



Community

The Amaravati Lay Buddhist Newsletter



Autumn 2008 /
2551 Issue No. 27

Guardian at Anuradhapura

In this Issue

Secular Buddhism

Mindfulness Based Therapy

Who is enlightened?

Anandwan—Forest of Bliss

Debtless

Community

editorial



Secular Buddhism

Mindfulness based therapies are increasingly popular. Various called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) or ACT (Acceptance and Commitment therapy) they are now mainstream at NHS trusts across the UK.

Mindfulness based therapy is generally accepted as originating from Jon Kabat-Zin in the early 1980's in the US. Jon was a long-term Zen Buddhist practitioner who wished to bring meditation into mainstream medical practice. He decided that divesting mindfulness from the more obvious trappings of Buddhism was important for its acceptance:

'If you want to bring the essence of meditative practice into a mainstream medical institution, there are ways that will slant your trajectory toward success ... If you go in talking about the Buddha and inviting masters with shaved heads for lectures, it's going to be perceived right away as some foreign cultural ideology - a belief system. Understandably so, it would likely be rejected.' [1]

Jon wrote some popular books on the subject and undertook research trials which showed that mindfulness was helpful for a range of depression, anxiety and stress related disorders [2][3][4]. Since the early 90's the method has spread in the US and more recently in the past ten years or so it has become established in the UK. The National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) sanctioned the use of MBCT as an NHS treatment some years ago.

What these therapies and movements have in common is that they adopt techniques from a Buddhist context and re-apply them as medical or psychological treatments to alleviate suffering. Recent studies showing that powerful and modern drugs such as Seroxat are about as

good as placebos in alleviating the symptoms of depression has given a further impetus to the rise of mindfulness based therapy (as well as other counselling methods).

The rise of mindfulness therapy is a sign that Buddhist teachings are finding their way into Western society. One would want to encourage any method of helping others to alleviate their suffering and the truth that Buddhism points to is not proprietary. Perhaps it may not be too long before the word 'mindfulness' is known more as an anti-stress technique than as a key part of Buddhist meditation practice.

It is commonly asserted that Buddhism has adapted to, and influenced each culture that it has entered. So in China, Buddhism interacted with Taoism and Confucianism. In Tibet, the Bon and Hindu religions influenced the direction of Vajrayana Buddhism. In the West, it is prominent scientific, secular, and psychological outlooks that are interacting most actively with Buddhist ideas and practices. The engagement between mindfulness, meditation and psychology represents one particularly active strand.

In this synthesis—or perhaps emerging new form—Buddhist practices become tested and applied as psychological therapies. The techniques are taught by trained therapists and are intended to alleviate or remove pathological psychological symptoms. Effectively, *dukkha* becomes a medically treatable symptom and the teacher's lineage becomes the university, medical school, course provider, or professional association. The religious context has been removed from these therapies since, as Jon Kabat-Zin says, they make them look like some 'foreign cultural ideology'. Many perceive religion to be a source of irrational ideas, rituals and superstition, and associate it with intolerance, dogmatism and unfounded beliefs. These are not qualities that sit comfortably with medical practitioners and scientifically validated treatments.

There are various views on this cross-fertilisation. Buddhism does not claim an exclusive monopoly on specific techniques. These are seen as

supporting innate and natural abilities possessed by all humans. The spread of mindfulness into mainstream health settings must be seen as a success. However, quite how the appropriation and repackaging of Buddhist techniques will affect Buddhist institutions remains to be seen. It would seem wise to maintain interaction between trained therapists and members of the Buddhist Sangha. We may find that dialogue continues to be fruitful with Buddhist practice becoming enlivened by new ideas from the mindfulness based therapy community, and new therapeutic treatments becoming possible.

It is likely that the spread of mindfulness based therapies will lead to growing interest in Buddhism; some will wish to extend and enrich their mindfulness practice within a supportive tradition. Others will wish to investigate the linked practices of *samatha* meditation and the development of *samadhi* states and *jhana* levels as well as the relationship between mindfulness and clear knowing—*sampajañña*. And those who practice mindfulness therapy may become aware that developing the ability to witness is not enough; what is being witnessed is also important and dependent upon past intentional behaviour and habits.

This leads on to consider how we spend our time and the moral frameworks we use. Our livelihoods and relationships become fruitful areas to investigate as do our beliefs and aspirations. Guidance on all of these factors is to be found integrated within Buddhism and supported by a rich psychological vocabulary. Mindfulness is just one factor of the Ennobling Eightfold Path.

Perhaps as more familiarity is gained with Buddhism, there will be further repackaging of Buddhist teachings. Scientific study of Buddhism will create 'religion free' psychological teachings which are judged purely upon the evidence that they 'work'. For some this may be hailed as progress towards a utopian vision of a society that fully values 'awakening', although for traditional Buddhists this process may be viewed as hijacking the 'treasures of the *Dhamma*'.

However the engagement process unfolds, as Buddhist practitioners, we can apply generosity, restraint and wisdom to negotiate through the daily challenges that arise. If we stay true to the essentials of Buddhist practice, then the outcome will be good.

Chris Ward

References

(1) An Interview with Jon Kabat-Zinn

<http://www.kwanumzen.com/primarypoint/v08n2-1991-summer-jonkabat-zinn-mindfulmedicine.html>

(2) Kabat-Zinn, J. et al (1992) Effectiveness of a meditation-based stress reduction program in the treatment of anxiety disorders. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, **149**,936-943.

(3) Roth, B. & Creaser, T. (1997) Mindfulness meditation-based stress reduction: Experience with an inner city program. *The Nurse Practitioner*, **22**, 150-176.

(4) Williams, J.M.G., Teasdale, J.D., Segal, Z.V. & Soulsby, J. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy reduces over-general autobiographical memory in formerly depressed patients. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (in press).

Reading

1. Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness*. Piatkus, London

2. Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion, New York

3. Saki Santorelli (1999) *Heal Thyself, Lessons on Mindfulness in Medicine*. Random House/Bell Tower, New York

Cognitive Based Mindfulness Therapy - A personal experience

Sometime ago a friend of mine gave a public talk about Buddhism in a local hall. While I was chatting to her beforehand, she mentioned that the local newspaper had interviewed her earlier that day, and had asked her to explain the essence of Buddhism. When she came to describe Right Speech, she said that gossiping was to be avoided. "Oh, how boring!" the reporter shot back at her. This upset my friend and it was still going through her mind several hours later. She compounded her distress by thinking that if she had been a better Buddhist she could have handled it better, and would not have let it get to her.

We can probably all relate to this. Things happen quickly, unexpectedly, and can tip us off balance. We have the nasty habit of churning things over in our mind, trying to solve problems by thought but never succeeding. This obsessive thinking can continue unrelentingly and lead to a downward spiral, even leading to depression or anxiety.

Cognitive Therapy has developed effective methods for dealing with this negative, distorted thinking, questioning whether such thoughts are useful, fair and true. More recently, Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Segal, three mental health researchers, have combined Cognitive Therapy with Vipassana to produce a treatment to

prevent relapse in people with a history of depression. It is based on an eight weeks course combining yoga, meditation and awareness of the body. In a controlled study the treatment prevented relapse in over sixty-percent of those who completed the course and has since been approved by the UK National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

Most of the content of the course will be familiar to people who practice meditation. However, the “Breathing Space” which is central to this approach is particularly interesting. It applies Cognitive Therapy using a more Buddhist approach to negative thinking. Clients are encouraged to just *be* with their thoughts, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. The Breathing Space is a very useful link between formal sitting meditation practice and moment by moment mindfulness.

I recently attended a training course with Mark Williams and could see immediately that the 3-Minute Breathing Space, which applied Vipassana to Cognitive Therapy, could be turned full circle and could be used to apply the learning of Cognitive Therapy to Buddhist mindfulness practice. It could be used at those times when the torrent of negative thoughts overwhelms mindfulness. This is what I had been looking for; something that would help me maintain my practice in the turbulence of daily life, when I wasn't in the perfect conditions of a retreat at Amara-vati, with support from like-minded people, and the inspiration of the Sangha.

You may be interested to try this method yourself. Here are the essentials: -

The 3 Minute Breathing Space

Why a breathing space?

Negative thoughts can often arise when we are not mentally focused and lead to an obsessive chain of thinking which can change our mood without us really knowing why. If we practice the Breathing Space at such times we give ourselves the opportunity to just be with such thoughts and not feel we have to do anything about them immediately. It is often the thoughts lurking at the back of the mind, the ones that are so black and despairing that you cannot bear to look them, that are the ones that need to be brought out into awareness. They will then be seen in proportion through the clarity of the wisdom mind.

First stage

Sit in a relaxed alert posture. Close your eyes. Take stock of what is going on in your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. Welcome, allow and accept any negative thoughts. It is not necessary to do anything about them, just be with them. Remember thoughts are just thoughts; you do not have to identify with them. Just watch them pass by like clouds across the sky. If they are overwhelming, just be with them. No need to judge them or cling to them or reject them, but if there is attachment or aversion just be with that as well. Be aware of any expression of the feelings in the body, any stress or tension.

Second Stage

Next, bring the focus to the breath, the rise and fall of the abdomen. Bring yourself to the present moment. If the mind wanders gently bring it back to the breath, just like normal meditation. No need to beat yourself up for wandering, just acknowledge it and bring the mind back, again

and again, as many times as it takes. Stay present, allow and let it be.

Third Stage

Finally, expand the attention to the whole body, breathe into the whole body, aware of any sensations, any tightness or tension in the shoulders, neck, back or face. Open and soften the focus.

When to practice

The Breathing Space can be practiced initially three times a day at whatever times you have chosen as convenient (Regular Practice). Once you are familiar with the practice, you can then apply it at any time when you become aware of an automatic thought leading to negative thinking and feelings (Coping Practice).

The Mindful Breathing Space was originally developed as a treatment for depression. However, with a little imagination you will find ways of bringing the lessons of Cognitive Therapy into Buddhist practice or re-discovering what is already there. Details of this approach to mindfulness are described in *The Mindful Way through Depression*, Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Guilford, publication date June 2007. Includes Audio CD.

There are many books on Cognitive Therapy written for the general reader, but a couple of accessible ones are: -

1. *The Feeling Good Handbook*, David Burns, Plume 1999.
2. *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Dummies*, Rob Willson and Rhena Branch, Wiley 2006.

Richard Hawkins

A MINDFULNESS BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY COURSE—SOME NOTES

I attended the same course as Richard Hawkins on Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). He has written clearly above about some of the techniques – here below are some of my rather messier personal notes that came from the course

How have these Cognitive Therapists picked up the Buddhist tradition so easily? Have they got it right? (Am I qualified to judge...?!) Well the bulk of the MBCT (Mindfulness based cognitive therapy) course is from John Kabat-Zinn's work on MBSR (Mindfulness based stress reduction), and having read some of his books he is clearly a long-term committed meditator, his writing captures for me some of the essence of a Buddhist perspective.

I had some 'wow' moments on the MBCT course. We were asked to reflect on this story: You are walking down the street and you see a friend walking towards you. You call their name, and they walk straight on by. What has happened? What do you feel?

In the class we offered our views and feelings. It could be a neutral event, they were listening to their i-pod and didn't notice me. Or, it could be I feel rejected and spin into a spiral of depressive thought.... Or, it could be I am concerned, my friend was so distracted she didn't notice me, I wonder why...?

Apparently there is research evidence which indicates that each of us is capable of every possible response. It is as if we were at the station and looking at the signing board with the lists of the trains destinations, the old fashioned kind where a

long line of rollers are clicking away with all the different station options – its happening fast.... suddenly there is the list of stations on a particular line for that train. In our minds this process is going on and something within us chooses a particular train on a particular line... (this sounds a bit like dependent origination to me.)

Cognitive Therapy looks at the process of choice which influences our mood. Mindfulness slows the mind down a bit, creates space around choices, so we can see what is going on, and then choose a little more skillfully which line we travel down!

GO ON A COURSE AND GET DEPRESSED...

The MBCT course is a training in depression management. Strangely it seems I found myself in some depressed spaces during and after the course. I went through a process of looking at some of my lurking negative thought patterns – a whole stream of stuff was triggered by thinking about how I dealt with the dilemma when I was a teenager, that I didn't get asked to dance at school discos. OK I didn't go to that many, I tended to go to more punkey or ravey things (guess my age!) where everyone just thrashed about in a crowd. If I remember those moments at those school discos where I thought I wasn't or I really wasn't being asked to dance, and the flow of feelings and then my reaction to those feelings – well I jolly well went out onto the dance floor and found someone to dance with. Well this shows bravery and initiative and a kind of confidence, but....it was also just a coping strategy for avoiding a whole bunch of feelings.

It's like now, relating it to my meditation, I might sit there proudly in a full lotus, here I am meditating...! And then settle back a bit as I become aware of a pattern of tensions in my body, more like just, well here I am, what are these feelings and tensions under here. And then tears come and anger, and a sense

Cont...

of the need for humility...and gratitude. Nowhere to go and nothing to do... just watch our rivers flow gently down to the sea.

CHOCOLATE, BI-POLAR DISORDER AND BUDDHISM

I think of myself as a unique personality, but maybe I am just made up of culturally and genetically generated types, unique in its mix and balance, but still assembled from common elements...

This explains the resonance of myth for us, and hence the value of the lists and stories of the way people are, that are used in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and other self-help techniques.

For example, I've started to muse about the aspects of my character that are bipolar, manic-depressive it used to be called. I don't want to belittle a serious real condition, but I have some bipolar traits in my character.

I can go on a roll -: I'm feeling healthy, clever, fit. I run down the road, I am successful in some way (something very minor like an efficient shopping trip – aaah the life of a homemaker!), the children are happy, my partner looks handsome today, I cook a good meal, I eat extra chocolate, I stay up late, I phone friends and make dates..... yes I am on a roll, a positive spiral of view about myself! From a Buddhist point of view, I am attaching to all my positive thoughts about myself and, er, chocolate! I think, chocolate can be healthily processed by my body to create energy and good feelings that I can use to create good in the world.....

Then a crash comes, it may be small, it may be large. It could be something small like, 'oh I feel really tired', that triggers the change. I went to bed late, fuelled by coffee and chocolate, something disturbed me in the night and I just wake up feeling quite tired, and the thought occurs "I've messed up, I feel tired, I'm going to feel bad for the rest of the day and I won't be able

to handle things... and". I call this catastrophizing. The momentum can build, I feel tired so I don't do my morning meditation, so then I feel a failure and then I feel anxious, and then the morning coffee makes me feel ill, and then I think, I really should give up coffee its bad for me, if only, I just haven't got the self control, I feel such a failure, I need to cheer up, lets eat some chocolate.... What does chocolate say now? It says "I am a dangerous substance, I can give you a false high, but then you will feel the poisons in your system reach overload proportions, tipping certain cells ever closer to the inevitable cancer activations, and disabling your mental acuties so everyone out there will realize how stupid you really are...."

I've found, some of the Buddhist teachings hard. As Ajahn Amaro says, we want to attach to pleasure, and when we attach to pleasure we feel our practice is going well.... Since I wrote the above about chocolate though, it made me laugh to re-read it, and I am much less caught up in that up-down pattern. Maybe one day chocolate will just be chocolate, that is chocolate solids, fat, a bit of sugar...!

Emily Tomalin June 2007

Useful references:

The Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre web site:
www.octc.co.uk

I also attended an interesting workshop "Person Based Cognitive Therapy for Distressing Psychosis, with Mindfulness Elements" given by Paul Chadwick who has had some success using mindfulness techniques with people with more serious mental illness.

Who is enlightened?

Look at the photos on this page. Who do you think is enlightened?

The photos were taken by my daughter, Susi, in Goa earlier this year. She was walking on the beach when she passed the girl meditating in the sea. She looks like she is playing at being King Canute – keeping back the sea through psychic power. As my daughter continued along the beach she said to her boyfriend, ‘She must be enlightened’. Her boyfriend didn’t agree. When they looked back I’ll leave that to your imagination. It’s a real ‘what happened next’ photo.



Whilst staying at a friend’s house in Goa my daughter befriended a stray kitten. The man in the picture visited them and the kitten curled up in his big hands. Have you ever seen such a huge smile? There is a



Buddhist saying you’ve probably heard more than once, ‘there’s no way to happiness, happiness is the way’.

This is a picture of happiness. But again, what happened next?

Of course we can guess. But not only do

we not know what happened next, we don't really know what happened then, at that moment. Even if we read into the pictures that the girl was experiencing peace and the man happiness, how can we really know? The girl might have been experiencing a very uncomfortable sensation around her bottom, and the man might have been allergic to cats and desperate to give it away before a great sneeze. It certainly isn't possible to tell if either of them is enlightened

When we first hear about enlightenment, that this is what the Buddha realised and gave his life to teaching, so that others could realise it too, it's not unreasonable to want to look for proof that it still works. After all, that was more than 2,500 years ago. So, we can look at monastics and teachers of Buddhism and those who have practised for many years to try to find evidence. But this can become an obsession. Our 'faith' in Buddhism can depend on it. After all, what is the point of setting out on a path that no longer reaches its destination? And it will not be long before we hear talk of how difficult it is and meet people who doubt whether enlightenment is even possible, these days. Where are the forests after all, to get enlightened in? The jungle we live in is the jungle of the city, its spreading roots are the cables, pipes and drains, and the jungle drums are email, internet and mobile phones and rather than elephants, we get around on jumbo jets. The Buddha said we should go to a root of a tree, not log onto our PC.

How can we really know? Who are we to judge? If an enlightened person should be compassionate then surely they should be completely compassionate, that means they should score 10 out of 10 for compassion. But when we look at someone, how can we decide if they score 8, 9 or 10 out of 10? Who are we, who score 2 or 3 out of 10, to judge? And there is a danger that good qualities can be put on like clothes, to impress, when people are looking. How do we know what people are really like? And even what they think of themselves is unreliable, they may be deluded about their own attainment.

Community

Asking is a waste of time, because an enlightened person is not going to tell you. The problem is that this would just attract blind faith, or doubt. It certainly wouldn't help anyone. Someone who isn't enlightened is more likely to say they are, in order to attract followers, as they are still deluded by worldly gain.

As we develop our practice, the question goes away. We start to appreciate the Buddha's path, and build our own confidence in the direction it leads. We know by personal experience. We glimpse the truth for ourselves, as a traveller who climbs a viewpoint to see his destination. We sense the direction we must hold and recognise our footprints when we have passed that way before, and are walking in circles. As we investigate the mind, the self, the way things are; the whole idea of attaining something begins to disintegrate. We see the danger in wanting to be enlightened. We see that even that is a desire we ultimately have to let go of if we are going to be completely free.

The thought of enlightenment is simply a thought, something that arises and ceases, according to its nature. Whatever fascination the idea of becoming enlightened may have held in the past disappears for the person who is enlightened. They have gone beyond the need to define, compare, achieve, impress. And it would be of no consequence, nothing remarkable, just the way things are.

So there you have it, Buddhism, a religion based on the attainment of something that cannot be proved, because no one will admit to attaining it. And to make things worse we won't even describe it, we call it beyond words. We say it is unconditioned, uncreated, not-this and not-that, but we can't say what it is. And when we talk about enlightenment we do so in hushed tones, almost apologetically, saying it is out of reach of ordinary mortals like ourselves. We want it to be something unattainable, something out of reach. And ultimately, we are terrified of enlightenment. It's so beyond our comfort zone of

greed, hate and self-delusion.

Yet when you read the Buddhist *Suttas* you find that the Buddha's followers experienced enlightenment in their thousands. Was it so easy then, and is it so difficult today, or are we making it difficult for ourselves?

I think we are making it difficult. Why can't we just wake up and be aware of the way things are? I think it's because that's too easy for us, we're far too clever for that. We want to have to study Buddhism for years, to practice under the greatest meditation masters, to get our concentration using the best meditation techniques, chosen just for us. We want to do anything other than stop wanting. All of this just keeps us running on the treadmill of grasping and delusion. We have to stop, get off the wheel of *Samsara*. But that's not attractive to the grasping mind.

But we can stop. We can go into the present moment, into our experience as we experience it, into the here and now. We can see things the way they are. It's not about getting something we haven't got. We have it all right here, right now. Buddhism is the teaching of the immediate. The now, not the future, not what we want but what is. We don't need to become enlightened, we have to stop running away from enlightenment. We think we are running towards enlightenment when all we doing is running away. We're running away from suffering, to some idea of perfection, a heaven world, the end of suffering. We're running away from the way things are, because we don't want them to be this way. We create a fantasy world so we don't have to bear with the truth.

That's the first noble truth isn't it. Don't worry about enlightenment, look where it hurts.

Martin Evans

Photos by Susi Evans

The Anana Sutta—Debtless Anguttara Nikaya 4.62

Introduction.

This *sutta* involves Anathapindika, a great and wealthy benefactor of the early Sangha. There are several *suttas* in which Anathapindika is mentioned or speaks. He was a highly regarded lay-follower. In the *sutta*, the Buddha describes the pleasure that can arise for householders when fulfilling their responsibilities. These pleasures fall into the category of mundane bliss, one of three categories of bliss. The others are heavenly bliss arising from *samadhi* and nibbanic bliss from the experience of the unconditioned. All of the three types of bliss are encouraged in Buddhism, although the overall aim is *Nibbana*. The *sutta* ends with the observation that a wise householder ‘knows both sides’ and appreciates that blamelessness arising from right action is the best of the mundane forms of bliss.

The Anana Sutta

Translated from the Pali by
Thanissaro Bhikkhu PTS: A ii 69
Copyright © 1997 Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
Access to Insight edition © 1997
For free and unrestricted distribution.

Then Anathapindika the householder went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there the Blessed One said to him: "There are these four kinds of bliss that can be attained in the proper season, on the proper occasions, by a householder partaking of sensuality. Which four? The bliss of having, the bliss of [making use of] wealth, the bliss of debtlessness, the bliss of blamelessness.

"And what is the bliss of having? There is the case where the son of a good family has wealth earned through his efforts & enterprise, amassed through the strength of his arm, and piled up through the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously gained. When he

thinks, 'I have wealth earned through my efforts & enterprise, amassed through the strength of my arm, and piled up through the sweat of my brow, righteous wealth righteously gained,' he experiences bliss, he experiences joy. This is called the bliss of having.

"And what is the bliss of [making use of] wealth? There is the case where the son of a good family, using the wealth earned through his efforts & enterprise, amassed through the strength of his arm, and piled up through the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously gained, partakes of his wealth and makes merit. When he thinks, 'Using the wealth earned through my efforts & enterprise, amassed through the strength of my arm, and piled up through the sweat of my brow, righteous wealth righteously gained, I partake of wealth and make merit,' he experiences bliss, he experiences joy. This is called the bliss of [making use of] wealth.

"And what is the bliss of debtlessness? There is the case where the son of a good family owes no debt, great or small, to anyone at all. When he thinks, 'I owe no debt, great or small, to anyone at all,' he experiences bliss, he experiences joy. This is called the bliss of debtlessness.

"And what is the bliss of blamelessness? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones is endowed with blameless bodily kamma, blameless verbal kamma, blameless mental kamma. When he thinks, 'I am endowed with blameless bodily kamma, blameless verbal kamma, blameless mental kamma,' he experiences bliss, he experiences joy. This is called the bliss of blamelessness.

"These are the four kinds of bliss that can be attained in the proper season, on the proper occasions, by a householder partaking of sensuality."
Knowing the bliss of debtlessness,
& recollecting the bliss of having,
enjoying the bliss of wealth, the mortal
then sees clearly with discernment.
Seeing clearly — the wise one —
 he knows both sides:
that these are not worth one sixteenth-sixteenth
 of the bliss of blamelessness.

ANANDWAN - FOREST OF BLISS

by Steven Saslav



The story began over 50 years ago in central India, when the local Council there had rather begrudgingly given some boulder strewn land, abandoned as useless, [except by the snakes, leopards and tigers which hunted there] to Baba Amte and his growing little community of cured but variously-abled lepers. They chose the name Anandwan, Forest of Bliss. Not being sarcastic nor ironic - they really meant it! They had lost everything: health &

limbs, work & income, home & family, self-worth & human dignity, they had even lost the right to be part of society. Now at last, no matter how pitifully hopeless it may have appeared at that time, they were given a chance to have a fresh start and to do something - and they sure did.

In their own words:

"Anandwan" The Forest of Bliss - is the realisation of the dream of Baba Amte and the enduring efforts of the organisation he set up with the 'differently-abled' people as vehicles for this endeavor. This journey, with all its trials and tribulations, holds major lessons for mankind while being a mirror of its social conscience.

Anandwan has grown over the past 56 years to become what is perhaps the largest community of Leprosy afflicted and physically challenged people in the world. Anandwan is the home for those who had been rejected by society - lonely, vulnerable, wounded and abandoned; they were the lost, the last and the least.

At Anandwan, every one of them is welcome with open arms, to stay as long as they need. Based on the lifetime motto of Baba Amte "WORK BUILDS, CHARITY DESTROYS".....has sought to build on their inner

Community

resources, to make Anandwan a unique example of a self-reliant community....offering free medical treatment, training and rehabilitation of disabled and disadvantaged people and bringing relief to the socially and economically deprived through productive work and outreach programs. The mission and motto ...being 'Production Oriented Social Service', the disabled and disadvantaged are actively engaged in about 45 diverse productive trades and disciplines....almost 60,000 people received some form of support...

The land surrounding Anandwan today is idyllic - there are forested areas, gardens, exotic animals and beautiful lakes built to retain the areas rainwater and thereby significantly raising the whole water table. The ensuing irrigation has brought out of season, self-sufficient, even record breaking agriculture. Its many visitors seem inspired by something in the air - something that tastes of well being, happiness and love.

In many ways Anandwan is as close to that much sought after 'utopian community' as I've encountered. People there are just ordinary folk, some with easily recognisable human shadows - but it's kind of 'as good as it gets' when a large number of people are living and sharing together. For this extended family of 5,000 mostly enabled disabled [which today also includes deaf, blind and orphaned children as well as many other kinds of social outcasts] by becoming productive members of a society they are proud to be part of have regained their self-worth and dignity.

Where did such inspiration and determination to make this all possible come from? Baba Amte was born into a rich Brahmin family. First a successful lawyer and dashing playboy, followed by being a sadhu [penniless spiritual seeker and wanderer] he then awoke to the plight of his 'brothers and sisters'. So he worked with [carrying 'night sewage' on his head], organised and lead the lowest of all the workers. He also studied and debated with while struggling alongside Gandhi and Tagore for Indian independence [from those bloody British!]

Then one day this fearless man saw a maggot infested leper abandoned on the street to die and he was terrified.

Fighting his fear, he personally nursed this man up till death and in so doing discovered and began his true lifelong vocation. When for a whole lifetime someone so totally walks the walk, their talking the talk can be a genuinely profound inspiration to all, as it has been across India and far abroad. And so it's been even up till now, on his deathbed, he's arguing with his loving doctor to not be medically quarantined just for the sake of living a few extra days. Fortunately his children and grandchildren have been bringing their own gifts and talents to see the work he started carried forward.

As for me, I was just part of the baggage - went along to be of support to Anna. Not to shirk a challenge though and needing it to be personal and hands on, I chose to work in the wounds clinic and also to give some physio and massage in the hospital.

After my first day of work I wrote the following:

"My first morning in the bandaging unit today. The wounds, mostly on dirty feet can be quite large. You quickly adjust to the mutilation and rawness though by approaching it pragmatically/professionally, but watching dead skin being hacked away with a blunt un-sterilized scalpel left me a little queasy. If the 'Infection Control' team from the hospital came here they would either have a field day or a heart attack. Yet, by Indian standards the place itself is very clean and they must be doing something right because none of the wounds I've seen so far have been septic."

It is interesting how when people no longer seem to identify themselves with their illness, then their disfigurement and even large open [non-contagious] wounds seem to quickly and casually become pretty ordinary. Namaste, the beautiful Indian greeting of hands together before heart roughly translates as "That which is God in me honours that which is God in you." The brief but incredible sense of connection that could arise in offering Namaste before and after treatment not only kept the feeling of the treatment personal [rather than just functional] but it also reawakened me again and again to the deep beauty behind those sparkling eyes to someone who can now carry their wounds and disfigurement as 'alright' - and even with dignity. Namaste kept reminding me, in what we put heart into doing together we can be blessed together.

Despite being the least contagious among communicable diseases, 100% curable, deformities preventable through early diagnosis, and a lot of rehabilitation actually possible, in some places in India there is still much fear and superstition about leprosy. But Anandwan and other such communities do have a radical impact on the attitudes of people connected to it and in the larger surrounding area. So much so that, *very curiously*, the latest source of income for the community has come from its facilities fast becoming a very popular local venue for the incredible exuberance and lavishness of Indian weddings.

Following an initial week of meditation retreat the group we were part of continued to meditate and reflect together enabling the outer and inner work to nurture each other more deeply. Sixteen very different people, different ages and nationalities, but each of us gratefully appreciating that spiritual work while working together in service to others is a truly potent approach. But the most pleasant surprise for me has been discovering that despite the, at times, maddening irrational chaos of India and her people there has grown a deep love in me for Mother India and the many blessings she offers in surrendering to her challenging but profound reality.

Perhaps it's a sign of my age, though Anna was able to be free from work and is now intrepidly traveling onward for two further weeks, and despite my having to exchange the almost perfect weather there for that of British winter, I was totally un-jealous of her opportunity and was actually quite content to return to the comforts of home and fridge. And yet, for me the whole experience seems to have highlighted the benefits that comes from trusting the heart when it beckons us to carefully step out of our comfort zones and taste the rawness of life afresh.

If you are interested in further info about Anandwan and its satellite communities google 'Anandwan' or see:

<http://mss.niya.org/projects/anandwan.php>

The organisation which arranged the retreat:

<http://www.sanghaseva.org/pastactions.htm>

A picture gallery of this and previous years:

<http://www.lalzinar.com/sanghaseva/index.php>

To My Fellow Retreatants...from Jody Higgs

During Ajahn Sucitto's ten day retreat, during which the embodiment of the open heart and metta were emphasised, retreatants were invited to share their thoughts on the final evening. Some of us chose to do so in poetry...

To My Fellow Retreatants

I don't know your name, but I know your good heart.

*I don't know your country, occupation or story,
but I have sensed your suffering.*

You and I shared this journey.

In the silence we have courageously faced the dragons.

*In the silence we have known such exquisite intimacies
that were they to find out, the gods themselves
would fume with envy*

Tomorrow we go our separate ways.

I'll put my name back on.

*You'll pick up your country, occupation and story,
perhaps wearing them more lightly than before.*

*And the treasures of the silence – the dragon stories
and the exquisite intimacies – where do they belong?*

*Why in the open heart of course, forever softening
and widening*

Jody Higgs

Dec 2007

(This poem had sat in my in-tray since early January waiting for me to start work on this edition. Before I had a chance to read it and respond, Jody died. I had met Jody twice, last year, when I spent several hours at her home in Edinburgh, and later with the Edinburgh Buddhist Group. I remember her as a warm, open, wise and hospitable lady (...she made a delightful rhubarb crumble!). **Editor**)

ALBA CONNECTIONS

Do you live a long way from a monastery or a local group? Or are you housebound or otherwise limited in how much you can get out and about? Would you like to meet like-minded people in your part of the country? Are you looking for a lift to the monastery to come to a day of practice? Or would you be prepared to offer one?

We are in contact with supporters of Amaravati and its associated monasteries all over the UK, so if you would like to be put in touch with new Dhamma friends, or if you would be happy to be contacted by others, do call Alison Moore at ALBA on 01442 865519 or email me at metta@petalmoore.net

It's entirely up to you how you would like to keep in touch with people – you may want to meet, chat on the phone, or simply make email contact. And we won't pass on any of your details to anybody else unless we have your permission – initial contact will be through ALBA. So your personal information will be safe with us.

--oo0oo--

ALBA CONNECTIONS YAHOO! GROUP

We've set up the ALBA Connections Yahoo! group to enable you to contact each other directly, for example to discuss Dhamma topics, to support each other's practice, to make practical arrangements, for example for lifts to events at Amaravati, or simply to make conversation with Dhamma friends.

If you're not already a member, there are two ways you can join, and both are very simple. You can join via the website - as it's an invitation-only site you will need to be approved, but that's just a formality, and approval is guaranteed. You'll then be able to start receiving and posting messages. Alternatively, email Alison Moore at metta@petalmoore.net and I'll send you an invitation. When you receive it, all you'll need to do to join is to click on the "Join this group" button at the bottom of the invitation email.

ALBA News

ALBA events for 2008 have been progressing well. They tend to go so smoothly that it is hard to remember the early days where we made up each event as we went along. Perhaps some of us have nostalgic feelings for the 'good old days' when we were on an adventure into the unknown.

The ALBA committee of some ten or so includes both those with many years experience in organising and offering day and weekend events, and those who are relatively new. Over the many years that ALBA has operated, a camaraderie has developed; and an understanding of how to work within the supportive facilities of Amaravati and its lay and monastic community.

Over recent committee meetings we have discussed organising a number of new events for 2009. Gill Williamson, the Hertfordshire SACRE representative has suggested a day at Amaravati for RE teachers. The aim would be to provide them with a basic understanding of Buddhism and some material on which to base some lessons. Many RE teachers are faced with 'having' to teach some Buddhism, and yet have little or no understanding of it.

We have also discussed a day at which all lay and monastic communities and organisations which use or occupy Amaravati can meet, exchange information, chat and perhaps plan for greater interaction in the future. There are many groups leading parallel lives at Amaravati: we all benefit from, and share in, the teachings of the Forest Sangha and it seems right that we should learn more about each other.

The committee are happy for those interested in the way ALBA works, to attend our meetings. Simply contact one of us to find out about a future meeting. We tend to gain new committee members on an 'organic' basis, where an individual attends meetings informally and perhaps helps out at an event in some way, before gradually making a commitment by becoming an associate member of the committee.

Community

It is a helpful experience to spend time with companions treading the Buddhist path as householders. In the UK the Buddhist householder faces a complex network of footpaths rather than a clear highway. There is both freedom and confusion, so the work of organisations such as ALBA is useful in establishing models and examples for others to adopt and develop. Come and join us! (email info @ buddhacommunity.org)



Some of the ALBA Committee as at May 24th 2008



The Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA) 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 longer events, as well as other 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 a while, we offer the opportunity to develop all aspects of the Buddhist path in a supportive lay context.

Community

Amaravati Lay Events - 2008

These events provide an opportunity to practice together and explore themes relevant to practice and lay life. They include silent and guided meditation, yoga, discussion and study groups, and other activities.

Events are led by experienced lay-teachers. All are welcome. Our theme for 2008 is the application of Buddhist practice within the life of a 'householder' and the issues that this raises. Note that dates for 2008 are now available both in this newsletter and on our web site

*Days of Practice (DoP) – no need to book, open to all
9.45am for 10am-5pm
(please bring a packed lunch requiring no preparation or cooking)*

***Retreats** – advance booking essential
5.30pm Fri. – 4.00pm on last day*

July 11-15th 5 Day Retreat –

Nick Carroll: Going deep – Staying light

August 9th DoP - Alison Moore:	Keeping the precepts
September 6th DoP – Martin Evans:	Sleeping with the enemy

October 17-19th Retreat - Martin Evans: Opening the heart

November 1st DoP – Nick Carroll:	Awareness and daily life
December 6th DoP - Chris Ward:	Aspiring to the divine

****Retreat booking forms and late changes to the programme can be found on our web site**:**

www.buddhacommunity.org
Organised by the Amaravati Lay Buddhist
Association

Recycling Problems



“ I know that getting our clothes from the charity shop reduces our carbon footprint, but I do feel that we stand out a little. ”



TripleGem is a new cooperative venture based in the UK, which provides Buddhist based comment on social issues and contemporary events. TripleGem is an independent, collaborative not-for-profit venture. At the heart of the enterprise is the TripleGem website hosting a range of reports, news, analysis, resources, media sources, research projects, programmes of events and other material.

Visit us at <http://triplegem.terapad.com> and join in the discussion or leave a comment.

Community

Teaching & Practice Groups

Ashford, Kent	Bernie Oxland	01233 643848
	email Bernardoxland@yahoo.co.uk	
Bath	Bill & Carol Huxley	(01225) 314 500
Bedford	David Stubbs	(01234) 720 892
Berkshire	Anthea West	(0118) 979 8101
Brighton	Sam Halter	07888 821 525
Cambridge	Dan Jones	(01223) 246 257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	(01227) 463 342
Carlisle	Jean Nelson	(01228) 543491
Harlow	Pamutto	(01279) 724330
Hemel Hempstead	Bodhinyana Group	
	Chris Ward	(01442) 890034
Kendal	Fellside Centre, Low Fellside	
	Sumedha	(01539) 729 793
Leeds Area	Daniela Loeb	(0113) 279 1375
	Anne Grimshaw	(01274) 691447
Liverpool	Ursula Haekel	(0151) 4276668
London Buddhist Society		
	58 Eccleston Square London SW1(Victoria)	(020) 7834 5858
London Hampstead		
	1 Hillside (Room 6) London NW5	
	Entrance in Highgate Road	
	Caroline Randall	(020) 8348 0537
	Ann Booth	(020) 7485 0505
London-West	Nick Carroll	(020) 8740 9748
Leigh-on-sea	Rob Howell	(01702) 482 134
Maidstone {Kent}	Shirley McDonald,	01622 203751
	email shirleymcd@blueyonder.co.uk	
Midhurst	Barry Durrant	(01730) 821 479
	Viv Bell	(01730) 812362

Newcastle-on-Tyne	Ian Plagaró-Neill	(0191) 469 2778
Newent-Gloucs	John Teire	(01531) 821 902 Email: john.teire@virgin.net
Norwich	Robert Coggan	(01953) 451741
Penzance	Lee	(01736) 762 135
Portsmouth	Medhavi	(02392)732 280
Redruth	Vanessa	(01209) 214 031
Sheffield	Greg Bradshaw	(0114)262 1559 Email: greg.bradshaw@NOJUNKbtclick.com
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen	(01305) 786 821
Southampton	Robert Elliott,	023 8061 2838
Steyning-Sussex	Jayanti	(01903) 812 130
Stroud	John Groves	(07967) 777 742
Surrey-Woking	Rocana	(01483) 761 398
Taunton	Annie Fisher	(01728) 457 245
Totnes	Jerry	(01803) 840 199
Teeside	David Williams	(01642) 603 481
	John Doyle	(01642)587 274

The Bodhinyana Meditation Group

We meet in the Bodhinyana Hall at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery – from 7.30 till 9.30pm on most Wednesday evenings. Meetings are open to all and include meditation and discussion around a theme. We do not have meetings during the summer and other holiday periods. And we join the monastic Sangha on observance days. Please check the website for more details:

www.buddhacommunity.org

Community

Amaravati Monastery Contacts

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

Office Phone : 01442 842455

Retreat Information: 01442 843239

Fax: 01442 843721

For Guest Information: please write to
the Guest monk / nun or visit the web-
site at www.amaravati.org

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE: end Oct 2008

*It helps if you can send your
contributions in electronic
form, as a basic text file or in
MS Word file format, attached
to an email and sent to:
info at buddhacommunity.org*

**The Editor, Community
Newsletter
c/o Amaravati Monastery,
Great Gaddesden, Hemel
Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ**

Editorial & Production Team :

Chris Ward, Nick Carroll, Martin
Evans, Alison and Peter Moore,
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.

Mailing list and Donations

If you do not wish to remain on
the ALBA mailing list or
change your address, 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 the address
below) to cover the production
of the newsletter would be
greatly appreciated.

Email your changes to :
metta@petalmoore.net,
or post to:
ALBA , Amaravati Buddhist
Monastery, Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1
3BZ, England

**If undelivered please
return to:
AUA Community
Newsletter
C/O Amaravati
Monastery
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Herts, HP1 3BZ,
England**