complex interplay between the different *kammic* levels, a study of the biological and behavioural sciences can help us to identify traits and conditions that we experience as being the impersonal results of inhabiting a human body on planet Earth, in the particular culture we are in, rather than personal possessions that we should feel guilty about. Understanding the way the world works also helps us to understand the impact of actions we take.

Professor Wilson's book is an illuminating and deeply interesting study of bio-diversity. I was surprised to learn that only a small percentage of species on Earth has been identified... 'I recently estimated that the number of known species ... including all plants, animals, and microorganisms to be 1.4 million. This figure could easily be off by a factor of a hundred thousand,evolutionary biologists are generally agreed that this estimate is less than a tenth of the number that actually live on earth.'

I find it astonishing that science is only aware of less than ten percent of major life forms. What makes this even more poignant is that human activities are destroying plant and animal species completely, before they have even been identified. The overwhelming feeling that comes through this book is how interconnected life is; how the earth is like a hugely complex organism and that humanity cannot act with impunity.

We are part of a global community at a biological, social and human level and the idea that a person or country is somehow an independent entity with complete freedom of action is a delusion.

Professor Wilson also points to the strong fossil and other evidence that life has the property to progress to ever more diverse and complex levels of organisation, even after the severe setbacks of a number of 'extinction events', one of which we are in the middle of, and caused by human activity rather than a giant meteor impact or unknown disaster.

This is a very good book, although I found the occasional forays into 'hard science' a little complex at times.

Chris Ward

AUA News

Changes to the AUA Constitution

After more than five years with the current constitution, the committee has undertaken a major redrafting exercise in line with our commitment to evolve in accordance with changing circumstances. The major change is that we are moving away from the language and practices of elections, voting and candidates. This has not proved to be a very useful model for an organisation that is voluntary and depends upon good people donating time and energy to something they value. However, we do consider it important to keep the broader lay-community fully informed and involved in the way the AUA moves forward. This will continue to be via the Community Newsletter, notices at Amaravati, mailings, and information at the one day and weekend retreats that we organise. We welcome and invite feedback on all aspects of these events and upon the Community Newsletter.

We are also changing the name of our Annual General Meetings (AGM) to Annual Community Meetings (ACM) in recognition that the establishment of a healthy lay community lies at the heart of what the AUA is all about. Finally, we are adjusting our name from Amaravati Upasika Association, to Amaravati Upasaka - Upasika Association, although staying with AUA as the short form. This complies more accurately with the Pali language - upasaka is a male practitioner of the Buddhas teachings, and upasika a female practitioner.

Once the new constitution has been fully reviewed and agreed by the committee, copies will be available via email from upasika@btinternet.com

Two Lay Days of Practice

At Amaravati Monastery in the Retreat Centre

During the Winter Monastic Retreat from 10am to 5pm

26th January 2002

2nd March 2002

Come along to enjoy the space and peace of Amaravati and join in a day of practice and meditation, in the company of like-minded companions.

No booking is necessary, but please bring some food to the Retreat Centre kitchen to share on the day.

For enquiries please contact- Nick Carroll (0208 740 9746) or Chris Ward (01442 890034)



The Amaravati Upasika - Upasaka Association (AUA) 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.

Connections

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

HARTRIDGE

All is well at Hartridge Buddhist Monastery! A lay manager makes an enormous difference. Paul Walker provides a friendly, welcoming presence and a feeling of stability since he has lived in monasteries for several years, and has a sensitivity to the monastic form.

Monthly Sangha teaching visits continue to be well supported by the lay community, who appreciate the opportunity to reconnect with the Buddha's teachings. We were fortunate that Venerable Kusalo was able to make an extended teaching visit in June. In July, many were delighted to hear teachings from Kittisaro and Thanissara, who were here from South Africa. We would like to thank them for emphasising the sanctity and importance of Hartridge as a centre for Buddhist practice, and a place worthy of all our support.

In August, we were pleased to welcome Ajahn Jutindharo for the teaching visit. In September, in the absence of a monastic teacher, we organised our own day of practice which was well received by all who were lucky enough to get there. Mahesi was able to teach the meditation workshop in October, and there was much interest expressed in his experience of sustaining a spiritual practice in lay life.

In November, we will be welcoming Ajahn Khantiko from Chithurst Monastery for a teaching weekend and we are delighted that Ajahn Candasiri will be visiting in late December to facilitate some New Year events at Hartridge (including a puja and desana on 30th December, a New Years Eve vigil with the opportunity to re-affirm the refuges and precepts and a meditation workshop on the 2nd January 2002) before going on private retreat here until the 20th, when she will be returning to Amaravati.

We very much appreciate monastics of all levels of experience making themselves available for teaching weekends at Hartridge (including a meditation workshop on Saturday, and puja and desana on Sunday evening). We understand that Ajahn Gandhasilo intends spending some time here during the winter months, and we hope that other monastics will feel inspired to come also.

On a more personal note, I was delighted to have, with my partner Suan, a relationship blessing ceremony at Hartridge Monastery in late August. Ajahn Candasiri, Sister Jayamangala, relatives and friends, created a very inspiring occasion. We would like to thank everyone for their wise

reflections and good wishes.

Lay supporters meetings are held monthly and include Sutta Study, meditation and chanting and the sharing of a meal as well as discussion of current business. All are welcome.

*For details of all events at the monastery
Contact : Sati sati 01305 786821 or
Paul Walker on 01404 891251*

CHITHURST

This year in the run-up to the Kathina Ceremony, Ajahn Sucitto and members of the Sangha at Cittaviveka, were hosts to Luang Por Sumedho and a number of elders from monasteries around the world, all of whom were to hold meetings at Amaravati the following week. As senior members of the Sangha, they were intending to meet together to discuss matters of common interest and concern.

At this time too, work on the Dhamma Hall had progressed well enough to form a pleasant setting for the Kathina Ceremony itself, a heart-warming foretaste of its future role. These two events together provided a great sense of joy to the whole Fourfold Assembly, to the extent that the numbers of lay supporters finally exceeded the availability of chairs and cushions! One particularly moving aspect of the programme in the afternoon, was the placing of an energised stone, carved with a representation of the sun, (traditionally a garuda in Thailand), within the apex of the Western wall of the Dhamma Hall.

The afternoon was concluded by an interesting and uplifting desana by Ajahn Sumedho - a fitting conclusion to a very special day.

Having recently returned from conducting a retreat at Amaravati, Ajahn Sucitto is soon to leave us again to journey to South Africa. The Lay Forums continue to be a welcome format for lay practice, and the yearly ceremony of Renewal and Resolution will bring the first year of the second millenium to a close.

For more details contact : Barry Durrant 01730 821479

(Connections continued overleaf)

HARNHAM

At the Monastery, Building work continues, focused upon the library, and the reception area which has been converted into a ground floor bedroom. At last the scaffold, which has hidden the Retreat House has come down, leaving us with a newly roofed building, looking almost ready for use!

There is an open gathering of lay practitioners on the second Sunday of each month at 6pm to finish in time for the evening chanting and meditation at 7.30pm. We particularly wish to welcome new meditators and will start each session with question and answers. Tea will be served at these meetings.

A Zen monk coming to the Hexham study group.....? But it wasn't just curiosity that took me over there, or had caused Robert Bluck to invite him. Quite a number of the group regulars have stayed at Throssle Hole Abbey this year, and we felt great appreciation for their welcome, guidance and spiritual teachings.

It was a delightful evening. Reverend Wilfred charmed us all with his openness, simplicity, humour and penetrating enquiry. Squeezed into the small attic meditation room in Robert's house, he was completely at ease taking part in the chanting, meditation and discussion, (the 5 Precepts), then disarmed us with 'getting to the heart of the matter' questions – "Why do you practice?". It was an evening full of lightness, reflection and laughter and with some regret I headed home after the first wave of post-practice tea, biscuits and (on this occasion) cake, leaving everyone to dhamma-talk late into the night (or maybe that was just my fantasy!). A special evening, a special person.

For information on Harnham events contact:
Richard Hopkins on 0131 652 6320

Problems in Practice



Chris Ward

Cecil's metta practice failed the instant he looked into the pigs eyes.

The Story

In an ancient monastery in a far away place, a new monk arrived to join his brothers in copying books and scrolls in the monastery's scriptorium. He was assigned to work on copies of books that had already been copied by hand. One day he asked Father Florian (the Armarius of the Scriptorium) "Does not the copying by hand of other copies allow for chances of error? How do we know we are not copying the mistakes of someone else? Are they ever checked against the original?"

Father Florian was taken aback by this observation. "A very good point, my son. I will take one of the latest books down to the vault and compare it against the original." Father Florian went down

The Joy of Translating

to the secured vault to begin his verification. After a day had passed, the monks began to worry and went down to look for the old priest. They were sure that something must have happened. As they opened the door of the vault they found Father Florian sobbing and crying over the new copy and the original ancient text, both open before him on a table. It was obvious that the poor man had been crying for a long time. "What is the problem Reverend Father?" Asked one of the monks.

"Oh my Lord," sobbed the priest, "the word is celebrate!"

From David Lourie - *Get Philosophy With Fur at www.DharmaTheCat.com*

NOTICES

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE:

31st February 2002

*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).*

E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com

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 a rare opportunity for lay-practitioners to discuss and share reflections on the teachings and our own experience.

The Spring 2002 meetings are:

- 15 Jan** - Precepts or Commandments?
- 23 Jan** - Meditation -What does practice mean?
- 30 Jan** - Joy: How does it Arise?
- 6 Feb** - War and Peace
- 13 Feb** - The Four Requisites
- 20 Feb** - Guilt : Do we need it?
- 27 Feb** - Transforming Problems
- 6 Mar** - Faith, Reason, and Knowledge
- 13 Mar** - The Perfections
- 20 Mar** - Is Silence Golden?
- 27 Mar** - What is birth and death?

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 890034

Amaravati Monastery Contact Details

*Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ*

Office Phone Number : 01442 842455
Guest Information: 01442 843411
Retreat Information: 01442 843239
Fax: 01442 843721

Meditation & Study Groups

Bath	Catherine Hewitt	01225 405235
Bedford	David Stubbs	01234 720892
Berkshire	Penny Henrion	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
Machynlleth	Angela Llewellyn	01650 511350
Maidstone	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 (Subhdra) Jackson	01239 820790
Portsmouth	David Beal	02392 732280
Redruth	Daniel Davide	01736 753175
Southampton	Ros Dean	02380 422430
Steyning / Sussex	Jayanti	01903 812130
Stroud	John Groves	0796 777742
Taunton	Martin Sinclair	01823 321059
Watford	Ruth	01923 462902
Woking	Rocana	01483 761398

Amaravati Lay Events - 2002

Day events (10.00am – 5.00pm)

N.B. No need to book. Please bring some food to share on the day

- 26th January** A Day of practice.
- 2nd March** A Day of practice.
- 1st June** Media and the Monkey Mind
- 20th July** Meditation – Insight or Delusion?
- 19th October** Walk your Talk – The Path in Practice
- 7th December** Who Am I ?

Weekends (Friday 5.30 pm – Sunday 4pm)

*N.B. For weekends, advance booking is essential.
Please write to AUA for booking form (see address below)*

- 12 -14th April** Mind and Body?
- 5 – 7th July** Our world and Nature *incl local walks*
- 6 – 8th Sept** Creative Arts Weekend

All events are held in the Retreat Centre and are open to all. They are a valuable opportunity to meet and practice with others and include silent and guided meditation, discussion groups, sutta study groups, yoga groups and other optional workshops, as well as opportunities for questions & answers. This allows you to participate in silence or more interactively, as you prefer on the day.

For further information, please contact either:
Nick Carroll 020 8740 9748 **or** Chris Ward 01442 890034

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika Association (AUA)
Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead,
Herts HP1 3BZ

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

Editorial & Production Team :

Chris Ward, Chris Blain,
Tony Spinks, Nick Carroll, Colin Rae
Plus much help in copying, enveloping, and posting.

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

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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.

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If undelivered please return to:

AUA Community Newsletter
C/O Amaravati Monastery
Great Gaddesden,
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Herts, HP1 3BZ, England

The Dhammapada

'Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone it ceases. This is an eternal law.'

Community Newsletter by Email

We are now able to send Community as an Acrobat file attached to an email. This is an economical way of reaching people anywhere around the globe. The Acrobat file looks virtually identical to the printed version except that it is in colour. It may be read using an Acrobat viewer (often installed on new PC's , but available for free from many sources). We are trying to keep the file size to around 1 to 1.5mb per issue so that a download takes just a few minutes. If you wish to receive Community in this way then email me at :

Upasika@btinternet.com