



Community

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The Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 9

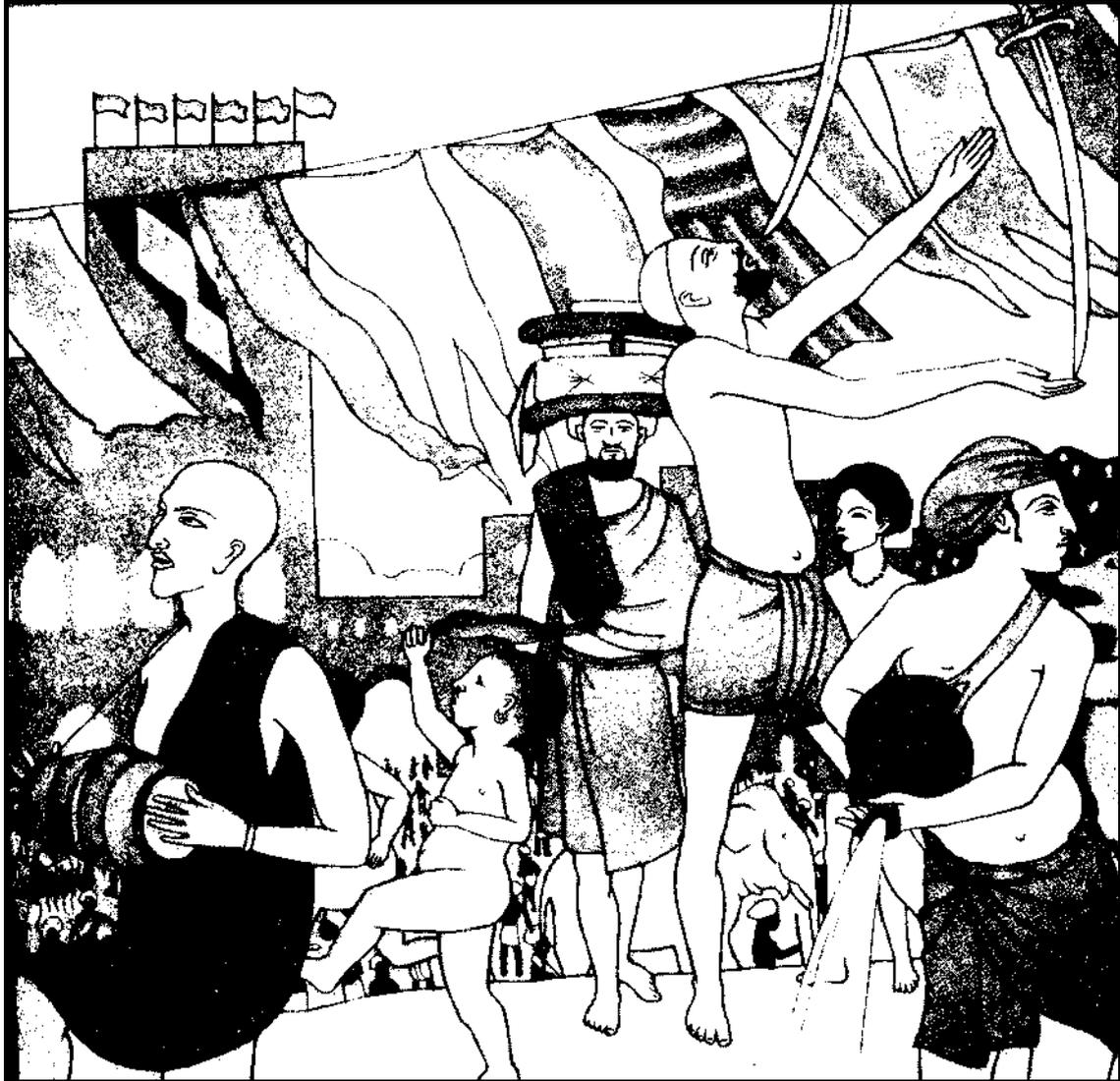


Illustration from the 'Light of Asia' by Sir Edwin

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EDITORIAL

Going off the Rails

This issue is on the theme of travel. Many of us consider our spiritual development as a path. This is fair enough except that paths have a clear start and finish and lead from A to B. Our spiritual lives often resemble a river or river system with meandering stretches, tributaries and dried up beds. (Refreshed by heavy rain they can turn into an unstoppable raging torrent). Or perhaps a railway network is a better analogy with delays, intersections, engineering works and detours.

But the other side of this is that maybe, after a few years of diligently practising, the insidious belief starts to gain hold that we are somebody on a path who has attained something and made some progress. We have become a 'good and proficient Buddhist'. We have made it. All the more disturbing then when we realise that we have 'gone off the rails' and the treasured self-image is wounded and we suffer.

What do we do then? What we consider as 'going off the rails' could be an unskilful action - perhaps a clear breaking of a precept. It could be that we experience dependency, the loss of inspiration and depression. This could become such a powerful experience that it might become 'a dark night of the soul' - which can ultimately be seen as a positive development.

Perhaps fundamental doubt arises as to whether Buddhist practice really works? This is the 'sceptical doubt' that is one of the five hindrances.

Perhaps the behaviour of others leads to a loss of faith? Perhaps someone we respect turns out to have deceived us or their behaviour becomes unwholesome?

There are many varieties of 'derailments' and many skilful ways of getting back on the network.

We cannot expect to be continuously inspired, just as we cannot expect to continuously inhale. Inspiration eventually turns to disillusionment. One conditions the other. We should expect this to happen in our lives. There are births and deaths. What we can do is to witness these births and deaths mindfully and let them go.

Perhaps we should put more energy into formal practice. Or maybe the reverse - we should lighten up and have a little fun. Spending some time in the presence of radiant people like Luang Por Sumedho is a great blessing. Our flagging spirits and dependency can be alleviated and a renewed resolve experienced.

It is skilful to be kind to ourselves when we have done wrong. The precepts are there as yardsticks to alert us when we are in danger of harmful behaviour. If we do 'act out' an unskilful thought then we have to acknowledge this, forgive ourselves and resolve to avoid similar behaviour. We may go through this many times and realise with humility how weak we can be.

Depending upon the motivation for the act we may have to consider clever ways of avoiding similar situations. Changing acquaintances, livelihood or associated actions may help.

Perhaps above all, we should mindfully avoid attachment to the belief that we have become an 'accomplished Buddhist'.

Chris Ward,

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]

The Road to Hell and Back

One of the discussion groups at the Upasika November Study Day explored the issue of burn-out at work. I would like to share my own experience of this in the hope that it may stimulate discussion on skilful means of working with this tendency.

I was reminded of the saying 'The road to Hell is paved with good intentions' which seemed to sum up my experience. I was throwing myself into a job that was destroying me. I was going that extra mile as the demands of the job became increasingly onerous and I was feeling more isolated from my colleagues who seemed to be unaware or uninterested in the problems that were arising.

I was driving myself on with the mantras 'I must put forth effort' and 'It is for a good cause'. I was going through Hell for what I thought were good reasons and 'as part of my practice'. What I failed to see was the imbalance in this attitude - there was no consideration for my own wellbeing. What I perceived to be selfless striving for a greater good did not have the quality of oneness or wholeness but was a striving which at best ignored my own wellbeing and at worst was attempting to annihilate me.

Scratching beneath the surface of this wrong view - hindsight is a wonderful thing - I wanted to find its causes. What supported the belief that my striving was right or even necessary? Obviously the cause was noble.

But two things seemed to motivate this drive or determination. One was a sense of perfectionism or pride. I set myself high standards and pushed myself to reach them at any expense. I was unwilling to admit weakness to myself or to others and there was a denial of the cost to myself.

The second was that I gave to others what I wanted them to give to me - namely love and support. I was over-sensitive to their needs because I recognised the same lack in myself. The more I neglected my own needs the more I pushed myself to meet others' needs. I had the hope that if I pushed myself hard enough for a good cause someone would notice

'I was throwing myself into a job that was destroying me'

how exhausted I was from my efforts and would be moved by compassion to love and care for me.

What was apparent from the discussion group on the Study Day was that this love and support is rarely found from others and when it is, it is rarely sufficient to overcome our own lack of self-love.

Some skilful means that I found useful in trying to counterbalance this determination were to:

(i) **Consider myself first.** The tendency to ignore my own wellbeing was so strong that I refused to care for or even acknowledge my own needs. What I had to do was to make

a strong conscious effort to first of all consider my own wellbeing. By such conscious effort I was enabling myself to make more balanced and encompassing decisions. I already knew that I would consider the needs of others or of the external situation habitually.

(ii) **Take responsibility for my own actions.** I had disempowered myself and hoped that someone else would save me from my predicament. By consciously accepting responsibility for my decisions I empowered myself to solve the issue and to maintain my own wellbeing rather than being dependent on external conditions to save me. (This also focussed my mind on the experience in the present moment rather than a hope of salvation in the future).

(iii) **Introduce change.** The habit was so ingrained that it seemed like a deep rut from which there was no escape - a habit that was so solid and powerful that it could not be eroded. Introducing any change to break up the apparent solidity and inevitability of the habit wears out the belief in its permanency. I used the image of the boxer who would jump up, ready to fight again, as soon as he was knocked down. This prevented the sequence of reactions that led to me being self-critical and depressed with the fact that I had fallen into the old habit again.

Alex Clingan

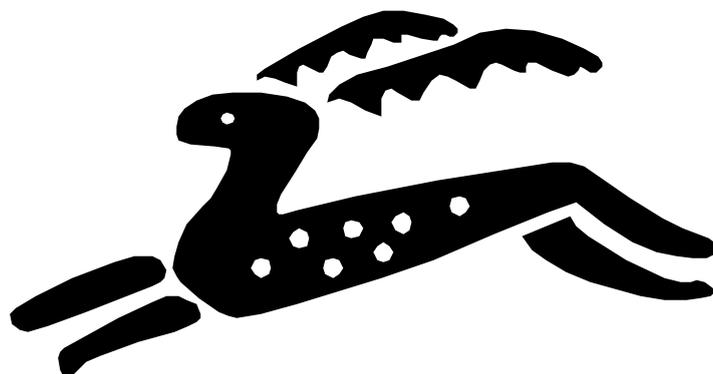
Rediscovering America as a Pilgrim-Tourist

It would have been merely a dutiful month long family visit to the U. S. stuck between one niece's wedding and another's Bat Mitzvah. But when Jen encouraged me to consider what I might actually enjoy doing during that time, what then began to unfold turned into a wonderful adventure of rediscovering my native land and its people.

The first thing that came to mind and grabbed my interest and involvement was the Grand Canyon; and later, as direct experience, it proved to be even more powerfully evocative. Dare I say that flying over the Grand Canyon was indeed the 'peak experience' of my journey. There were tears and more tears of humbling awe from a heart totally overwhelmed by this Wonder of the World's transformative power. There are many amazing pictures that capture its magnificent splendour, but these are still but a flimsy shadow of the reality.

Arizona, where the Grand Canyon is found, and the American Southwest in general, are such rich sources of geological, historical, anthropological and spiritual

interest. It drew me to explore some of them, even if it meant merely scratching the surface as a tourist. Even on a standard minibus day tour, Sedona, ancient holy land of the American Indians, provided delightful spiritual energy and uplift. Throughout the Southwest there are countless archeological ruins of ancient Indian civilization, viewing some of which teased my imagination with the feeling of life's earthy poignancy. Though there was a similiar poignancy felt on a tourist's tour of an



active Indian Pueblo (i.e. village), some of whose multi-storied adobe buildings have now been lived in continuously over centuries, there was also the feeling of real human warmth and gladness for the humble traditional life still present there.

The desert's vastness and intensity bestows a dignified beauty on all it contains, and even just riding through it on a

Greyhound Bus, it gifted me with a delightfully mellow sense of well being. There is a truly inspired Desert Museum not far from the Mexican border, [which I duly toured across for a Coca Cola and an hour of souvenir shopping amongst the throngs of 'poverty entrapped' hawkers]. There, the desert's creatures, its flora & fauna, geology & history are presented in their 'natural' habitats with such loving respect that you could see it reflected on childrens' faces by the genuine interest of their awakened curiosity.

Despite the many beautiful and fascinating places of the American Southwest, what was more important to me was meeting some of my countrymen with fresh eyes. At first I had thought of letting the whims of the wind blow me along

as I haphazardly wound my way overland down towards the Grand Canyon. I had hoped that the spontaneous encounters arising from wandering aimlessly might help to counteract some of the expatriate anti-American 'bigotry' which has accumulated in me over decades of media conditioning which focuses on America's shadow side.

But this intended deconditioning of my negativity was even more effectively accomplished by a complete change of plans when I instead decided to check out the grassroots Dhamma scene by visiting the lay Buddhist groups that I would pass on my way. The joy and gratitude in encountering heart-sisters/brothers on the way made it like traveling from oasis to oasis. People who were previously only briefly contacted by email or phone call invariably offered gracious hospitality and became instant Dhamma friends and family. In such groups, lay sangha is not just alive and well, but also lively and quietly flourishing.

The American style of friendliness, with their quality of investing personal energy to do things well and successfully in a thoughtfully organized but horizontally democratic way seems to be yielding a genuine expansiveness; particularly among ordinary middle and upper class folk who are finding the teaching and practice highly relevant to their concerns. There always seemed to be a lot of personal contact between members and special care for the needs of newcomers. Geographically isolated groups are usually connected to the Insight Meditation community in the U.S. As well as the on-the-job training of "just doing it", lay teachers and group leaders further promote interchange, connections farther afield and their own depth of insight through regularly teaching and sitting Vipassana

retreats throughout the country.

In Ann Arbor, Michigan, Barbara teaches beginners, where there is the 'homework' of weekly exercises [described by one of her students as "kitchen sink Dharma"], and trains meditation teachers. There is always a focus on the relevance of the teachings to the happenings and concerns of daily life. Around her, there is a strongly growing sangha family complete with opportunities for sittings five days a week, meditation days, residential retreats and their own quality newsletter. Her warmth and hospitality in receiving visitors from afar was a taste of things to come and eased me on my way.

In St. Louis, Missouri, Susan and Elizabeth share teaching responsibilities between them, making the practice available through wide ranging outlets - weekly beginners' meditation, Sutta classes, twice weekly group sits and an all day group practice opportunity every Sunday. In the wider community, there is vipassana outreach into a live in AIDS community, a high security prison, and the upper echelons of Monsanto.

Boulder, Colorado, lies at the foot of the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, which with its dramatic snow capped immense sheer rock faces are like an American Alps. There David and Terry [and another whom I didn't meet] have established a large, stable, weekly group of people who do weekend retreats together

several times a year. Terry also teaches retreats elsewhere in the country and offers meditation locally through Yoga and therapy.

Boulder is something of a hotbed of American Buddhism, largely because of the presence of Naropa Buddhist University, where there is a genuine creative exploration of how higher education can also include spiritual teaching, regular meditation, [an hour's sitting required for each hour of classes!], sangha and service in the community.

In Tuscon, Arizona, Mary's strong enthusiasm for practice together with her reassuring motherly personal concern and advice has led to her garage being turned into a community meditation centre where different groups meet several times throughout the week. She also arranges retreats led by her teacher Shinzen and by others.

Finally, three different sanghas in New Mexico were last on my itinerary, each with its own colour and flavour, from small sitting groups to classes of 40+.

In risking what has proved to be a highly unconventional way of taking a vacation, delightfully spiced with some highly conventional touristy bits, there was much learned, much gained and much of the mysterious grace that is rooted in sangha. Sangha is indeed the love of my life. It seems to be the call of my heart to be trustingly open to ever more richer experiences and understand the endless facets

The Virtuous Highway?

Surfing for Buddhists



No, not squeezing into a wetsuit and searching for the perfect wave off the coast of California, but virtual surfing of the much hyped internet. Many of us will view this whole internet thing as yet another complicating irrelevance of our 21st century materialist society. We might be bemused or offended at the idea that computers and the internet could have any reasonable connection with Buddhist practice. And yet, perhaps this is a misguided view. Misguided not so much from the point of view of immediate practice - The Buddha and his followers down the ages have got by perfectly well without the internet - but from the point of view of the spread and future well-being of Buddhism.

It has been possible for some time to link a small personal computer into a vast worldwide network and to search out large amounts of information that was previously difficult or expensive to obtain in traditional printed form. The internet is the next step in recording and communicating the Dhamma that started with verbal transmission for the first few hundred years after The Buddha's time and then moved to written scriptures - the Tipitaka - recorded on palm leaves, before moving to printed works over the past century. One of the great barriers to the spread of the Dhamma has been the fact that scriptures written in Pali or Sanskrit have only slowly been translated and made generally available in the West.

This situation has changed dramatically over the past ten years or so. There are now a growing number of accessible and modern translations of key scriptures. Many hundreds of suttas and complete books by accomplished teachers such as Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Sumedho and others are available on the internet. The complete Pali Tipitaka is also available as well as being issued on

CD-ROM. The numbers of Buddhist teachings on the Internet is rising rapidly.

The widespread availability of high-quality scriptures and teachings is but one aspect of the growing impact of the internet. There are also Buddhist newsletters and articles - of varying quality - which support a global debate about the nature of Buddhism in our time. There are online controversies and debates between traditionalists, materialist agnostics, psychotherapists and others about what the Buddha's teachings are and how they can be applied. Are they still appropriate to this time? Is therapy a quicker path to the ending of suffering? Are western people afflicted with an unique form of suffering unknown in the Buddha's time? Do we have to believe in kamma and rebirth? These are some of the many questions being openly discussed on the Internet by Buddhist authors, teachers and practitioners.

We are extremely fortunate in the UK to have accomplished monks and nuns in the Forest Sangha Tradition able to explain and represent fundamental Buddhist teachings in ways that make them understandable and directly applicable to our daily lives. A few visits to internet sites shows that others are not so fortunate. They have become confused or disillusioned by misinterpretation of the Buddhist teachings.

There are also some dishonest sites which masquerade as sincere sources of information but which are really intended to discredit Buddhism and other faiths and to sow doubt or obtain converts.

I think it is important to engage with the medium of the internet and ensure as far as we can that good and helpful material is made as widely available as possible. For many young people, their first exposure to Buddhism is, likely to

be via the Internet, as part of a school research project. Inevitably, perhaps, the Internet is dominated by US sites, and many of these are excellent. It would be nice to see some more UK sourced sites.

Some good sites to start from include:

<http://www.btinternet.com/upasika/>
Community is hosted here

<http://www.triplegem.com/>
Also links to the above site

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/>
Lots of scriptures and information

<http://www.dharmenet.org/>
Also has lots of information and teachings.

<http://www.ratanagiri.org.uk/>
The Ratanagiri web site

<http://www.fsnews.cjb.net/>
Contains Forest Sangha News and links to Venerable Kusalo's sites.

<http://www.geocities.com/wtwillson3/index.html>
An informative and enthusiastic site.

<http://freespace.virgin.net/london.vihara/>
The London Buddhist Vihara Site

<http://www.gn.apc.org/gaiahouse/>
Gaia House site.

<http://www.buddhism.ndirect.co.uk/billinge.htm>
The Mahasi Dhamma Fellowship

Good surfing!

Travels and Travails

1. TRAVELLING LIGHT

After months of talking and planning, there was a certain amount of apprehension as well as anticipation as I set off by myself on an eight-week exploration of Scandinavia last summer. Never having attempted any independent travelling on this scale before, there was no shortage of fear and anxiety (mixed with excitement and just a little joy) as the day of my departure dawned. What if my ten-year-old red converted camper van broke down? What if it poured with rain the whole time? However, my mind was eased by a helpful garage mechanic, who sensing my nervousness, reassuringly said that my van, Ruby, was certainly up to the task: "If you look after the van, it will look after you," were his parting words.

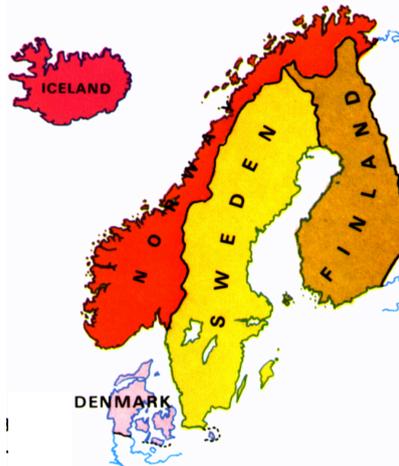
And so it proved, even though it took a while for his words to really sink in. In fact, it was about three weeks into my travels before I started to relax, let go, accept and trust. I realised that all I had to do was simply sit back and enjoy the ride, instead of worrying about what might happen if...

My travels were indeed a reflection of my mind - which was absorbed either in memories or thinking about the future, or a combination of the two: e.g. I wonder if I'll manage to find a campsite tonight that had showers as good as the ones where I stayed last night? I began to realise that none of this really mattered (so what if they had no showers!) and slowly started to put some of that wasted thought energy to more positive use.

I had plenty of opportunity to face up to (or duck out of) that familiar old feeling - fear, especially during my first couple of days alone in the wilds of Norway. I'd always been one to seek out solitude and quiet places, and yet having found the perfect picturesque

spot (wooded hillside, fast-flowing river, no people etc.) I noticed that much yearned for sense of peace and joy was missing. The most immediate feeling was that of unease. So uncomfortable was this fear of being on my own that I would start to distract myself by making a sandwich or bury my head in a book, listen to some music -- anything to avoid feeling the fear.

It wasn't until a few days later that I began to reflect on my obsessive desire



for silence and aversion to noise. Oh dear, I thought, as I reached a busy campsite in Oslo, there goes my good night's sleep! I won't get any peace with all these people nearby. But then something happened, and instead of continuing this negative thinking, I started to feel really grateful for their presence, especially as I'd had little human contact for a while. In fact they could make as much noise as they wanted (within reason!) because it meant that there was safety in numbers, someone else was keeping an eye on me.

And from then on, I started to cultivate a different attitude towards groups of people and noise. In fact, I met nothing but kindness on my travels. People

seemed surprised when they heard I was on my own, but during my weeks on the road I never felt threatened or in any danger. It's true - Scandinavia is not full of strangers, just friends you've yet to meet.

Certainly there was a good sense of camaraderie among the many camping folk I came across. Most of us relished the fact that we were free to enjoy the wide open spaces, it was a privilege to be able to stop in a beautiful spot and savour the view while sipping a freshly brewed cup of Earl Grey tea. And it was a joy to swap notes and share experiences with other travellers and to discover that kindness, generosity and travelling go hand in hand.

This generosity would manifest in unexpected ways. The most memorable (and tastiest) gift I received on my journey was half a dozen freshly laid free range eggs which a Swedish camp-site owner gave me at the end of my stay. I was touched by his kindness and shall always remember the special taste of the scrambled eggs I tucked into for breakfast the following morning.

Disembarking at Harwich, I felt a sense of fulfillment after my two month trip. I may not have done much formal meditation but I had managed a fair amount of mindfulness. After all, there had been no disasters, just a couple of mild hiccups and those earlier fears had proved unfounded as I learned to go more with the flow of the life. Yes, in a small but significant way, I have moved on.

*Jenni Jepson.
Summer 1998*

Travels and Travails

2. GREETINGS FROM MENDUT MONASTERY (INDONESIA)

On my pilgrimage to Borobudur I found refuge at Mendut Vihara.

I left England for Indonesia with a clear idea: to visit Borobudur, the most auspicious Buddhist monument in the heart of Java. What I did not anticipate was the refuge and Dhamma practice at Mendut Monastery.

After having travelled alone for three weeks through Indonesia and just recovering from a lung infection, I received the warmest possible welcome and hospitality at Mendut Vihara, 3km from Borobudur. I was deeply touched by Venerable Sri Pannyavaro's kindness and radiance and was near tears when he gently said: "Feel yourself at home, this is OUR monastery". His encompassing gesture conveyed that he meant not only the monastic Sangha but upasikas alike.

The Mendut Vihara is spaciouly laid out, beautiful Javanese architecture with lush lotus-ponds, exotic sculptures and serene Buddharupas. Furthermore, it is situated right next to the magnificent historical Buddhist Temple built by King Indra in 800 CE. It is believed that the temple was linked to Borobudur and known as the 'Temple in the bamboo grove'. The holy shrine is approached by a steep staircase and houses the most outstanding 3 metre-high Buddharupa. Instead of the usual lotus position, he sits Western-style, with both feet firmly planted on the ground and is flanked by two Boddhisattvas, Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani. These three were carved from single blocks of stone, which may explain why they have survived for 1200 years in such good condition.

Venerable Sri Pannayavaro invited me to

attend the full-moon puja at this ancient Mendut Temple. When three bhikkus and six samaneras chanted the familiar puja in Pali, it felt like a warm tropical rain washing over me, cleansing and purifying; it was like coming home after having travelled through a country whose language I don't speak nor understand. We offered beautiful white flowers, incense and candles and I was mesmerised by the magnificent, auspicious place where generation after generation had come to pay their respect and devotion to the Buddha.

The **Sangha Theravada** of Indonesia celebrated its 20th anniversary last year, and during my stay at Mendut monastery the **Young Buddhist Association of Indonesia** had their 10th year celebration. The monastery became the centre of busy cultural activities: Javanese dances, songs,

and drama, and several speakers talked about the path Theravadan Buddhism is pursuing in Indonesia. Everything was perfectly organised, with plenty of delicious food for over 200 people and there was much joy and happiness all around. Particularly delightful was the spontaneous applause and enthusiasm each speaker and performer received from the crowd. What a great weekend to be a part of!

No doubt, Borobudur is a most grand and auspicious monument, one of the wonders of the world; however, the heartfelt warmth, the

friendliness and the kindness of the Mendut Sangha was even more meaningful. It confirmed once again that to me, it is the Sangha which brings Buddhism to life; without the Sangha, Buddhism would be an academic, philosophical exercise without the warmth of the opening heart.

Vicky Assling



Travels and Travails

3. WOMAN WITH A MISSION!

Bedford to Amaravati.....35 miles.....60 minutes?.....there must be a quicker way!

So began my desperate search for the fastest route across two counties during my first few months of attending the weekly study group. Cursing my misfortune at living so far away and the total inadequacy of public transport, I tried enough routes and combinations of routes to defy any computerised guidance from the AA!! I became a woman with a mission. Priding myself on never being late, I was determined to find the magic formula which would shave a few precious minutes off the tedious drive which was wasting so much of my time. Such elation when I achieved a 55 minute run one night; such despair when I realised that whatever the route, whatever the weather, whatever the traffic, *this* was an exception and that **this journey takes an hour**. This was the fact. This was how it was.

Then suddenly - acceptance. I don't know what caused the shift. Maybe it was being fed up of arriving tense and generally disgruntled; maybe it was seeing just how much ill will and verbal invective I heaped upon others along the way as they hindered my progress; or maybe it was realising that this journey was symbolic - that it epitomised how I frequently operate in my life -

my inner compulsions, my 'having to get things done-ness', my valuing the goal more than the process, my tendency to blame others for what I cannot change, my refusal to accept the way things are.

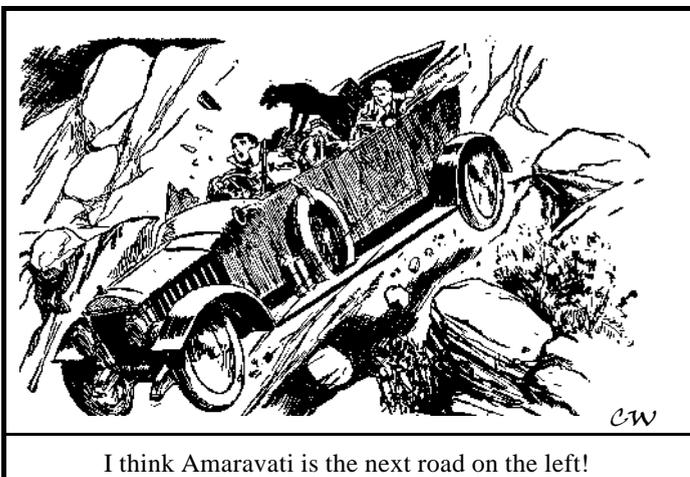
Suddenly the solution seemed so simple - and so obvious. Start out earlier, give myself an extra 15 minutes - make the journey *longer!*

The journey was transformed. I settled on the scenic route. Ask me and I will tell you about the delights of meandering at 30-50mph through rural Bedfordshire, the canopies of orange in the autumn, the lush greens of spring, the Whipsnade Lion white amidst the greys of winter, or lit up like a diamond necklace at night; wild deer bounding out of the undergrowth. As I relaxed and enjoyed, the journey also became a time for reflection and meditation, a gentle transition from my busy world in Bedford to the tranquillity of the monastery - from restlessness to stillness.

That hour with myself has become a precious time - and yes, the magical thing is, it *still* takes 60 minutes! There has also been a change in my approach to other journeys, although I can still be caught out, reverting to old patterns as I find myself legging it round to the corner shop or tense in anticipation of missing a train. However, I have also learned to be late sometimes!!

Trying to get somewhere is hard work. May we all come to enjoy and appreciate the richness of our journey.

Chris Blain



I think Amaravati is the next road on the left!

LETTERS



Dear Editor,

ISN'T IT GREAT TO BE SELFISH!

Some thoughts on the last Upasika retreat

I had a strong sense of self as I walked through the gates of Amaravati after the Upasika retreat. But it's only now that I realise that - looking back I cannot recall being aware of my self in any way at the time. For once in my life, I had a total absence of *self*-consciousness.

If all that sounds paradoxical, it's because it is. We talked much during the weekend of *self* and *not-self* and as human beings trying to communicate with each other we talked of them as if they were two, when of

course they are actually one.

While we were talking, someone pointed out that this was all just language and that it did not accurately reflect the reality beneath.

That's true, but as they say at so many business meetings - 'We're only trying to give a ballpark estimate here.' It seems we can only communicate our sense of the unity of everything if we talk about the dualities within it.

Another paradox! But aren't paradoxes fun when you just let go and let yourself swing through the trees on them.

As I said, I felt a strong sense of self on that Sunday night, even though I didn't know at the time. I'd stopped trying to be somebody and found that I had become some-one.

Something had changed. Was it me? Was it Them? Or was it simply us?

Myles Hewitt

Agati Sutta Off Course

"There are these four ways of going off course. Which four?
One goes off course through desire. One goes off course through aversion. One goes off course through delusion. One goes off course through fear. These are the four ways of going off course."

If you --
through desire, aversion, delusion, fear --
transgress the Dhamma,
your honor wanes, as in the dark fortnight -
the moon.

"There are these four ways of not going off course. Which four? One does not go off course through desire. One does not go off course through aversion. One does not go off course through delusion. One does not go off course through fear. These are the four ways of not going off course."

If you don't --
through desire, aversion, delusion, fear --
transgress the Dhamma,
your honor waxes, as in the bright fortnight -
the moon.

Anguttara Nikaya IV.19

Hawkwood College *Kalyanamitta* Weekend*

We are planning a weekend stay at Hawkwood College from **10 - 12th November 00**. The idea is to have a relaxing and sociable stay with good friends, good surroundings and good food!

Hawkwood is an early 19th century manor house surrounded by its own extensive grounds. It is situated at the head of a small Cotswold valley with a panoramic view down the Severn Vale.

Some walks in the area can be planned for those who wish to take part.

The weekend is open to all lay-Buddhists (and their partners) and the cost will be around 60 pounds for the weekend (including food).

Places are limited!

If interested please contact:
or

Jeffrey Craig 020 7221 9330
Tony Spinks 01582 512669

**kalyanamitta is Pali for 'good friends'*

Kalyani.
Dhamma Talks from Ajahn Sucitto
Publisher: Amaravati Publications

Book Reviews

This is the latest in a growing series of publications from ordained followers of the Forest Sangha Tradition. Those of us who have known this tradition over the years have been very privileged to have access to teachings and reflections from accomplished and long-term members of the ordained Sangha.

Ajahn Sucitto became a Theravada Buddhist monk in Thailand in 1976. After Returning to England in 1978, he trained as a disciple of Ajahn Sumedho for 14 years before being asked to supervise the teaching and training of the community at Cittaviveka Monastery in West Sussex. Although he also travels to give teachings, Cittaviveka is where he currently resides and where the talks that form the substance of this book were given.

Like many other Amaravati Publications Kalyani comprises a number of chapters which each represent a transcribed talk given over the previous few years. Some of the talks were given to a mainly ordained audience. Some to largely lay-groups.

Kalyani is Pali for 'lovely', 'uplifting' or 'beautiful' and some of Ajahn Sucitto's talks reflect upon the inspirational side of practice where the development of the heart is emphasised.

The chapter on the 'Leaders of Awakening' is a fine reflection upon faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom and how these may be developed to counter the negativity and darkness of the mind. In the 'Good Heart', we learn that the Buddha occasionally taught the noble *ten-fold* path.

All in all, a rich collection which reflects many years of practice and which will encourage us all to 'associate with the lovely'.

Chris Ward

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. We currently have about half of 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

CHITHURST DHAMMA HALL Fund raising

There will be a Guitar Recital of classically based music at Petersfield Library Hall on 28th June 2000 to raise funds for the Chithurst Dhamma Hall Project.

If you would like to attend there are a number of seats at £10 per person, including light refreshments after the performance

or if you wish to make a donation; contact **Rocana** on **01483 761398** or write to her at:

143 York Road, Woking. GU22 7XS, enclosing SAE if you require tickets.

*Please make cheques payable to
'The English Sangha Trust'.*

AUA NEWS

Nominations for election to the AUA Committee from June 2000 until May 2002 are as follows :

Colin Rae, Vicky Assling, Tony Spinks, Jeffrey Craig, Nick Carroll, Tony Fisher, Santoshni Perrera, Chris Ward, Martin Evans, Gill Williamson, (you?)

**The Outgoing
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.

**Lay Week-end Retreat
on the subject of
The Three Fires
at Amaravati**

from Friday 29th Sep - until Sunday 1st Oct

All are welcome

Make a note in your diaries!

For booking forms and programmes please send SAE to
AUA, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery,
Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ

*For specific enquiries, contact Nick Carroll on
0181 740 9748 or Chris Ward on 01442 822097*



Quick! The advanced austerities class started ten minutes ago!



Study Day and Slide Show

All are welcome

to attend the the study day on **Saturday 27th May 2000** at Amaravati on the subject of

‘Sorrow, Lamentation, Pain, Grief and Despair’

The morning meditation will commence at 9.00 am and all are welcome to join the Sangha for the mid-day meal. Afternoon events start at 1.00pm and will include a slide and audio show prior to discussion.

Connections

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

CHITHURST

Whilst the squirrels sift through the dwindling dregs of winter, as banks and hedgerows become enlivened by groups of snowdrops and primroses, the Sangha settles once more into the peaceful rhythms of another winter retreat.

Ajahn Karuniko has returned to Cittaviveka after a tour to New Zealand, Thailand and Australia. When Ajahn Candasiri returns from her current retreat in Thailand, she will be based at Amaravati. Sister Thaniya is taking the role as senior nun in the community here.

The construction of an ornamental pond in the walled garden, the completion of the loft conversion and the laying of the foundations for the new Dhamma Hall has completed the current programme of development for a while. It has been suggested that a Dhamma Hall Day might be organised as part of the Asalha Day celebration on July 16th. Ideas for such an event being most welcome.

The popular Lay Forums will be resumed in April with one or more meetings perhaps being an 'Open Day' for newcomers to meet informally with those more familiar with the monastic routine to dispel any anxieties and doubts common to any unfamiliar setting.

For more details contact : Barry Durrant 01730 821479

HARTRIDGE

1999 was a year of change and a great teaching on impermanence and non-attachment. We said sad farewells to Ajahn Siripanya and Sister Uttama, wishing them well as they continue on the Path in lay-life; then turned to welcome Ajahn Sundara, Sister Anandabhodi and Sister Santacitta, with the realisation that all the nuns who had made the long walk from Amaravati had now moved on.

There have been changes too among the lay-supporters as folk come and go, but the major change is to say goodbye to Kath and Paul Woods as they move to pastures new in Gloucestershire. They will be greatly missed, and we thank them for all they have done over the years and wish them well for the future.

Wesak and Almsgiving Festivals took place in May and September respectively, the latter date being an attempt to overcome problems which can result from Devon weather in November. That was achieved, but not everyone was comfortable about holding the event before the end of the Vassa.

Lay Support Meetings are held bi-monthly and Sunday evening talks and the monthly Saturday Meditation Workshops continue as regular features, the next workshop being on the 29th April. On the 26th December a special workshop entitled 'Love Unbound' concentrated on learning to cultivate a loving and kind heart, and how to deal with the obstacles that interfere with our potential to approach life compassionately. There was much food for later contemplation. It is hoped that the occasional Dhamma Workshops will continue, providing a forum to study the Buddha's teaching in greater depth. These have been much appreciated and have stimulated questions and discussion.

A number of lay people joined the Sangha for a peace vigil from 30th December to 1st January, some staying, others visiting, and on the 2nd January we gathered for a 'Beginning Anew' ceremony. This felt very special as we deepened our commitment to the Three Refuges and Five Precepts. The lay-supporters are keen to build a communication network which will provide a means of disseminating information about needs, opportunities to help, and events at Hartridge and also to offer a way for supporters to be in touch with each other. Anyone interested is welcome to ask to be included.

*For details of all events at the monastery
Contact : Mudita, 01395 568742*

HARNHAM - Millennium Eve

We help our Hexham neighbours stretch bunting from trees to lamp posts. 'You'll miss the party! Ceilidh dancing in the street at midnight!' We'll just have to miss it.

The drive over to the monastery is cloudy and damp - will it rain and spoil the fireworks?

The Dhamma Hall fills up slowly until there are over fifty of us, some new people and partners of regulars. Monks and anagarikas, chanting and meditation. Ajahn Munindo speaks gently on metta, on what matters to the heart, on forgiveness and aspiration. A very helpful talk at the end of an extremely difficult year.

Tea break in the reception room, and then the midnight ceremony which has become traditional at Harnham. We write down the names of anyone we have harmed, asking them for forgiveness. Turn the paper over, and write the names of anyone who has harmed us, offering them forgiveness. On a second piece we write the names of all the people we wish to remember in our hearts.

Each person in turn comes forward with their papers - lay and ordained, women and men - and sets light to the first piece of paper, dropping it into a large bowl to burn away to nothing. The other piece is placed in a separate bowl, to be mixed later with the mortar of the new Retreat Centre - the names of our loved ones will be woven into the fabric of the building.

Midnight approaches and the ceremony is completed, sitting in a deep silence. On the first stroke of the bell, distant fireworks explode. The local people shoot rockets into the air as we are taking the precepts. What timing! We shall have to keep them now.

New Year hugging meditation follows. We walk out of the Dhamma Hall into brilliant starlight, Orion and the Plough, Jupiter in the West, the bringer of joy. Fireworks in Newcastle, fifteen miles away.

Back in Hexham our neighbours are still chatting and eating, and surprisingly coherent. A crescent moon rises in the East. We open our door and there are sweets on the doormat, pushed through the letterbox by our Buddhist friends - the first gift of the new millennium.

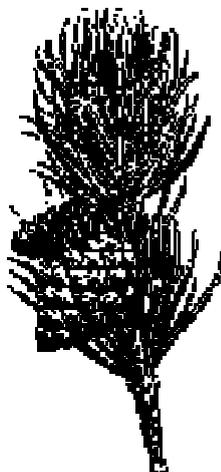
Robert Bluck

For information on Harnham events contact:
Marion Keay 01388 817974
Mike Downham 01697 748214

For more information about events at the monastery:

Contact: Marion Keay 01388 817974
Mike Downham 01697 748214

AMARAVATI



Story Page

There is no-where to hide...

A woman in London goes to a travel agent and asks for a ticket to Tibet. "I want to go and see a guru" she says. The travel agent points out that it is a long difficult journey to Tibet, and suggests she might be happier going to Majorca. But she insists, buys her ticket and gets on the plane to India. She gets another ticket, visa and pass, catches the train up to Sikkim, gets a border pass, and takes a bus up to the Tibetan plateau. When she steps out all the people around her say "Where are you going?"

"I must go and see the guru."

"Its such a long way, you're an old lady and its high up in the mountains".

"I know, but I am still going".

"You know that you only get 3 words?" they told her.

"It doesn't matter, I am going"

So she hires a horse as there are no roads, and then has to finish the steep climb on foot. Meeting other pilgrims along the way they too ask where she is going.

"I want to see the guru." she replies again.

"Remember you just get 3 words"

"I know".

The old woman finally arrives, joins the queue and gets past the guards at the door who say "Just 3 words".

Finally she enters the room. The guru is sitting there in his robes, thin with a scraggy beard. He looks up at her. She looks at him and says

"George, come home."

One Day Vipassana Retreats

With teachers (mainly) from Gaia House

LONDON

April 16: Siripanya Caplan

The Path of Non-Distraction

May 21: Christopher Titmus

Seeking Enlightenment

June 11: Yanai Postelnik

The Happiness of Peace

Details: Clare Brunt: 020 8755 0353

OXFORD

April 29: Martine Batchelor

June 3: Catherine McGee

Details: Brigid 01993 813 217

BRIGHTON

May 20: Christopher Titmuss

June 10: Yanai Pastelnik

Details: see to Joty Barker, 55 Lowther Road, Brighton, BN1 6LF

NOTICES

In The Footsteps of the Buddha *A pilgrimage with Shantum Seth*

Shantum Seth is organising a three-week pilgrimage in **January 2003** to India and Nepal to the places where the Buddha lived and taught. Twelve places are available on a first-come-first-served basis. We also hope to be able to invite a British Theravadan monk or nun from the Forest Sangha to take part. This is a rare opportunity to visit the sacred places as a group from the same tradition. Shantum makes two trips a year and speaks fluent Hindi. He takes great care of the pilgrims on each trip ensuring that drink, transport and accommodation are arranged. Travel is in a private coach throughout the journey and accommodation is comfortable - even including five star Japanese hotels.

The current cost of the three week pilgrimage is \$3900 pounds per person. This includes all accommodation, food and transport in India but excludes the flights between the UK and Delhi. If you are interested in obtaining more information please contact :

Robert Bluck, 10 Tynedale Terrace, HEXHAM, Northumberland, NE46 3JE

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:

31st May

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

RING: Chris Blain, Tel: 01207 563305

E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com

The Wesak Walk

Jeffrey Craig and Tony Spinks are organising a walk on Sunday May 21st. The plan is to meet at Amaravati car park at 10.30 and set off at 11.00am. Walkers should come with a packed lunch and suitable clothing and footwear. The walk may take most of the afternoon but will be taken at a steady pace. You do not need to be superfit.

All are welcome

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

LIVERPOOL: Meditation Group
Contact: Ursula Haeckel 0151 427 6668

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

AMARAVATI LAY EVENTS - 2000

The Amaravati Upasika Association organises a series of Study Days and weekend retreats. These are open to all who 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 822097

Editorial & Production Team :

Nick Carroll, Chris Blain, Robert Brown,
Tony Spinks, Chris Ward

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.

The Bodhinyana Group

Wednesdays 7.30 – 9.30 pm in the Bodhinyana Hall

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

The Summer 2000 meetings are:

10 May - Pilgrimage to Sri Lanka

17 May - Buddhist Practice - Wisdom

24 May - The Selfish Buddhist?

31 May - Buddhism, Science and the Supernatural

7 Jun - Buddhist Practice - Right Speech

14 Jun - Hindrances to Practice

21 Jun - Sutta Study

28 Jun - Desire and Renunciation

5 Jul - Buddhist Practice - Right Effort

12 Jul - Medicine, Illness and Practice

19 Jul - Is it OK to Have Fun?

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 822097

Radmilla Herrmann 01494 864905

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/>

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