

Community

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The Upasika Newsletter

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The Millennium Edition

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EDITORIAL

The End of the World

This is the last issue of Community before the new millennium starts. It feels like this should be an important time. I notice that a number of millenarian 'cults' have sprung up, based upon the idea that the year 2000 has some deep significance rather than simply being a human convention. The 'end of the world' is confidently predicted by some of these groups. The latent fear and superstition within us all does not need much to trigger it.

The measurement of time is something that we now take for granted. However, it has resulted from a long and complex process spanning much of the last 2000 years and beyond. The establishment of a common calendar has been intimately linked with religious convention. The establishment of a 'correct' annual date for Easter being a major concern for many centuries. Also, in a largely agricultural world, the right time to plant crops was also a very important consideration which could spell the difference between famine and plenty.

Some of us observe that British Summer Time (BST) shifts into 'Bhikkhu Standard Time' once one enters the gates of Amaravati. This refers to the way that the Monastic Sangha sometimes tends to be more focused upon the quality and 'rightness' of events rather than with basic punctuality. In one way this is very refreshing; in another way it can be very frustrating to those of us who are ruled by time and the need to fit in as much as possible into each day. Most of us have to live with these worldly dhammas of efficiency and productivity, targets and timescales.

The sense of spaciousness and timelessness of Amaravati and the Buddhist traditions is a wonderful antidote to our time obsession. Rather than thinking about where we

should be and where we have been and what we might do tomorrow or next year, we are brought back to the moment and the way we feel and the way our bodies are. This gives us a position to reflect upon the convention of time.

We can gradually shift from our obsessions about getting things done; being efficient; and being successful to simply - 'being'. The convention of time does not disappear, but we are no longer deluded by it.

Learning to be in the moment gives us a perspective on the worries and plans and emotions that for much of the time hold us in their thrall. In these quiet moments where we can open our hearts and be mindful, we can experience the 'end of the world' which we habitually inhabit.

So, although I have a hunch that the material world will survive into the new year I hope that for all Community readers the millennium brings with it the end of your world of sam sara.

Chris Ward, December 1999

The year 2000 will be :

2543 according to the Buddhist calendar
1997 according to Christ's actual birth circa 4 BC
2753 according to the old roman calendar
2749 according to the ancient Babylonian calendar
5760 according to the Jewish calendar
1420 according to the Moslem calendar
1378 according to the Persian calendar
1716 according to the Coptic calendar
5119 in the current Maya great cycle
208 according to the French revolutionary calendar

UPĀSAKA (masc.) / UPĀSIKĀ (fem.) lit. sitting close by, i.e Lay Adherent; is any follower who is filled with faith and has taken refuge in the Buddha, his doctrine and his community of disciples. (A.VIII, 25) His/her virtue is regarded as pure if s/he observes the 5 precepts (panca sila: s.sikkhapada). S/he should avoid the following wrong ways of livelihood : trading in arms, in living beings, meat, alcohol and poison. (A.V.177)

[We have been advised that in Pali there is no inclusive male & female plural form for lay follower/adherent. The Community Newsletter uses Upāsikā as the plural form. Editor]

Reflections on a metta retreat at Gaia House

by Brian Tucker

Reservations about attending the retreat

I have attended vipassana retreats regularly since 1978 for periods of several weeks to several months at a time. My previous experience with metta practice was limited to the occasional guided meditation during these retreats. I found myself being quite critical of the method, subjecting it to a great deal of rational analysis and finding it wanting as a 'good' meditation practice. (ie, meaning one that led to wisdom, as I saw it). Trying to follow the guided instructions only sent my mind into more activity, not less, as I often found it impossible to refrain from dismissing the metta phrases as pure 'wishful thinking'.

I also lumped metta in with the other such practices as mantras, prayers and visualisations, all of which I tended to regard suspiciously as side-shows, traps, dead-ends, or 'lower' practices than so-called 'straight' vipassana which I had fallen in love with because of its emphasis on what is immediate and obvious. I thought all concentration techniques were inferior to 'bare attention' because they essentially created an object or objects for the attention to focus on, whereas bare attention used what was already present and available to every human being. I tended to dismiss metta in particular because I equated it quite strongly with prayer, which I have seen abused in subtle and gross ways. So over the years, I developed a view of practice

that tended to downgrade the part concentration played in leading to insight (or wisdom as I use the words interchangeably).

“... I found myself being quite critical of the method”

I highly value the life of the intellect, the investigative faculty of mind (which is, after all, one of the factors of enlightenment). I saw metta as an example of trying to 'open the heart', whatever that meant, at the expense of the head. Whilst I recognised genuine moments of compassion in myself and others and paid lip service to the Buddha's upholding of both compassion and wisdom as equally important, in my mind and heart I felt suspicious of metta practice and clung to an ideal about practice that elevated the wisdom aspect.

For all these reasons, and others, I was hesitant about sitting this retreat and needed to be convinced of its potential benefits by my teachers. I anticipated I would 'secretly' have to sit there practicing vipassana while hoping no-one else could read my mind!

The experience of the retreat

This retreat was for me a perfect confirmation of the adage that nothing is as difficult as our anticipation of it. I found myself to be surprised and delighted about my ability actually to repeat the phrases over and over again. Mustering a good deal of faith in the teaching 'do the practice and let it unfold' the phrases showed me that I was being judgmental, in all kinds of ways, at many times of the day. The phrases themselves actually served as very powerful objects of attention because in and of themselves they revealed the discrepancy between being free and having a seemingly constant stream of commentaries and opinions flooding through my consciousness at any given moment.

It took some humility for me to admit that, while my critical and evaluative qualities were real strengths, I was clearly too attached to my judgements and let them roll around in my head too long. But with the metta phrases, the judgements came to an end abruptly. They just left no space in the mind for any other thoughts. I also had to admit that I had become attached to an ideal of practice about body sensations that tended to ignore just how often I was lost in thought (particularly judgmental thoughts). The metta practice showed me directly and quite clearly that my thinking was not going to stop despite all my noble intentions to just be aware of sensations. I was also able to see just how unnecessary my judgements were, how they made absolutely no difference to anything.

The phrases were also of great value in cutting through judgement and commentaries, story-lines, and what have you when I was off the meditation cushion and making eye and ear contact with people, animals and the environment.

In just a few short days I sensed a profound shift in my practice. The sense of deep appreciation for the value of samadhi arose in my mind as well as the admission that I needed much more of it if I truly wanted more wisdom to fill my life. This is perhaps one of the most important revelations about the practice that I can ever recall having. I realised much more keenly than before how truly linked wisdom and compassion are. Actually they are inseparable. I began to see how the separation I had believed to exist between them was only a creation of my own mind. The increased concentration I felt and the cutting through of the judgements showed me even more deeply the 'three characteristics of existence' that are actually apparent all around in simple ways. Seen in a fresh way, it became obvious that these judgements were impermanent, burdensome, and impersonal, not 'me' or mine'. From this insight all desire to blame myself or others just dropped away as absurd and meaningless, and compassion for myself and others arose spontaneously, effortlessly and immediately. What a wondrous quality of the mind! How remarkable that the mind, for all of us, possesses the capability of instantly being aware of the worst possible thought or reaction, holding that thought in awareness without any reaction to it whatsoever! This is the love that is at the centre of our beings. Would we blame a tree for having green leaves instead of purple ones?

I truly had the intuition that who we really are is this extraordinary

awareness that is not located anywhere, that doesn't belong to any of us, not owned or controlled by anyone, but that is our loving salvation, so to speak. The sense of waking up to the simplicity and profundity of this view was so strong that it made me, not a devotional type of person, want to get down on my knees in gratitude for what felt like divine grace. This is what the Buddha meant by the mind's natural luminosity.

Perhaps the final insight that arose answered all the objections my rational mind had held onto for so long about the goal of metta. It was inaccurate to think the main point of the phrases was to bring about results along the lines of one's sincere desire for peace and harmony. If that happened, then fine. But the important point to remember was that the phrases were used primarily for developing the intention to wish for the welfare of all as a means of discovering the connection that already exists among all beings, the fact that all beings are connected in awareness. To practice metta is to re-discover, to remember again and again this connection, to pierce the illusions of separateness. Keeping this in mind ends a lot of useless agitation and reactions to this practice. In my own understanding, the practice reminds me of karma yoga, where one does what is necessary without being concerned about the results. 'Cast your bread upon the waters,' as the Bible says. This ethic is at the heart of living and acting in a wise and compassionate way in this world. The practice has highlighted the all-embracing power of intention in life, and especially in meditation, where it is often the only factor of mind one can speak about having any control over.

Recommendation of this retreat to other vipassana practitioners

I suspect I am not the first vipassana practitioner to have had such a bias against metta. For anyone who has my type of personality, who has done a lot of insight practice but still feels dissatisfied and frustrated hearing how necessary it is to open one's heart; for anyone who can't quite articulate what he or she might sense is a limitation in practice; or for those honest enough to know that excessive judgement prevents a deepening of understanding, especially the understanding of selflessness, then I wholeheartedly urge that person to attend such a retreat. Metta does not make one a 'namby-pamby'. It is quite a sublime practice that has taught me a lot and opened new vistas. I intend to incorporate it consistently in my practice.

The Four Brahma Viharas

**Accumulation of knowledge
will not bring peace.
Cultivate loving kindness
for all that lives.
Give compassion
to those who suffer.
Greet with joy
all beauty which gives
gladness. And view
with equanimity
the impermanence of creation.
Its nature is to arise and cease.
Turn to the emptiness
of the deathless,
and realise peace.**

Catherine Hewitt

• Samye Ling •

An artists view

My recent visit to Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Scotland was the result of a two year fascination with Tibetan vajrayana practice. Like the Theravadin practice, which I have followed for about 12 years now, it is focused on stilling the mind through watching the flow of the in - breath and the out - breath, and noticing the wandering mind settle to create a space where insight and understanding can arise.

This, my third and longest visit to Samye Ling - my first being two introductory weekend workshops - helped me to further my understanding of the place and the practice.

The temple itself is a close reconstruction of the original Samye Ling Temple in Tibet, for centuries the home of the Kagyu tradition, which had to be abandoned with the invasion of the Chinese in 1959. A perfect spot in the valley of the river Esk in Dumfriesshire was acquired for the building, surrounded by hills and tributaries of the river. Driving up from London the noticeable thing on arrival was the clarity of the air, and on the rare occasions when the sun shone, the light was dazzlingly bright. Indeed, brilliant light and colour form a large part of the Tibetan culture, and the Temple is full of colour and ornate decoration which reflects Tibet's land of bright sunlight where where, I am told, vivid colour is the norm.

Once the eye has adjusted to the exotic interior, what remains is a deep feeling of calm, solemnity and warmth. The Tibetan meditation that I was introduced to on my first visit involved visualisations of colour and light which I responded to easily as an artist, and which I have combined with the practice that I have learnt over the years at Amaravati. These exercises have given my mind a flexibility that I lacked before, allowing thoughts and images to flow and change within a calm inner space, which I find increasingly relaxing and peaceful. All the crystal clear colours of diamond white light, ruby red light, azure blue light, brilliant golden yellow light and emerald green light are engaged with, and within this, one slowly transforms the grey, negative, dreary mental states, perhaps in much the same way that Jung likened the alchemical nature of psychoanalysis to that of turning base metals into gold.

The shrine room at Samye Ling is studded with gold, as well as brilliant pure colour, mainly red, and it is lit by a central crystal chandelier that splits the natural clear white light that can sometimes beam into the room through the south facing windows and skylights into it's clear rainbow essence. Large tangkas depicting the lives of the Buddhas and great Tibetan teachers hang on the walls of the temple, and this time I was much more aware of the enormous sense of tranquillity that the images convey through the colour and spacing within them.

Apparently the kagyu painting style is well known for it's distinctive style and beauty, and they owe the continuation of their great heritage to Sherab, an elderly and extremely frail Tibetan monk who lives at Samye Ling, and who I was told is the greatest living artist of the kagyu tradition alive today. He is too frail to paint now, but he directs the placing of every element within the paintings. I was fortunate to meet Heinz, a young German artist who has been Sherab's apprentice for a while now, and who very kindly showed me around their studio. Two tangkas were in the process of being painted, both very unfinished, but the one that was less so was already three years in the making, and had been commissioned for the refurbishment of a monastery in Tibet. After the simple elegance of the new temple at Amaravati, Samye Ling appears almost garish by comparison, that is, until you begin to realise the enormous significance and meaning of its form to the practice of this very special branch of Mahayana Buddhism.

Anna Badar Nov 98

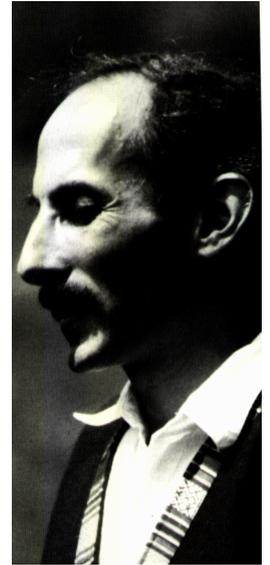
For anyone interested in visiting Samye Ling the address to write to for information is:

*Kagyu Samye Ling Tibetan Centre
Eskdalemuir
near Langholm
Dumfriesshire
Scotland DG13 0QL
Tel: 013873 73232*

An Interview with Jack Kornfield

By Jonathon Hill

Jonathon Hill caught up with Jack Kornfield at the Amaravati Temple opening in July. An international Buddhist teacher and author, Jack first met Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Chah during his time with the Peace Corps in Thailand in 1967. Since then he has returned to the East over 12 times to deepen his experience of Dhamma, ordaining in India and then with Ajahn Chah in 1982. He is one of the founding members of the International Meditation Centre in Barre and Spirit Rock in California, as well as holding his own psychotherapeutic practice. He is married with one daughter.



JH: *How did you get interested in psychotherapy?*

JK: I came back from being a monk in Thailand and returned to graduate school to learn Western psychotherapy because I was interested in understanding the heart and the mind from a western perspective. I also wanted to understand what had happened to me in Buddhist training. I had gone into the monastery with a lot of suffering from my painful family situation, and many westerners are the same. They come to practice gravely wounded in certain ways, and I wanted to understand how to work with that in the Western context.

Now, I don't make a big division between Buddhism and Psychotherapy. I see that the best of Western psychology is really a practice of awareness that's done between two people instead of just one, because there are certain fears or pains or delusions that are very hard for us to see on our own, or to touch on our own. When you go to some of the core wounds that some people carry, even in meditation, it's possible to get some samadhi and skip over them.

Of course, we know it is often most skilful to practice meditation alone. But sometimes, when we get stuck in our most fearful areas, it really requires someone to ask you questions: "How do you feel that in your body?" or "Tell me the story of that," and then you begin to look at those questions, of what you are attached to as your own identity. The deep question in therapy, if it's very good, is, "Is that who we really are?". We carry these deep wounds and pain, and in wise therapy we're not just rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic before it sinks. Our therapists' questions should be: "Do you believe

yourself to be this?" That is Dhamma practice - are you clinging to that identity, or can you feel the pain, the suffering, the defensiveness, the story with wisdom.

Rather than speak of meditation and psychotherapy as separate worlds, I would prefer to describe them as universal and personal levels of practice. One aspect of Dharma is universal where one sees everything as Anicca, Dukka, and Anatta*. But if you saw only Anicca, Dukka and Anatta, you'd become very detached, so you couldn't also tend to the new monks and nuns who come in the monastery and experience their sadness of loss or their excitement or joy. If you couldn't tend to the particulars and the personal, it would be a very one-sided practise.

So to fulfil freedom, there is the universal level, but there's also the particular level of freedom, in our own history, in our body, its aging and suffering, and in our own psyche. What are the identities that we cling to, and how can we learn very personally to respect our history and find freedom in its midst? In that way, I see it's not a limited level called psychology, it's personal work, and everybody who wants to be free has to do the work of the universal Dhamma and the personal Dhamma.

JH *In my experience, I did quite a lot of psychotherapy and counselling before I came to Buddhism, I found that the danger is that it's too intellectually directed so you only get an idea of what suffering might be..*

JK This is not a very good question because it lacks discrimination. It's like saying that Buddhism is too intellectual. In Sri Lanka, Burma or Thailand there are many monks I met, and

monasteries I went to, where they didn't know much about actually living the teaching. How many monasteries do you think have a very deep commitment toward liberation in this life in Thailand? Probably a small percentage. How many forms of psychotherapy have that same kind of depth? Only a certain portion. If you go to Thailand and you want to go meditate or become a monk or live the holy life, as a westerner you seek out the great Ajahns, don't you? You go for Ajahn Chah or Ajahn Mahabooha or Mahasi Sayadaw or Goenka or someone that everybody respects as a teacher of liberation. It's exactly the same in Western psychology. There are a lot of nice counsellors who vaguely try to help you....

JH: *There is a danger that people follow the medical model, that a doctor was someone who you really respected and you just did what he said..*

JK: But that's bad psychotherapy. Do you go to a monastery and do whatever any monk says if he says: "You should give up your family, abandon your wife and children because they're 'suffering' and come and live in this monastery with me"? That may not be the right teaching for that person.

It's a very naive question to make a comparison in that way. I have experienced very kind and wise teachers and Ajahns in all the traditions: Thai, Tibetan, Burmese, etc. They may not be the majority, but they exist and are

wonderful. They carry the light of the Dharma for people who are interested in freeing the heart of greed, hatred, and delusion in this very life. I have also sought out some of the wisest of the western healers of the heart, and they too are not intellectual or overly directive. This may not be what you commonly find in your corner counselling. There is a problem, because if you blindly say people need counselling or psychotherapy, they don't need bad counselling or psychotherapy. At times they need wise psychotherapy. In the same way, at times we need a wise meditation teacher. Not just the corner store New Age variety, but teaching with depth.

You need to find those skilful means which help you to develop Sila, Samadhi, Panna, which help you to free your heart from greed, hatred and delusion, whatever means those are. The truth is, a lot of people do psychotherapy and then come to meditation because the psychotherapy they had was not good enough to free them. Equally true, many long-term meditators, in robes or not, will do Dhamma practice and then turn to good psychotherapy because they need that to complement meditation. Some don't do either of these, and some do both. There are also people who, after doing very austere practice, go and do devotional practices. What their heart needs is to go and sing. For them the skilful means may be to go to India and be with Anandamayama. These are all skilful means. When you make a comparison of what's right, it can only be what is the skilful means for one human being. So one has to look in one's heart and see what's needed to be free, and then look at the resources around and use them.

To look down on therapy as low-level practice is ignorance. But you know there's no lack of prejudice in Buddhism. You often find it between one Sayadaw or Ajahn and another, or their communities, a tremendous amount of prejudice and it isn't anything to do with Buddhism. It's the nature of samsara, it's the human heart. However, when you became wiser, you let go of that; that's all. It's really simple.

JH: *It is simple but it's so hard to do.*

JK: It's hard to do...? Yes, but it's not

as hard if you have wise teachers, if you have someone who models it like Ajahn Chah, who shows an extraordinary open-mindedness, or like the Dalai Lama. Then you realise.."aah!..this is possible!" When you take refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, that's what Sangha means - that there's somebody who shows you that freedom of the heart is actually possible.

JH: *Is that what having a teacher is about, having a guru?..*

JK: Not a guru, but a master, a spiritual friend, someone who shows you by their being, by their words, that it is possible to be free.

'That's what Sangha means - that there's somebody who shows you that freedom of the heart is actually possible.'

JH: *Should you have one teacher? Should you limit yourself to one teacher at a time?*

JK: Should you only have one girlfriend? Should you get married and should you never get divorced?

JH: *OK, you should only have one girlfriend at a time. But should you only have one teacher at a time, or did you accept influences from different teachers?*

JK: A better way to ask such a question would be, "What's a skilful relationship to teachers?" For many people, it's useful to have one teacher for a time until they get established in the practice, anything more would be confusing. However, if you look honestly at the practices of most Westerners, they have benefited from having more than one teacher at some point in their lives, sometimes within the same tradition or sometimes from a different tradition, whether it's Japanese or Chinese Zen or Tibetan Buddhism. This is a question of skilful means. For certain temperaments it's really helpful to have just one teacher for quite a long time,

and just get solid with that. For others, it's more helpful to hear the Dhamma in two or three voices to help sort out the difference between the personality speaking and the essential Dhamma that's underneath. Those things that lead you to letting go of views and opinions, to letting go of suffering are helpful.

JH: *Is enlightenment only possible in a monastery?*

JK : That's kind of a limited question. That's like asking if you can only be free if you live in England! If enlightenment is freedom from Greed, Hatred and Delusion, then to say it's limited to a place would be a very limited understanding of freedom. Does anybody around here believe that enlightenment's only possible in a monastery?

JH: *I think there is a tendency towards that view in great respect to the monks and nuns and their commitment to the Dhamma and perhaps an undervaluing of people in lay life trying to achieve that.*

JK: I don't know what happens in this community, I can't comment on that. But I would say that we lay teachers were really beautifully received here. I'm really excited about seeing Ajahn Sumedho, who is my oldest Dhamma friend from Asia, and see how the whole community has blossomed. I haven't felt any sense of comparison or lack of respect. Yesterday (the Saturday Open Day) it was very interesting to have lay teachers, even a lay woman up giving Dhamma talks with all the monks there. In Thailand and Burma there is commonly a belief that the people doing serious Dhamma practice for liberation are those in robes. Lay people's role is primarily to support the monks and make merit so that in future lives they might be able to do the same thing. That's the custom.

However, as everyone knows, in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka, only a tiny portion - perhaps 1% or 2%, of the monks or nuns meditate. For a large part the practices are other forms, the practices of study, of teaching, of generosity and Sila (discipline) and at least the practice of letting go. But in the West, people don't want to come to the monastery and put food in the bowls and only do devotional practices to the

monks and nuns. They actually are very interested in the same practices as many of the ordained sangha, those that free you from greed, hatred and delusion. So the lay people are undertaking the practices of Dana, Sila, Bhavana (generosity, discipline, Mental Development) as the monks and nuns do. And anybody who practices Sila, samadhi and panna will find Enlightenment, that's how it works, it's very simple.

JH: *How relevant do you think monasticism is in the west as opposed to centres like yours at Spirit Rock or IMS in the States or Gaia House here in England?*

JK: It is said traditionally that Buddhism is not completely planted in a new culture until all aspects of lay and monastic practice for both men and women are available, so I would hate to ask a question like that which made a comparison. It's like saying how relevant are apples to oranges or trains to cars. I feel one of the great blessings of our tradition is that it's very broad and very rich and it has a thousand skilful means for fostering Dharma: Sila, Samadhi, Panna, Bhavana in many different forms. There are hundreds of different meditation practices. There are 50 kinds of ways to do Vipassana that are popular right now in Burma or Thailand, with another 50 or 100 that are not so popular.

It is really a blessing to have monastic life for those who are drawn to it, and for those who support it or are inspired and nourished by it. I can see that it is growing, and truly hope it will flourish in the West. For many, just to see a monk or a nun is a reminder of a sense of renunciation that touches the heart so that realisation is possible. The monks and nuns are one of the four heavenly messengers. I also believe that diversity is what makes Buddhism in the West particularly interesting, and that even in just one generation, there is a growing respect for that diversity.

In Tibet, if you talk to the old guys from the mountains, they say, "Ah, the Hinayanists in Burma or Thailand, they never really get enlightened." And if you talk to some Burmese they say (though this is an ignorant stereotype) that Tibetan Buddhism is some form of

distorted Hindu practice where they do sex instead of meditation. In Japan, Zen students say the Theravadins are very limited and the Tibetans have too much complexity, and neither go right to the heart of enlightenment. But here in the West, we see for the first time in two thousand years these traditions actually meeting, talking and learning from each other, and we witness this opening of Amaravati as a celebration of this. In that same spirit, lay practitioners and monastic practitioners who are devoting their lives to Sila, Samadhi, Panna are learning from each other - they are all very important.

JH: *That's the thing that confused me when I first came across Buddhism. There is this great tradition of acceptance and openness and yet each tradition was saying "we are the right way."*

JK: Even within Buddhist countries, many Ajahns and the Sayadaws put each other down and say the other teachers don't really understand; my way is the best one. But you know that's just delusion.

JH: *Right, right but these people are supposed to be trying to get away from that and they're still.....*

JK: Yes, but one of the wonderful things to see, if you look at the nature of wisdom, is that some dimensions of us awaken before others. We can be awake in some areas and still have other areas of greed, hatred and delusion that aren't so conscious. Anybody who has practised for just one retreat can figure that out. Once you realise that, your practice becomes not one of comparison, but of looking into each day and each moment at where the clinging is and the attachment, and where the possibility of freedom lies.

JH: *What has Buddhism got to say about our relationship with the environment?*

JK: It's very simple. The fundamental teachings of Buddhism are the teachings of interdependence. Interdependent arising is at the root of all Buddhist understanding. The best Western ecologists also understand that we are interdependent. Buddhism offers ecologists a new language and philosophy for this truth. But better than that, it offers a

way of practice, of transforming the ecology of the heart, which can extend our interdependence as wisdom and compassion with one another and with all life.

JH: *You see ecology is almost an embracing of Buddhist principles, moving away from a "them and us" concept of man and nature*

JK: But again we get into this interesting paradox, because a lot of the Buddhist countries are not ecologically minded, in fact horribly not so, and even meditation monasteries are not terribly ecological in certain cases, so would you say.....

JH: *No...I want to ask what has Buddhism got to say..*

JK: It goes both ways, honey!! Buddhist teachings of interdependence have wonderful things to offer to Western ecology. But Western ecology also has big things to teach Buddhism. That's the truth. Underlying it is the freedom from Greed, Hatred and Delusion, to live an ecological existence (sic) is to be free from the small sense of self and to understand the interdependence of all that lives. And these are different languages and skilful means for awakening.

JH: *Thank you very much.*



INTO THE WEST: AN IRISH RETREAT CENTRE FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM

When I first visited the recently opened Amaravati Buddhist Monastery (then known as a Buddhist Centre) in May 1986, I can still remember the image which came to me when I sat down to meditate in the draughty ex-school canteen meditation hall. It was the vision of a beautiful white lotus flowering on a windswept hillside. This is the way the dhamma manifests in the chilly north I thought. Indeed, the privations of those early Amaravati years have now entered the stuff of legend: water freezing in bhikkhu's glasses overnight as they meditated in their kutis; zealous young novices taking early morning plunges in the ice-covered swimming pool (now lotus pond); Dr Zhivago style journeys across the frozen Chiltern tundra to bleak Berkhamsted.

The Gulf Stream lapped West Coast of Ireland with its 'soft' (Irish euphemism for damp and rainy) Atlantic climate may seem a world away from the rigours of Southeast England in winter, but the new Sunyata Retreat Centre which Stan and Clare de Freitas (with a little help from their friends - including the present writer) have established in the rolling hills of East Clare captures much of Amaravati's early pioneering spirit. True, there are as yet no resident monks or nuns, but that may soon change once the ever creative Stan (a skilled carpenter and builder) constructs the first of the Early Christian-style beehive huts to shelter visiting monastics and lay meditators next summer. More imminent still, however, is the prospect of the completion of Ireland's first Buddhist meditation hall which has been under construction since last October. This remarkable half-timber and stone building has been rising up rapidly on what was once a pigsty, and now commands the most stunning views over the wide panorama of the plain of Ennis with the mighty Shannon (the British Isles longest river) to the south and the exquisitely flowered moonscape of the Burren to the north. Spectacular sunsets turn skies to beaten copper as the shadow of evening races out across the storm-tossed Atlantic, while in the valley below the sheen of East Clare's many loughs glint an ancient gold.

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(Cheques should be made

shattered lives. Already the first one-day and weekend retreats have been held under the guidance of experienced teachers from a wide variety of Buddhist and other traditions. On 24-26 March, Sr Elaine MacInnes OLM, a Catholic nun and zen *roshi* (in the Sambo Kyodan lineage) will be coming out from the UK to take the centre's first Christian-Buddhist retreat and places are still available. This will be followed in April by a series of one-day meditation sessions given by Bhikkhu Bodhidhamma from Burmese (Mahesi Sayadaw) tradition. Later, on 21 July Luong Por Sumedho will be coming out to officially inaugurate the Dharma Hall. So the millennium calendar is already filling up. Soon Sunyata (from the Pali for the spaciousness behind all form and the original Gaelic *sneacht* [the place where the snow lingers the longest] which is the name of the local townland or territorial division) will be fully operational with self-catering accommodation for family holidays and personal retreats, and the possibility of children's summer camps in a few years' time.

From the first Sunyata was conceived as a spiritual resource for the 21st century, a place for lay people interested in practising the dhamma and incorporating the teachings in their daily lives. Much still needs to be done and for this we need your help. Traditionally lay supporters provide the financial means whereby the dharma can flourish. In Ireland, where such lay support is still thin on the ground, this is even more important. We are thus inviting you to give generously to ensure that our vision for Sunyata can be fully realised. Here is the time to make an investment in the new millennium by supporting a centre which will soon be truly open to the world!

Peter Carey

Stanley or Clare de Freitas,
Sunyata Retreat Centre,
Sixmilebridge,
Co. Clare, Ireland
(Tel: 00-353-61-367073;
email: sunyata_ireland@hotmail.com)

LETTERS



shortcoming of Buddhism...(is that it) does not set out the prerequisite development stages necessary to practice beneficially". Perhaps this could be explored further?

Anu Padayachi

Feedback on the July Study Day

Dear Ed, I wanted to thank everybody who attended the Upasika day, all of the monastic sangha and the facilitators for being part of such an enjoyable experience. A day which has lifted my practice, contributed to my learning and provided me with so many reasons to continue with Right effort on the path. In addition, concerning the request for feedback on the day – I'd like to say that the relaxed, reflective and flexible approach, by giving responsibility to individuals and consideration to the whole group was an excellent format.

Gary Moore July 99

"Allies or Enemies"?

Dear Ed, I found the the article "Allies or Enemies - the meeting of the Dhamma and Psychotherapy" by Marijke Acket (see previous issue) illuminating and very useful. Her views and explanations have helped me understand the 'Western mind' much better. After all, everything that arises does so in dependence on conditions and the birth, and the growth of psychotherapy in the West is in answer to a need.

I liked the presentation of the two approaches i.e. "strengthening the (healthy?) sense of Self (Psychotherapy)" and the "realisation of no-self (Buddhism)" as "two ends of the same continuum...". Altogether a very good article. But I did find a negative - and I think it lies in the sentence "Perhaps... the

(Editors Note: Would anyone like to respond to this request?)

Autumn leaves falling

One night of rain has spread
a pool of sun around her plum
 'It's useless'
 'It bears no fruit'
'Only moss will grow in its shade'
 I cut it down at the root
Pile the sturdy branches behind the shed
 Just a pool of leaves
 And my mother making tea
 A pool of yellow leaves
 And my mother
 Another year lies on the floor
And my mother - like a wounded animal
Tells how bitter are life's last sweet drops

And all I can give is my time
And all I can do ... is listen

Martin Evans

The Concrete Buddha that 'Walked'

From our northern crime correspondent

The co-ordinator of a Hexham Buddhist group is appealing for the return of a concrete Buddha which was stolen from his garden.

The 22-inch statue was taken from outside Robert Bluck's home in Tynedale Terrace, Hexham, which is also the meeting place of the Buddhist Group, late at night on Wednesday.

Mr Bluck who has had the figure for two years said: "It helps to create a very nice atmosphere in the garden. It has the same value to me as a figure of Christ would have to a Christian.

"I am more interested in seeing the Buddha again than seeing someone punished. I don't know how whoever took it managed to carry it away. It is made of concrete and is on a concrete plinth so it is very heavy. But both the plinth and statue have the postcode on them so I am hopeful that I might get them back".

Cave in the Snow: A Western Woman's Quest for Enlightenment.

Author: Vicki Mackenzie. Publisher: Bloomsbury

Book Reviews

This is the story of how a working class English woman from the East End of London came to live and survive alone in a tiny cave high up in the Himalayas, sitting for 12 years in almost continuous meditation with virtually no other human contact. Anyone who has romantic notions about this kind of endeavour will soon be disillusioned by this amazing story. Vicki Mackenzie describes how Tenzin Palmo found the inner resources to cope with this degree of prolonged isolation; how she coped with extremes of temperature and the trauma and hardship of this existence and the fruits of such a path, driven by a fierce determination to achieve enlightenment.

This time living alone close to the earth and surrounded by beauty was a constant source of joy for Tenzin. However, equally fascinating is the account of the journey which led her to this place. From her childhood vision of becoming a nun, through the obstacles she overcame to reach India in 1964; the power and poignancy of the meeting with her first guru, (both parties recognising each other from many lifetimes before), to her struggle, as a young woman, with

ordination and its lifetime commitment, her single mindedness is quite awesome.

Most moving of all, and a constant theme throughout the book, is Tenzin's account of the pain, isolation, struggle and suffering she experienced in the face of exclusion, prejudice and often hostile attitudes she met from the monastic tradition, simply because she was a woman. This suffering was clearly harder to bear than the trials of the cave. Tenzin does not pull her punches when describing how she was treated.

The ingrained patriarchal belief, that women are not capable of enlightenment *, initially enraged her and then became an inexhaustible source of fuel which fed the flames of her determination and vow to achieve freedom in female form, however many lifetimes it took.

Having experienced the 'unadulterated patriarchy' of Tibetan monastic life, Tenzin's time in the cave served to strengthen her resolve. She came out of the mountains in 1988 to face her life's work, to create a monastery where women can practise and support each other in their quest for enlightenment

A truly humbling and inspiring book, for men and women alike. Read it.

Chris Blain October 1999

** eds note: the Buddha considered both women and men equally capable of enlightenment*

Buddhas Back to Front

Appeal

We would like to reprint 1000 copies of Venerable Kusalo's childrens book - Buddhas Back to Front. Each copy costs 40p so we need £400 to sponsor this.

CAN YOU HELP?

*If so please send donations to:
AUA Publications Appeal,
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great
Gaddesden, Hertfordshire. HP1 3BZ
Cheques made payable to: English Sangha Trust - indicating the
cheque is to sponsor Buddhas Back to Front*



AUA NEWS

Welcome to Santoshni Perrera who was elected. to the AUA Committee at the recent AGM.

The next **AUA committee meeting** will be held on the **19th February 2000** at Amaravati ; all are welcome.

A new committee will be elected next May. Any AUA member who wishes to be considered for the committee should send their name and address to : AUA Elections, c/o Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Herts.

The Amaravati
Upasika Association
Committee members
(in alphabetic order) are to the right:

Bandu Amarawardena, Vicky Assling,
Anna Badar, Nick Carroll, Alex Clingan,
Jeffrey Craig, Martin Evans, Tony Fisher,
Radmila Herrmann, Keith Matthews,
Santoshni Perrera, Colin Rae,
Tony Spinks, Chris Ward, Gill Williamson.



The three signs of being identifies dukkha - suffering , anicca - impermanence and anatta - not-self as central truths of our human experience. How can we relate to these key teachings and what do they mean to us? Can they continue to provide meaning in the new millenium?

What understanding can you offer to others? What can you learn from others? Come and explore this theme in silence and in conversation
at the

lay week-end retreat at

AMARAVATI

24 - 26th March 2000

‘The Three Signs of Being’

All are welcome

For booking forms and programmes please send S.A.E. to AUA, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. HP1 3BZ

If you have specific questions please contact Nick Carroll on 0181 740 9748 or Chris Ward on 01442 890034

Connections

CHITHURST

It hardly seems possible that once again we are fast approaching another winter retreat, with its all-pervading tangible hush - that familiar cloak of silence which enfolds, shelters and supports that vital core of concentration and dedication.

Gone will be the muted voices of daily exchange - communication for the most part temporarily suspended in the interests of sustained application, a sacrifice to the need for a turning within rather than a turning without.

Lay Forums have been (hopefully) revitalised after having sunk a little into the mire of apathy. After a recent review of the current format and a sharper focus on their structure and purpose, it is hoped that more people will come forward to 'take the chair' and offer to be speakers.

The Kathina Ceremony, truly blessed by superb autumn weather proved a warm and joyous occasion. This year, the greater use of English with the Pali, and a more detailed step by step account of the unfolding ceremony hopefully engendered a deeper appreciation and thereby a greater sense of individual participation.

Ajahns Karuniko and Candasiri are away now from Cittaviveka for varying periods of time, leaving Ajahn Sucitto to cope as he puts it, with a 'stretched Equanimity Paramitta' (whilst recognising, nevertheless, that 'life is like this').

Although there are no plans at present to specifically celebrate the arrival of the 2nd millenium, there will be the customary puja and desana on New Year's Eve. (Dec. 31st), when due acknowledgement is given to this unremitting cycle of birth and death, arising and ceasing. This will be followed on the afternoon of Sat. Jan.1st., by the popular and much appreciated ceremony of "Resolution and Renewal", - the individual and collective taking of the Three Refuges and Five Precepts...

Details: Barry Durrant 01730 821479

HARTRIDGE

Details of all events from the monastery or Paul Woods, 01404 831605

HARNHAM

The August Picnic and New Year ceremonies are now long standing traditions at Harnham. Along with Wesak and Kathina, they focus the energies of the lay sangha and provide an opportunity to spend more informal time with the monastic sangha as well as meet up with old friends.

This August the picnic was based in the north Pennines at Burn Law, the nearby Bah'ai community. We arrived from all directions, some coming from as far afield as Lancashire, bringing partners, friends, children - and one dog. The weather had turned overnight from a hot sunny Saturday to a cool windy, Sunday. Undeterred, blankets and mats were spread by the river and an interesting array of food emerged from plastic containers and silver foil before the monks chanted the formal blessing.

Traditionally, the meal is followed by a walk, so the more hardy (or foolhardy!) set off in crocodile formation on a route which took us up onto the moor and encompassed Monks Wood, passing Monks Farm on the way. At one point a steady nerve was called for as a herd of heifers, fascinated by this single file of multifarious humans trudging diagonally across their field, frisked and pressed close. However there were other less alarming distractions. It was intriguing to watch the monastics adopt differing strategies to negotiate boggy patches. Some picked nimbly around the edges to avoid the wet whilst those shod in flip flops squelched straight through with considerable equanimity. Even more intriguing was how certain samaneras managed to keep their clothes so white and apparently unscathed throughout - a silicone spray or psychic powers?

Whilst some might say the highlight of the day was getting to the end of the walk in one piece, the true highlight was the opportunity to meet so many different people, some whom had no contact with the monastery previously. Truly a day of community and friendship.

On New Years Eve there will be another opportunity to gather together in the stillness of Harnham. Rituals of previous years may be repeated, for example burning lists of those who have harmed us to symbolize forgiveness and rebirth. It is also planned that we will be invited to write memorium for those we have lost so that these can be plastered into the walls of the new retreat building. Everyone is welcome.

For more information about events at the monastery:

Contacts: *Marion Keay 01388 817974*

Mike Downham 01697 748214

AMARAVATI

New Year Peace Vigil 28th Dec - 3rd Jan

Over the new year there will be a 7 day peace vigil. Those interested in staying at Amaravati should contact the office.

Purchase of Field

The possibility of purchasing a field next to Amaravati is being investigated. This would form the basis of a new wooded area. If you are interested in being involved contact :

Nick Carroll - 0181 740 9748

School Visits

Some of you will know that for a number of years there has developed a growing relationship between Amaravati and schools in the surrounding counties. Venerable Kusalo has been the driving force behind this and has organised one school visit per week to Amaravati during Autumn and Spring each year. This has made many children and teachers aware of what a special place Amaravati is and hopefully to appreciate a little more about Buddhist practice. Opening Amaravati to children is a good way of encouraging the integration of Buddhist practice into English culture.

However, in accordance with anicca, Venerable Kusalo will be going to mid-Wales for a sabbatical commencing in mid-December. This leaves the organisation of school visits in need of new support. Hopefully by the time you read this, some office support to handle school queries and arrangements will have been agreed. However, this still leaves the need for some help to escort and guide school groups around Amaravati. If any of you wish to give a little time to this worthwhile venture please contact me ...Chris Ward....

c/o Amaravati or by email to C.

Ward@btinternet.com

Story Page

Skilful Intoxication?

Jack woke up, showered and ate a light breakfast. He prepared some 'x' to wake himself up and because he knew that he was going to have to concentrate and work hard to prepare a report he took a tablet of 'y' which he had found gave him energy and concentration. During the day Jack made good progress with his report, he drank quite a lot of 'z' and by the end of the afternoon had finished. He set off for home and when he arrived decided he needed something to relax. So he mixed himself an 'a' and drank it on the patio. Later he went to a dance club with his partner Sally. Before he went he took some 'b'. Jack found that this both relaxed him and gave him the energy to really enjoy the music and dancing. After an enjoyable evening, Jack returned home and took some 'c' to help him sleep.

The following morning Jack's right knee was quite sore. He had probably twisted it during the dancing. So he took some 'd' which he found quite effective at reducing pain. Just as he was leaving to visit his parents he realised that yesterday he had forgotten to take his regular tablet of 'e'. So he took one this morning, knowing that he did not wish to lapse into depression again. He wondered whether it was time to come off these tablets. He felt pretty good much of the time now. Later in the day Bill came round and suggested that they both have a smoke of 'f' and some 'g' whilst talking about old times. Later in the afternoon Jack realised he had become quite intoxicated from having 'g' with Bill. But it had been good to have a chat with his old friend and share some concerns. Jack decided he would have to cut down on his intake of 'f'. It was an expensive habit and not really good for his health, although he did find it

made socialising so much easier and more enjoyable. Sally then arrived home and later that evening suggested that Jack take 'h' before they went to bed.

Now this tale is exaggerated, but the question is...*without knowing what these substances are*, is Jack's behaviour in taking them immoral or unskilful? Is it immoral for all of them or only for some of them? And if so why?

Now does it make a difference if we substitute the following for the 'letters' above..?

x = tea; y = ginseng; z = coffee; a = gin and tonic; b = caffeine tablets; c = cocoa; d = paracetamol; e = valerian; f = cigars; g = beer; h = chamomile tea

Does it now make a moral difference if we substitute the following substances for the 'letters' above...?

x = coffee; y = cocaine; z = coca cola; a = whisky; b = ecstasy; c = kava; d = cannabis; e = prozac; f = cigarettes; g = marijuana; h = viagra

There is certainly a legal difference, and also in some cases a different health impact...but what about moral impact?? Does it depend upon intention? Is any intention to alter our current mind state through chemical means a spiritually unskilful one? Or...are some intentions to use substances to alter our mind/body state skilful?

Chris Ward

NOTICES

COMMUNITY ON THE INTERNET

This Newsletter and other Upasika information can now be found on the internet at:-
<http://www.triplegem.com>
or <http://www.btinternet.com/~upasika/>
or <http://members.tripod.com/upasika/>

Meditation/study groups

(see Forest Sangha Newsletter for main list)

CAMBRIDGE: Amaravati Group
Meets fortnightly and arranges visits to Amaravati.
Contact: Dan Jones: 01223 246257

HEXHAM: Meditation/discussion Group-
with taped talks or readings from dhamma books.
Meets Wednesdays 7.30pm at 10 Tynedale Terrace,
Contact Robert Bluck 01434 602759

WATFORD: Meditation/discussion Group
Meets Thursdays 7pm at 26 Lambert Court,
Bushey Grove Road.
Contact: Ruth 01923 462902 or 253650

Editorial & Production Team :

Chris Ward, Chris Blain,
Nick Carroll, Robert Brown,
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.

What does it mean to be a Buddhist?

In future Community issues we want to include short observations from practising Buddhists, plus your five top 'tips' for the aspiring Buddhist. What teachings, books or events did you find most valuable when you were finding out about Buddhism?

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE:

29th February

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

RING: Chris Ward, Tel: 01442 890034

E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com

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

The Upasika Training Guidelines

Purpose.

- * To enhance individual practice and increase self-discipline through making a formal commitment.
- * To deepen both the intellectual and experiential understanding of the Dhamma.
- * To encourage more contact with the monastic Sangha and like-minded people.
- * To be better equipped to communicate the Buddha's Teachings to others.

Guidelines

- * Undertake to live by the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts.
- * Attend regular meetings whenever possible with other Upasikas.
- * Observe the Uposatha days of the full and new moons in a way appropriate to individual living situations
- * To visit the local monastery or vihara on a regular basis
- * To cultivate the practice of regular daily meditation.
- * To go on retreat at least once a year.
- * To attend at least one festival day or communal gathering each year.
- * Cultivate a basic knowledge of the Buddha's teachings
- * To support the monastic Sangha according to ones means
- * To keep to the guidelines for one year after making the formal commitment

AMARAVATI LAY EVENTS - 2000

The Amaravati Upasika Association organises a series of Study Days and weekend retreats. These are open to all who have some experience of meditation and wish to develop their practice further.

Day Events (no booking required)

22nd April 'Enjoyment'

27th May 'Sorrow, Lamentation, Pain, Grief and Despair'

1st July What does it mean to be a Buddhist?

18th Nov Topic to be confirmed

Weekend Events (please send SAE to the AUA at Amaravati for booking form)

24 - 26 Mar Three Signs of Being
(Weekend Retreat)

29th Sep - 1st Oct The Three Fires
(Weekend Retreat)

For further information please contact either:

Nick Carroll 0181 7409748 or

Chris Ward 01442 890034



The Bodhinyana Group

Wednesdays 7.30 – 9.30 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. The Spring 2000 meetings are:

12 Jan - The End of the World

19 Jan - Basic Buddhism - Meditation

26 Jan - Intoxication

2 Feb - Awareness - Knowing Oneself

9 Feb - Is it possible to lead a simple life?

16 Feb - Buddhism - a Way of Life?

23 Feb - No Personality? - Try Anatta!

1 Mar - Respect, Devotion and Worship

8 Mar - Basic Buddhism - Sutta Study

15 Mar - Where is our practice going?

22 Mar - Irritation, Anger, Rage, Hatred

29 Mar - Spiritual Friends - Kalyanamitta

5 Apr - Basic Buddhism - Tangkas - Bring an Artifact

12 Apr - Rebirth

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 890034

Radmilla Herrmann 01494 864905

IBAP Conference

Institute of Buddhist Analysis and
Psychotherapy

4-6th February 2000

Buckden Towers Retreat Centre

The conference is open to anyone who has an interest in the therapeutic potential of Buddhism. It is not necessary to be an IBAP member or a therapist. Buckden is a beautiful retreat centre in Cambridgeshire.

Cost: IBAP Registered Members £85
Non-Members £95

For booking details contact :

IBAP c/o 4E Dells Road, Chingford, London,
E4 7TN