

Upāsikā Newsletter

FOREST SANGHA TRADITION

MARCH 1996 No2

Return to the Dhamma

I was first attracted to Buddhism many years ago when I first came across the teachings of Chogyam Trungpa. Chogyam's books helped me through a difficult period when I was trying to detach myself from the negative psychological effects of being part of a large organisation centred around a charismatic guru figure. Chogyam's sharp insights into guru phenomena and "spiritual materialism" and his very heart-felt compassion for humanity's follies drew me closer and closer to the Dhamma.

I started meditating in the shinay/anapanasati style and explored the Tibetan, Zen and Theravadin paths and found within them people who embodied many admirable qualities, showing me that all Buddhist traditions had fine teachers and teachings with the potential to enlighten human beings if the motivation is there.

During this time I found that there was something about the Forest tradition that seemed to draw me back again and again. I remember watching a video where a local Christian minister living near Amaravati or Chithurst was giving Bibles to the Sangha; I was so moved to see that the Sangha were beaming wonderful smiles to him, warmly thanking him for the gift. It was moving because it was obvious that the Sangha had nothing to prove or protect, they just demonstrated an unconditional regard for people with a different religious perspective. This genuine and open minded attitude was very impressive and is not always a common feature of cross faith dialogues.

There are aspects of the Forest Sangha tradition that I have always had difficulty with. The tradition has a policy, if policy is the right word, not to encourage close teacher / pupil relationships. This can occasionally make me feel that I am losing out on the intimacy that people can experience with teachers in the Tibetan and Zen traditions. However, there are distinct advantages too with the Sangha's hesitancy to engage with taking on the guru role. There has been much reported over recent years about spiritual teachers falling prey to abuses of power with their pupils. With this in mind what could be seen at first as a restriction to my spiritual development, could also be seen as a way of ensuring that the spiritual practice of the Sangha and laity is kept free of the suffering that can occur if power is abused.

There are other aspects that I do not always find easy to accept for example; the one meal a day and the apparent

sexism with the hierarchy of the Sangha. However, I can see that Ajahn Sumedho's decisions on these matters has meant that the spiritual tradition of the Forest Sangha has escaped many of the trappings of some of the other large religious communities, Buddhist and non Buddhist.

If it were possible to find one word that encapsulated what the Sangha meant to me it would have to be integrity. An integrity born out of the very root teachings of the Buddha. In a world where this word has lost much of its meaning, finding a community of people who embody integrity means that they are worthy of respect and support.

I have found that for me many members of the Forest Sangha have demonstrated a deep spiritual wisdom and genuine compassion while remaining connected to the everyday practical issues of life in this country. I remember when my wife's father died, Ajahn Santacitto, the Abbot of the Devon Vihara at the time, was able to offer such a deep understanding of what my wife was going through, my wife felt held and strengthened by this monks' loving presence.

I have had two years away from Buddhist practice and coming back to it over recent months I have re-appreciated the qualities of the Forest Sangha. Returning to the Devon Vihara and Chithurst monasteries, I have experienced the deep sense of peace and friendly welcome there and felt filled with motivation to practice the Buddha's path another day.

I feel very hopeful about the development of the Dhamma in Britain and although the news of well respected senior monks distrobing has understandably shaken some peoples confidence, the overall picture looks very positive. The development of the Upāsikā training for example, will do much I am sure to strengthen the link between the Sangha and laity. The new temple at Amaravati has given all concerned the opportunity to express the beauty of the Dhamma in a physical way and will no doubt provide an opportunity for us to see impermanence in action as we try to protect it against the British weather.

I for one treasure the contact I am able to have with the Forest Sangha and feel very fortunate to have had contact with some wonderful and truly genuine spiritual friends and teachers: may this long continue.

May all beings be happy,

Les Phillips.

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 (*pañca sīla*; 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 newsletter will continue to use Upāsikā as the plural form. *Editor*]

SOMETIMES LATE IS BETTER...

This edition of the Upāsikā Newsletter has been a long time in the making.

Being a voluntary enterprise for all involved and having to be fitted into a year full of other commitments, both personal and Upāsikā related, has highlighted the limitations we live within. Coming to terms with these limitations can be difficult at times, especially when Dhamma related activities offer such a sense of fulfilment and joy when seen through to completion. It can sometimes be harder to let go of the pleasant than the unpleasant, but that's the 'beauty' of practice – letting go of both.

Letting go of ones feelings of responsibility and duty is a more subtle practice, as one attempts to disentangle one's personal conditioned survival patterns of ambition and 'becoming', no matter how laudable and inspiring the aim, from the oftentimes ensuing feelings of guilt and failure when they are not fulfilled. Recognition of and acceptance of how things actually are, again and again, is the only way out of that one.

But these personally experienced birth pangs of the Newsletter have been more than rewarded by the variety and quality of contributions received, some of which have had to be held over to the next issue for lack of space.

...and even better is to stop

It is all too easy to read a newsletter superficially by glancing through it, including items that catch our deeper attention, a bit like the daily paper, perhaps telling oneself that one will come back to it later to read an article more attentively, but then, over time, allowing that resolution to fade away. There is an art to reading, and its secret is to take one's time and not rush. What could then have been an habitual intellectual exercise with passing mental comments such as "Oh yes, I know that already", becomes an act of mindful reading that can touch us more deeply. This type of reading when compounded by a Dhamma content, enriches our practice by leaving an imprint that can then come to us as a reminder in a moment of habitual forgetfulness.

But at a time when there are so many Dhamma publications and items of information attracting our attention, how do we decide what to read and when, when so much of it gives the impression of being helpful. Surrounded by, and part of a world full of 'busyness' which can so easily overflow our consciousness, the answer is first to STOP – and pause. Stop doing, stop thinking, planning, anticipating and reminiscing – allowing oneself to feel whatever is happening and allowing it to happen without feeding more into it.

With regular and frequent practice of 'stopping', even if only for short periods of time amongst our daily duties and activities, we can get better at 'dying' so that we can begin to live. For lay people especially, this probably has to be a basic practice, a well tried and tested antidote to the 'conveyor belt' existence so many of us get caught up in.

Going through both the pain and relief of 'stopping' we can then be more deeply receptive to the insights that arise and far better able to know when to think, speak and act, as well as read; and when not to.

What's in a name?

Ever since the inception of the Upāsikā Training there have been different views about the title and especially the word 'Training'.

'Exclusive', 'elitist', 'divisive' were some of the adjectives used in discussions where there was concern that the idea of involving lay supporters in a distinct community might result in the formation of a 'third order' trying to emulate the ordained Sangha as a special group of lay practitioners. Some thought the word 'Practice' might be better than 'Training', but in the end its original name prevailed.

Over a year later at the annual Upāsikā Review day at Amaravati a question was raised – What exactly is the Training? On one level the answer is obvious; it is as described in the purpose and guidelines of the Upāsikā Training at its inception. (see page 11)

But it is a good question, for it highlights a *feeling* that perhaps the word 'Training' does not quite convey an essential aspect of what seems to be developing.

The most commonly reported appreciated factor of Upāsikā events after having spent time together with like minded fellow practitioners in silence or discussion, has been the experience of the warmth of spiritually focused friendship – "kalyana mitta".

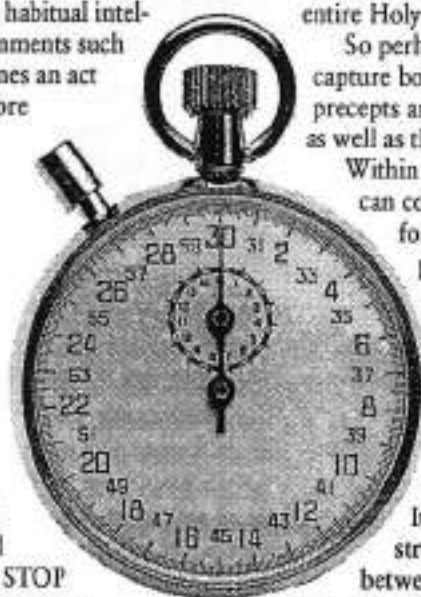
Few have any doubts about the training aspect of the ordained Sangha's way of life, but the name given to the monastic community emphasises its essential aspect – community. And it is in community that one experiences 'noble friendship', which according to the Buddha "...is the entire Holy Life".

So perhaps as a name, Upāsikā Community might better capture both the individual commitment of living by the five precepts and 'sitting close by' the teachings of the Dhamma, as well as the sense of doing it with others.

Within this more committed lay community, individuals can commit themselves individually to more specific forms of training be it studying the suttas, or practice, learning the Pali language, lay teacher training or perhaps a deeper practice such as choosing to live by the eight precepts.

As a term, 'Upāsikā Community' sounds more embracing of the various life styles and degrees of greater commitment of those who have responded to the Dhamma as practiced and taught within the Forest Sangha tradition.

It could be an umbrella name for a community that strengthens and reaffirms the existing relationship between Sangha and individual lay practitioners and helps develop lay practice further within the development of a sense of community. Such a change in name, if it should take place, will only happen if it is felt to be helpful. Time will tell, and so will your views. What do you think?



THE PRACTICE OF WORLDLY CONCERNS

When hearing the noble teachings of the Buddha in the monastery, it's all so obvious, it makes such complete sense. There, the presence of good friends and respected teachers, a refined and protective atmosphere, are united with our own good intentions to put our worldly concerns aside. With all these wholesome supports converging and conspiring to encourage our hearts to be collected, there can be that peace which allows the teachings to be seen as they are: so simple and clear. However, when we leave, (what some may cynically call a spiritual 'neverneverland'), and come back to the 'real world', where does it all go to? How can our bit of clarity and all those good intentions fade away, or even disappear, just like that? and should we feel left flat on our face, where do we go from there? How can we then face up to the boundless opportunities for boundless mediocrity made available to us, seducingly and even tauntingly by the 'real world'? and finally, how can our working with worldly concerns be the source of a fertile spiritual path?

Though none of us really have all the answers, perhaps we do each have a little glimmer of light. Somehow, this bit of dhamma mysteriously blossoms right there, in what can at times feel like a seemingly hopeless and endless struggle, not unlike treading water, of trying to practice amidst all our worldly concerns. Yet sometimes I really wonder, just how much we do trust the fact that reflecting these glimmers to each other can bring us more light – that we too have reflections worth sharing from the many faceted gem of truth?

And though we do trust the teachings of the Buddha, how do we translate and internalize them into our own life experience so that they may enrich and be enriched by them, and so that they can be working right here amidst our own worldly concerns?

To facilitate our practicing more responsibly with worldly concerns, the Buddha taught the 'eight worldly dhammas'—four dualistic pairs of goal orientated motivations which, when seen clearly for what they are, unveil the Middle Way of non-duality.

"The Buddha was enlightened in the world, he contemplated the world. If he hadn't contemplated the world, if he hadn't seen the world, he couldn't have risen above it. The Buddha's Enlightenment was simply enlightenment of this very world. The world was still there: gain and loss, praise and criticism, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness were all still there. If there weren't these things there would be nothing to become enlightened to! What he knew was just the world, that which surrounds the hearts of people. If people follow these things, seeking praise and fame, gain and happiness, and avoiding their opposites, they sink under the weight of the world.

Gain and loss, praise and criticism, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness – this is the world. The person who is lost in the world has no path of escape, the world overwhelms him. This world follows the Law of Dhamma so we call it worldly dhamma. He who lives within the worldly dhamma is called a worldly being. He lives surrounded by confusion. Therefore the Buddha taught us to develop the path." (*"The taste of freedom" by Ajahn Chah*)

The Taste of Freedom

Developing the path transforms both how we perceive and relate to worldly concerns. As a reflective teaching for practice, the four pairs of worldly dhammas (gain and loss, etc.) point us to investigate the underlying self-orientated nature of the motives that drive us and give momentum to our day to day concerns, thereby keeping us stuck in the world of 'becoming'. By using this reflection, experiencing the arising of worldly concerns can be transformed into an opportunity for dhamma practice, in which we can learn how to shift the focus of attention away from their absorbing problems and goals, toward a greater awareness and understanding of the habituated, and perhaps hidden, worldly motives behind them – the Worldly dhammas. So used, these eight pointers can be mirrors for cultivating skill in unveiling desire and fear within the shadows of ignored habit, where their power is perpetuated, and thus bring them into the light of self-knowing awareness, where their power is deconditioned. The ephemeral and delusory nature of our desires and their objects can there be realized – and this is exactly where daily life conjoins the practice path of transcendence.

Of course this doesn't mean that our concern and caring responsibly for the well being of our family, work etc. is necessarily made up entirely of these worldly motives and is therefore inherently 'undhammic'. Ajahn Chah was heard to say when picking up a tea cup, "Though the eyes of wisdom see it as already broken, it has its useful function, so one cares for it and doesn't let it be damaged or broken by heedlessness." However, to whatever extent we are caught and driven by worldly dhammas, the goodness and love that is there is undermined, and our responsibilities remain as just more 'becoming' and rebirth, rather than the walking of the path of cessation of birth and suffering.

While working on this article, an interesting, if small example of practicing with worldly concerns has arisen, in which some parallels may be found with your own inner work. My intention in writing this has been to be helpful and it has proved to be a fairly satisfying exercise. At times though, I have felt rather clogged up, and on occasion, inconveniently and easily distracted by thoughts about it (e.g. during meditation). So actually applying the teaching I was writing about(!), I acknowledged that there was an issue of self-image, and that this unnoticed concern involving gain and loss was hampering my patience and therefore my timing as to when to write. Not feeling these motives as strong, I had considered their influence as rather peripheral. Still, unheeded, they do distract, and hinder finding the best way forward, especially when considering what is of benefit to the reader.

One rather curious way that working with this proved helpful was in giving a voice to these desires. Morning toilet time alone in the bathroom, brushing teeth etc. seemed a really good time for this. I tried speaking from the place of these desires, perhaps exaggerating slightly so as to feel them fully; in the body, in the gut, in the heart: "I really want...lots of clever ideas, all smoothly flowing and integrated, an impeccable and blemishless article. I want to feel good about it." i.e. I want more and more desirable 'me' and 'mine'! The better, and more naturally, these voices are heard and felt, the

easier it is to recognise them when they then whisper their wants and preferences at rather inconvenient moments e.g. when trying to act skillfully or meditate. But rather than trying to brush these motives aside and repressively make them go away, what feels right is to be heedful of them and their influence on the mind, so as to be able to integrate their energy into the wholeness of my beingness, into a path of cessation of attachment and ownership.

Practically, as most of our Worldly motives are worked with/through as we live them out, it's crucial to develop Right Attitude and Right Seeing in how we relate to them; to practice listening to them with loving kindness and compassion. Neither ignoring nor drowning them out on the one extreme, nor having to do something about them and making them a problem on the other; can we instead listen to their persistent naggingness, like children who just need help to grow up and mature. As raising children is not a one way relationship, nor always a pleasant one, so in their unskillfulness, our worldly motives can certainly be irritating and problematic, cleverly and persistently demanding attention and trying to influence us to get what they want. Thus, as with raising children, can our showing love by caring for what they say they want and need, be balanced with providing for what they really need; i.e. raising them skillfully to participate in, and learn from, the joy of giving, the self worth of self-restraint, and the peace and self-knowing of meditation - dana - sila - bhavana. Mutual support and balance between dana and sila, between lovingly giving and lovingly drawing boundaries can naturally be there as long as we are heedful and neglect neither. It is in developing such practical skill as the heedfulness that these two simple words powerfully highlight, together with meditation practice, that there is the purification of Right attitude and Right Seeing amidst and toward worldly concerns and worldly dhammas. But even when trying to put Worldly concerns aside to cultivate dana, sila and bhavana, it is most prudent to be applying this teaching to be alert to where worldly dhammas can taint the intention of our practice with various forms of 'spiritual materialism' e.g. wanting to gain enlightenment, fear of losing peaceful states etc.

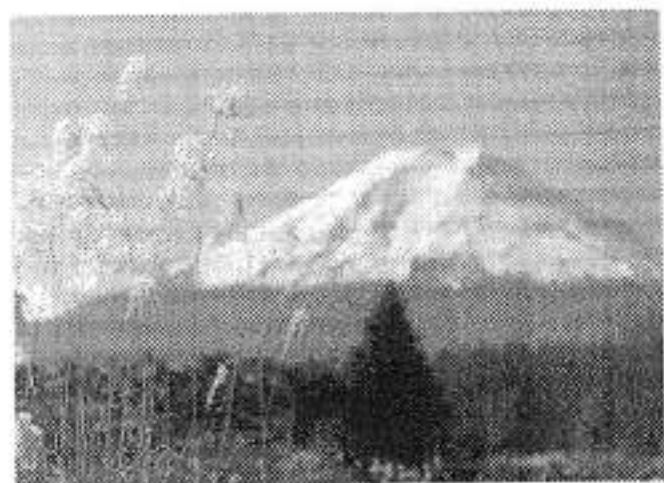
So in summary; not clearly seen nor heeded, our worldly concerns contain problems which hinder our efforts to practice. But to clearly see and to heed the often subtle influence of the worldly dhammas as they arise and cease, makes our practice fertile.

Beyond individual gain and loss, the self orientated motives of the worldly dhammas are also valuable pointers in further purifying our unselfish behaviour, whether our responsibilities and interests are extended to include the well being of our family, company, community, nation or humanity. As larger extensions of self, the activities there engendered, though benevolent, are but more refined forms of dualistic becoming leading to rebirth, albeit favourable, rather than being a path of cessation of self. Of course, this doesn't mean that the path of cessation is in avoiding wholesome action or involvement. To the extent that activity does arise from a mind which is unclinging to self nature, it is then more the action of beingness flowing from harmony with the Tao (or Dhamma) of how things are. It would seem that in the Metta Sutta, the Buddha is expounding this way of responsibly fulfilling our wholesome concerns when we chant those words "Unburdened with duties". When we do act in this way, it is serving Dhamma. As such can we trust, and

intuitively know, that all are being served in the ways that count the most.

P.S. Is there anyone out there... who might like to share their own feelings, experiences or reflections on practice amidst worldly concerns, in the spirit of dhamma friendship.

S.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

It is now 10 years since Luang Por Samedho gave me my Pali name, Susilo, and over the years a number of people have asked about it. Usually they ask the meaning, but sometimes they ask why I have it. A simple and perhaps flip answer could be that as I have a Christian name and am not a Christian, why not have a Buddhist name since I am a Buddhist!

Whilst this is undoubtedly true, there is more to it than that. I don't remember what made me ask for a Pali name (it is usual to request one although some people have been given theirs as a gesture of appreciation, I believe), All I know is it seemed like a good idea at the time, and I am grateful to Luang Por for giving me such a useful tool to work with. This is what it is, in fact, a tool which can help with one's practice. The meaning can seem very flattering at first - Susilo means "One of virtuous conduct" according to the card which I received at that time - but it is not a description, a label saying what you are. Rather it is a tool for reflection, to work with, a mantra if you like. I find mine is an inspiration for me. It makes one feel connected to the Sangha, too.

Not many people know that the names come out of a book, and it would help if you know on which day of the week you were born, since they are organised in lists, certain names for certain days!

I know that not everyone wants a Pali name, some have told me they definitely do not want one. They are usually given after a person has been known to the Sangha for a while. If you would like one, or are thinking about it, why not speak to one of the Ajahns at any of the Viharas, I am sure that they will be able to advise you.

Susilo

Some Approaches to Sutta Study

For most of us, that first encounter with the suttas can be a somewhat daunting experience. We can be overwhelmed by the copious footnotes and annotations, the unfamiliar idiom, the tongue-twisting names, and especially by all the repetition which makes for turgid reading.

Nevertheless, with determination and an enquiring mind, we can overcome these negative feelings, and just as we might enjoy exploring the alleys and byeways of an unfamiliar town, so we can look forward to a sojourn in the pages of this or that sutta. (It is worth recalling here that what we 'see' in any object or situation is largely determined by our attitudes at that time). We need to design and adopt a strategy to overcome these early reactions.

Reading and studying the suttas does not seem to be regarded generally as an integral part of our practice; reference to any such text largely being undertaken at the suggestion of a teacher or to clarify or amplify a point met earlier.

These thoughts are offered in the hopes that they will encourage others to overcome their resistance and come to find interest and joy in the written Dhamma

Firstly we should recall that none of the Discourses was written down until some 3-400 years after the Buddha's Parinibbana, and that the written word even so, can only convey the meaning and nuance attributed to it by the sensitivity and skills of the translator. It is interesting to compare the style of writing in earlier publications by the Pali Text Society with say modern translations such as in 'Thus have I Heard', (The Digha Nikaya), by Maurice Walshe.

Starting off

It is most helpful to adopt a 'Sherlock Holmes' approach; to set out mentally on a voyage of discovery, to set ourselves specific goals and aims, rather than flicking idly through the pages of some text chosen at random. We can decide upon and follow a rational course of investigation. (In this respect it is very helpful to have a Buddhist Dictionary at our side at all times).

Ideally, it is of value to have access to say all five Nikayas of the Suttanta Pitaka, - all those discourses delivered by the Buddha on various occasions, and as confidence and interest grows we can widen our searches to include all three Pitakas - the Vinaya, the Suttanta and the Abhidhamma! This allows for greater flexibility and offers a greater scope for our enquiries.

The strange names, and unfamiliar idiom tend to give us a sense of distance, unreality, or detachment in time and place, but of course, the various patterns of human behaviour and life situations are constantly recurring phenomena in this sensory realm; the Discourses are as valid for us today as they were to our predecessors 2,500 years ago.

Try substituting the name 'Joan' for Patacara, or 'Andrew' for Pottapada; look for parallel situations in the world today, and relate the stories and situations to our own experience. Disputes over territory, doubt and confusion, bereavement, greed, hate, and delusion continue anon.

Personal Investigation.

Rather than scanning a text as one might glance through a newspaper, we can start our exploration by setting ourselves certain targets - specific items to look up.

'Who was Anathapindika?', 'Where was Magadha?', 'What was so wrong in what Sati said?', and 'What did the Buddha say about 'self'?

The Buddha used a neat turn of phrase, many a homely simile, and simple parables in His Teaching, and these are often quoted in other texts on Buddhism. 'Within this fathom-long body lies the arising and ceasing of the world', 'Be ye islands unto yourselves', 'The parables of the raft and the saw', and the similes for the Five Khandhas and Five Hindrances are commonly encountered, and it is very helpful to note the sutta these quotes came from and to read it in its entirety, - to set it in context.

The character of the Nikayas.

It is well worth becoming familiar with the format of texts within the Pali Canon; these texts vary in their length and the way the subject matter is presented.

The Samyutta Nikaya is a large body of short suttas which have been collected together according to the topic being addressed. Because each sutta treats of a similar topic they are designated the 'Kindred Sayings', e.g., kindred sayings about Feelings, (The Salayatana Book), kindred sayings about Elements (The Nidana Book), and so on. Coming across a particular topic of interest one can thus see what the Buddha said about it on a number of different occasions.

Similarly, the Anguttara Nikaya consists of short suttas each of which refers to a specific number of Dhamma items e.g., 'Possessed of four things monks, a monk has entered on the path to surety'... and 'Monks, there are four perfections'.., and ' Monks, there are these four unthinkable'..All these are arranged in progressive numerical order, (hence 'the Book of the Ones' or 'The Book of the Eights'),

The Sutta Nipata and Dhammapada are the best known of the fifteen books of the Khuddaka Nikaya, (the last Nikaya of the Sutta Pitaka), and all the above four texts make for excellent 'coffee-table' or bedside use. The suttas are short and offer much to reflect upon.

On the other hand, the Digha Nikaya, consists of some 34 long Discourses, and makes excellent reading by the fire on a chilly winters night or whenever one can settle down undisturbed for a some while.

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is certainly not for the faint-hearted, but is ideal for the intellectual, - one who is obsessed by lists, precision and orderliness. One can learn the 37 Bodhipakkhiyadhamma or Constituents of Enlightenment- (The Buddha and His Teachings, Narada), the 25 beautiful mental factors, (Mendis), or the 24 Paccaya or 'modes of conditionality', (Nyanatiloka).

Learning and recalling these lists forms an excellent mental exercise for any 'spare moment' - whilst awaiting a bus, or when unable to sleep. They put the time to good use and avoid our drifting off into day dreams or regrets!

Whilst these formidable lists demand considerable mental effort, the detailed analytical approach of the Abhidhamma

markedly amplifies one's appreciation and understanding of material from the Sutta Pitaka.

Lastly whilst it can be contended that the Vinaya is of little concern for the lay Buddhist, a familiarity with its contents does help us to understand how we can support and sustain members of the Sangha in their adherence to the Rules of the Holy Life.

Format for group Study.

As an individual, we can choose one or another of the above approaches, or devise strategies to suit ourselves, but within a group setting some system must be adopted which suits all parties and makes the most economical use of time. (It hardly need be said that all members should read the material and formulate some ideas before the meeting).

Members of the group can take it in turn to 'present' or initiate discussion of the sutta concerned, (in whatever way they deem most helpful), or members can collectively 'go through' the text, voicing their doubts, difficulties or opinions

as they go. This is a matter each group must decide for itself - dependent upon the needs or views of the individual members.

Having a member of the Sangha present during a group discussion can be most helpful; to have an authoritative opinion readily available is indeed a bonus but some members of a lay group may find this initially inhibiting and a disincentive to participate. Perhaps the answer here is for the group to work for a while on their own, making notes of difficult passages or topics along the way, and then from time to time, inviting a member of the Sangha along to talk especially about these problems.

Adopting these kinds of approaches, and using such strategies really makes a difference to our perception of the suttas, and with greater acceptability comes greater enjoyment.

Barry Durrant

Although bowing is a common gesture in Buddhist gatherings and other Eastern traditions, it is not something which many Western people are comfortable with - myself included. In fact, it is a practice which is often viewed as alien to western culture. Through our conditioning, we are more likely to associate bowing with primitive heathen worship or humiliating subjugation. It also runs counter to the anti-authority and pro-individual Western culture which tends to discourage respect for any sort of authority apart from our own.

Interestingly enough, bowing in the West is becoming more common through martial arts where the teacher and students all bow in the Dojo at the start and end of the training session. So we may find that negative conditioning reactions to bowing will gradually decline.

The dictionary defines bowing as 'to bend the body in respect' but also mentions 'to submit'; 'give in': or 'surrender'. Bowing provides a visible gesture to others that we respect what is represented by an image or that we respect people who are worthy of respect - Bhikkus and Bhikkunis in particular. This is the outward value of bowing.

Its inward value is in encouraging mindfulness and 'letting go'. What happens when you bow? Do you feel angry or embarrassed? Perhaps self-conscious? Do you like surrendering? Could you possibly find it a joyful and happy gesture? I find bowing is most difficult when I am not mindful and there is a strong sense of self. Sometimes I forget to do it. Try bowing on your own to see how it feels.

When do we bow?

When entering or leaving a Buddhist shrine room, one bows three times - to the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. One also bows once or more before a monk or nun. This may be a kneeling or standing bow. During chanting there are also points at which bowing occurs. I usually bow before and after meditation. It then becomes part of a positive habit for encouraging concentration.

BOWING

How do we bow?

In a kneeling position the hands are placed palms together in anjali and then raised to the head; lowered to the heart region and then moved to the ground with palms flat down and the index finger and thumb of each hand touching. This provides a 'digital' platform which protects the forehead from impact with the floor if one accelerates too much (or falls over!).

I find that hinging from the knee and hips provides a flowing and comfortable movement. However, this depends upon your own body shape, size and flexibility. Experiment until you find something that feels right. Try getting family members to bow to each other. It can be quite an illuminating experience. How do you feel when someone bows to you?

Chris Ward

Sitting together,
it is not the absence of noise
but the presence of silence
which invites us to experience
the reality of communion,
the communion of reality.

Sitting together,
it is not the presence of self
but the absence of self
which allows us to experience
the reality of wholeness,
the wholeness of reality.

Kalyani

H O M E L E S S

Some Snails carry their house on their back and have the luxury of retreating inside at will. If you tap the shell they shrink into their home straight away. If you look at these snails crawling along, carrying a house on your back can seem like a very cumbersome activity. Most of us non-snails live in a physical home, but spare a thought for the Homeless.

Michael, a small framed man standing inside Bank Underground station, shuffling from one foot to another. Long hair, matted in locks after years of neglect. Head hanging looking at his feet through his locks. By contrast, commuters washed and powdered in work clothes rushing past, oblivious to Michael, set on their destination.

John, sleeps on a public bench near St. Paul's carrying most of what he owns with him. The area which is his home, is marked with his perfume. No one wants to walk past him, perhaps it is too painful, too real, hoping that this will never happen to them. I too was afraid, not of him because he is not a frightening person, but afraid of facing someone who has fallen through a hole in society. Taking my courage in hand I tried many times to say Hello, this being greeted with silence.

Over a period of time I observed John to ascertain what kind of help, if any, he was receiving. Towards the end of the job I had at the time, I used to bolt out of the office to get a coffee mid-morning from a sandwich bar. I saw John sitting on a wall. I recognised the packaging. The coffee shop where I was going had given him a 'cuppa' and a blueberry muffin.

John was sharing his muffin with some sparrows and other little birds. They were at ease with him and it was obvious that they were regular to each other. It was very touching that someone with so little could share so much.

An internal debate arises. If I give money to the homeless will they spend it on drink, drugs, etc. Who am I to judge what they do with the money? In giving from this perspective am I trying to control the outcome according to my views and opinions about how they should be, live their lives, etc.... After much consideration and abandoning rational thought I decided that food is one thing that may be difficult to get if you have an addiction. In Camden I have offered many homeless people a hot cup of coffee or tea. Such an offering has never been refused.

Ginger, for whom I once offered to buy some food, told me that I should decide what he should eat. Had he really lost his ability to Choose? I have discovered over time that a number of homeless people are vegetarian. This brought home the point that even the homeless are entitled to their principles. At Christmas time I asked a guy selling the Big Issue if he'd like a sandwich. He said "Yes, if they are vegetarian, I'm not a cannibal". I had already given all the vegetarian ones away and, as it was raining heavily and I had been on my sandwich run for a few hours, I was keen to get

to put some distance between myself and the meat sandwiches. I was feeling dejected at the Big Issue reply.

Will I ever get rid of these sandwiches? What am I doing this for, out in the wet and cold. As I carted the dreaded sandwiches and my heavy load of dejection up towards Camden Lock, I spotted a man and woman with a sleeping baby crouched under a shop canopy. I somehow knew that they were hungry. In an effort to communicate with them I realised that they didn't speak English. In a smattering of French I worked out that they would like sandwiches and a coffee. I gave them the sandwiches and trotted off to get the coffees. As they came into sight on my return they were wolfing the sandwiches. I also saw the shop owner come out to give them some money and disappear with the ease of an

angel. A quick assessment of the situation led me to believe that they were probably from Bosnia.

The baby was very cleanly dressed, sleeping gently in its mothers arms. They had such an air of being a family, each caring for the others. I suppose even though their circumstances were bad they did not make it part of themselves. Leaving, I was grateful to the rain for hiding my tears.

Life on the street seems to have the same problems of greed and competition as exist elsewhere.

Blankets get stolen, competition for sleeping space in a shop doorway, etc. Perhaps life on the streets is on an instinctive level and survival tactics come into play.

Trying to use my instinct I try to work out if the person before me would like to chat or not.

If they have a dog it's easy, as many people love to talk about the object of their affections. I have had a few chats in doorways and on pavements which have given me much to think about. Sometimes they don't want to or can't talk, which is also fine.

The homeless are after all someone's brother, son, sister, lover, etc. who for whatever reason, have fallen through a hole in Society. I have ceased trying to work out the rights and wrongs of Society with my mind. Instead I try to live by intuition.

When you see a homeless person, look beyond their circumstance to see the Being Within and send Love from your Wise and Loving Heart.

"Walker"

"At some point your heart will tell you what to do"

Abijan Chah



SUMMARY OF NATIONAL UPĀSIKĀ MEETING HELD AT THE SAMATHA BUDDHIST CENTRE, MANCHESTER,

January 20-21, 1996

An Upāsika representative national meeting was held at the Manchester Meditation Centre. Because of the monastic winter retreats and the wish to vary travelling distances for the representatives from the widely separated monasteries an alternative venue was sought. Thanks to Krishna's efforts and the Samatha Meditation Centres' generosity, it was held in Manchester. Being the first such meeting it was the first to be significant, and as such of interest to Upāsikās. Jenni Jepson, a participant, has kindly written a report of this gathering.

Attended by Ray King and Catherine Hewitt (Devon), Mike Downham and Carmel Brown (Harnham), Nick Carroll, Krishna Padayachi and Jenni Jepson (Amaravati). Unfortunately, due to a variety of circumstances Chithurst was unable to be represented on this occasion.

Although most of us had to travel a considerable distance, the Manchester meeting proved a valuable, productive and thoroughly enjoyable event – providing a chance to network effectively ... to meet old friends and make new ones, to hear each other's news, share experiences and achievements, air anxieties, identify difficulties and swap ideas.

The supportive, open atmosphere was due in no small part to the generosity of the Samatha Trust supporters in allowing us to use their well-equipped and cared-for Buddhist Centre (a former Methodist chapel), complete with impressive large and small shrine rooms, meeting rooms, kitchen facilities etc.

Main areas of discussion:

- 1 Arrangements for Magha Puja Upāsikā weekend at Amaravati (March 8-10)
- 2 Reports on Upāsikā groups at Amaravati, Devon and Harnham.

Magha Puja weekend

- Theme: "Sangha", invitation to Ajahn Viradhammo and one lay member to speak.
- To involve both Sangha and Upāsikā members.

Arrangements:

- Retreat centre available to accommodate visitors, including those travelling from Harnham and Devon. Numbers to be confirmed
- Co-ordinate sleeping and eating arrangements (breakfast for Upāsikās in Retreat Centre; main meal with Sangha in sala).
- Liaise with ABM kitchen re food for main meal on Saturday; organise help with food preparation; financial contribution.

Change of name:

On discussion the group favoured the title, Upāsikā Community. This was seen to encompass different needs; to strengthen and reaffirm the existing relationship between monastic Sangha and lay practitioners, and develop this further through personal practice within the development of a sense of lay community.

Development of training

Upāsikā Community to act as an umbrella group within which specific training and practice would be offered.

- Suggested subjects proposed by Amaravati Upāsikā group:
Basic Buddhist study
Sutta Study
Vinaya practice
Chanting classes
Training for potential teachers

Teaching/talks on Buddhism to outside groups:

- Ray King agreed to write an article on his Buddhist teaching experiences for the Upāsikā newsletter
- Also agreed to set up meeting at Amaravati for potential teachers
- Seek Ven Kusalo's input re teaching packs
- Approach Upāsikās with teaching skills/experience.

Upāsikā group reports

Devon

- Ray and Catherine provided updates on Vihara activity, stressing the far-flung nature of lay support (Numbers attending Upāsikā meetings have varied).
- Some discussion about cost and relative need for a temple at Amaravati. Does it help to lead a simple life? What is its significance to practice?
 - Need to improve limited guest facilities at Devon.

Harnham

- Carmel presented an update on the current state of the property dispute at Harnham, indicating that there was cause to hope that it could be resolved satisfactorily in the near future.
- Mike reported on successful Upāsikā meetings at Harnham, attended by up to 20 people (drawn from very wide area). Meetings seen as valuable way of sharing experiences; helping to strengthen commitment to personal practice
- Hoped that a minibus of supporters from Harnham would attend Magha Puja weekend (numbers to be confirmed).

It was agreed:

- National Upāsikā weekend to be held annually; to include representatives from more meditation and Upāsikā groups
- Support fund for those of limited means to travel to Upāsikā meetings and attend retreats.
- Form regional mailing lists and help foster greater sense of local lay communities

... in the North

FOUR UPASIKA MEETINGS took place at Ratanagiri (the Jewel on the Hill) in Northumberland during 1995. Each of these meetings has had the same form, the emphasis being on an opportunity for lay people to spend a full day (Saturday or Sunday) at the monastery together in spiritual friendship.

We start the day by offering contributions to the monastic meal, and eating together with the Sangha. Afterwards we gather on our own, pay homage to the Triple Gem, and sit together for half an hour or so. We then form a circle, and each person is given an opportunity to share their recent experiences of daily life practice.

It is good to find that in the context of the monastery, and in the shared interest in the Buddha's teachings, people are able to open their hearts to each other, even when people are new to the group, or do not know each other particularly well. There has been much to learn from listening to the joys and difficulties of others, and from relating one's own story in a safe place. After an hour or so we break for a walk or a rest, then have a second period of sitting, followed by discussion, before meeting with one or more members of the Sangha over tea. This is a good opportunity to share the main meals which have emerged from the discussions with the Sangha, who offer valuable reflections and who find that that they are able to gather useful insights into lay life.

The day ends with the evening puja, during which some or all of us renew our commitment by offering flowers, incense and candles, and formally request the Refugees and Precepts.

Numbers at the meetings have ranged from five to sixteen. Different faces appear at different meetings and nearly everyone on our mailing list of 36 has been to at least one meeting. It seems to have been helpful to have had one person as a regular facilitator.

To avoid a closed group as well as to save time and costs on communication, the only notice of the Upāsikā days is in the Harnham newsletter "Hilltop" which goes out to all lay supporters.

One feature that is emerging from our sharings, is the variation in the form of practice which each of us discovers as appropriate to the limitations and opportunities of our daily lives. Increasingly we find ourselves respecting the validity of each person's path, and are seeing that forms essential for a monastic community are not necessarily best suited to the wide variation in lifestyles and commitments in the lay world. Someone at a recent meeting, for example, described how she had been able to practice mettābhavana towards some difficult neighbours whilst strapping her young children into their car seatbelts.

Numbers may have been small, and "progress" may be slow and uncertain, but that feels fine with an idea which seems best unfolded gradually and gently, rather than striving for something larger and more defined, which is liable to be both exclusive and off the mark.

Mike Doutham

... at Amaravati

THE LAST YEAR AT AMARAVATI has seen a number of Upāsikā events including Study Days, a combined Upāsikā and ASN (Amaravati Support Network) gathering and a Review Day held in December.

The Study Days have formed the backbone of events and it might be helpful to enumerate the opportunities they provide. Firstly, they are an opportunity to study and reflect on extracts from Suttas and teachings on a specific theme (i.e. Right Speech, Right Effort, Right Livelihood) prior to the day itself. Secondly, an opportunity to come to the monastery and offer dana to the monastic community at the morning meal. Thirdly, an opportunity to reaffirm one's commitment to the Triple Gem and take the Five Precepts. Fourthly, to hear a teaching from a member of the monastic Sangha. Fifthly, to discuss one's practice and experiences with fellow practitioners i.e. learning to speak to others and to listen to others on Dhamma related issues. Sixthly, and perhaps most importantly, they provide an opportunity to spend time together, interacting and in silence, experiencing the sense of spiritual community with others.

The Review Day and the follow up questionnaire allowed us to take stock of where we were. Together with the comments and suggestions received, the responses highlighted a variety of expectations and hopes, some realised, some not.

It emerged that many individuals were still not clear about the purpose and guidelines of the Upāsikā Training as formulated and agreed over a year ago (see p. 11). Interesting was the comment from many, that the term 'Training' did not adequately reflect their experience of Upāsikā events. A desire for deeper training and more serious practice were frequently mentioned. This expressed itself in considerable interest in some form of 'basic Buddhism' course and in other possible developments suggested in the questionnaire i.e. Upāsikā weekend retreats, sutta study classes, chanting practice and a vinaya for lay practitioners. As a result, a number of working parties will be set up by those interested, to pursue these ideas further.

What has become clear is that as a 'vehicle' for lay practice, the Upāsikā Training needs to accommodate a very broad spectrum of individual needs, which can be broadly identified as having two different emphases - 1. the need for a monastic Sangha focused practice (as in the more traditional Theravadin model), and 2. the need for a Sangha inspired but perhaps more self-reliant and independent lay practice, in some ways complementing that of the Sangha's but in a lay context. Since the idea of the Upāsikā Training seemed to have been conceived with something like this in mind, hopefully there is room for both.

In the meantime we will continue the exploratory process of developing the Upāsikā Training at Amaravati with the much appreciated support of the Sangha and Ajahn Viradhammo in particular. We will try to respond to the comments and feedback received, realising that we are unable to please everyone all of the time.

N.C

... at Cittaviveka

The Upāsikā training programme at Cittaviveka is one characterised by the broad spread of spiritual opportunities it offers over the year, to meet the varying and diverse needs of supporters.

On the eve of the first quarter-moon of every month, lay supporters are invited to meet together for tea and discussion. (On occasions they are joined by a member of the Sangha) Following this informal meeting Ajahn Sucitto has offered the opportunity at the evening puja, for lay Buddhists to formally take the Three Refuges and Five Precepts – either individually or collectively.

In addition to the regular *desanas*, and the morning and evening pujas of the monastic regime, there are working parties where lay practitioners can work alongside members of the Sangha maintaining Hammer Woods, some week-ends being specially set aside for this purpose. There is an established Woodland Committee formed from both lay and monastic members, and a gardening group to constantly review the needs of the monastery grounds; new recruits are always welcome.

We have recently established more lay involvement with book-keeping, accounts and office management, and there is an "Events Committee" who's purpose is to assist in the organisation of events connected with the monastery such as The Kathina, Ordination, Wesak etc.

There remain plenty of opportunities for supporters to offer assistance in a variety of ways, e.g., cooking during the longer Sangha retreats and such help is always appreciated.

There is a regular Sutra Study Group meeting on the second Wednesday of each month, and Discussion Groups or "Lay Forums" are organised throughout the year- the last such meeting in 1995 being on Dec. 3rd, when we discussed "Buddhism and Social Action".

During the summer months a joint picnic for Sangha and lay supporters is arranged, and when a leader is available, whole days are given to a ramble through the surrounding countryside incorporating walking and sitting meditation, reflection, and an introduction to the local flora and fauna.

Barry Durrant

... in Devon

A beginning in the South West.

It is interesting to reflect on the long period of germination for the development of an Upāsikā Training group based on the Devon Vihara. For seeds to germinate and grow they need the right conditions. Some of the conditions necessary for the development of an Upāsikā group would seem to include recognition that there is both a space and need, that it could become a suitable vehicle for the mutual and helpful support of lay practitioners committed to following the Buddhist Pathway and that such a group would not be exclusive or divisive.

The nature of Devon Vihara, in particular its size, has

always brought a close association between the monastic sangha and lay supporters in an informal Four-Fold Assembly and this together with regular supporters meetings has, in the hearts of a number of our lay community, brought a doubt as to the need for a specific Upāsikā group and concern that it may cause division. It is, perhaps, recognition of this background and a sensitivity to the feeling of necessity to avoid division that it was not until the summer of 1995 that a ceremony was arranged for those who wished to formally commit themselves to the Upāsikā Training

It was on the 9th July, 1995, that five beings formally presented themselves to our Abbot, Ajahn Subhato, with offerings of incense, flowers and candles, and individually requested the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts. Four were undertaking the Upāsikā Training for the first time and the fifth was renewing their commitment, having previously taken the Refuges and Precepts at Amaravati. The occasion brought out a deep appreciation of the commitment involved and an awareness of the endeavour that would be needed.

A first gathering, possibly at rather short notice, was arranged December 16th when we enjoyed the privilege of offering the meal to the Sangha. We met together, firstly with Ajahn Subhato and other guests at the Vihara, to jointly take the Refuges and Five Precepts and to receive Ajahn's words of Dhamma, and later alone for a period of sitting meditation followed by some discussion. Unfortunately some were unable to be with us and this at first gave rise to feelings of disappointment but then acceptance and recognition that the success of the gathering was in the quality of the experience and not in the number of beings who were present.

It was not appropriate to consider the content of future meetings as had been intended, so this can be left for the future, but the format of the day seemed to be appropriate and we closed by chanting the reflection on the 'Sharing Of Blessings'

Ajahn Subhato joined us to share with us both refreshment and our reflections on the day. He was most supportive and encouraging, and has suggested that we hold an Upāsikā day each month, to be combined with the meditation workshops planned to take place on the last Saturday of each month, starting on the 30th of March, 1996. This will be an opportunity to spend time together both in meditation and reflection on our practice and to consider the way forward.

If you would like further information, have ideas to contribute about Upāsikā Practice in the South-west, or would like to join us on February 17th, please contact:

Ray King
"Crossby", Peoples Park Road, Crediton, Devon, EX17 2DA.
Tel: 01363 772007

DIARY 1996 - UPĀSIKĀ PROGRAMME ON BACK PAGE

Temple roof . . .

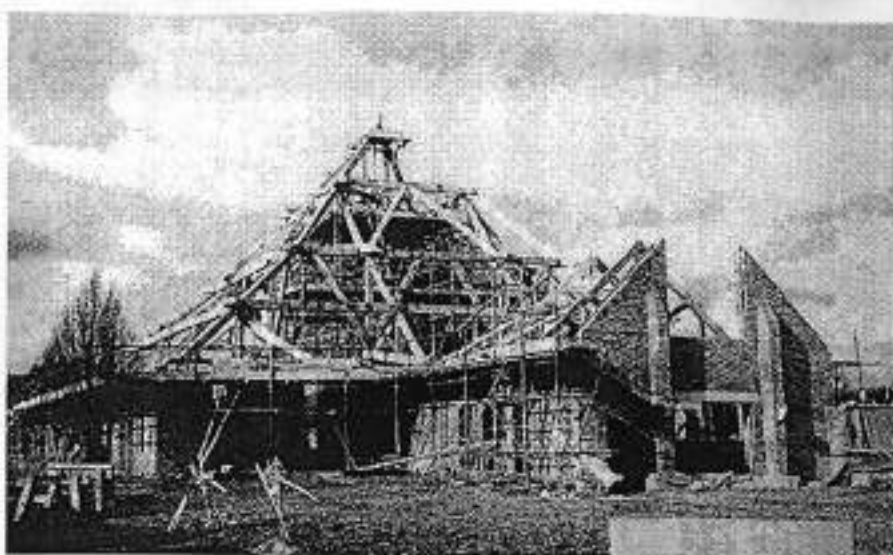
In January the pre-cut green oak columns and timbers forming the new temple roof were erected and joined into place.

Having allowed three weeks for the operation, in the event it only took two. The team of carpenters said it was the smoothest operation they had worked on.

The roof apex was lifted into place by crane, and long oak dowels locked it into place.

The carpenters held their 'topping out' ceremony by tying a sprig of oak to the top in gratitude to the oak trees that provide their livelihood and as a symbol of the trees (10 x as many as were used) that will be planted in their place.

Assisted by the Sangha and to the background sound of chanting, the Buddhist flag with the wheel of the Dharma was hoisted to flutter in the winter wind.



Above: The Temple at Amaravati in construction on February 18, showing the main timber frame in position.



Right: The Buddhist flag and oak sprig at the pinnacle.

U P Ā S I K Ā T R A I N I N G

Purpose

- ☞ To enhance individual practice and increase self-discipline through making a formal commitment to spiritual training.
- ☞ To deepen both the intellectual and experiential understanding of Dhamma.
- ☞ To have more supportive contact with like-minded people and the ordained Sangha.
- ☞ To be better equipped to communicate the Teachings to others.

Guidelines

- ☞ undertake to live by the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts, with the Theravada Forest Tradition as the focus of one's Buddhist practice.
- ☞ attend regular gatherings with other Upāsikās, either at the Vihara or in our own home.
- ☞ visit the Vihara and formally take the Refuges and Precepts at least quarterly.
- ☞ observe the Uposatha days of the full and new moons in some fashion appropriate to our living situation.
- ☞ practice meditation daily.
- ☞ find some time each year to go on retreat.
- ☞ attend at least one festival day or communal gathering at the monastery each year.
- ☞ cultivate a basic working knowledge of the Teachings.
- ☞ support the Sangha according to our means and abilities
- ☞ keep to the training for at least one year after having made the formal commitment.

A first . . .

Upāsikā representative national meeting.

A meeting between representatives of the local monastery Upāsikā groups was held in Manchester on 21st January to help develop the sense of spiritual lay community and shared practice within the same tradition, as well as to discuss and plan the forthcoming March Upāsikā week-end (8-10th March) at Amaravati.

A warm thanks was expressed by participants to the Samatha Trust who so generously offered the use of their centre with shrine and accommodation facilities for the overnight stay. (See p8 for fuller report)

Dana requirements . . .

How often have you wanted to offer dana to your local monastery and not known what was required?

Now you can find out with one phone call to 01273 502055 during office hours

The Dhamma School have kindly offered to provide a weekly update for all the four monasteries requirements.

Diary 1996

Amaravati

- March 8-10 National Upāsikā Magha Puja week-end (not to be confused with monastic Magha Puja assembly March 3-7)
- April 19-21 - Retreat Centre work week-end. All welcome.
- April 27 - Upāsikā Study Day
- June 22 - Upāsikā Study Day
- July 12-14 - Retreat Centre work week-end
- September 14 - Upāsikā Study Day
- October 18-20 - Upāsikā week-end Retreat
- October 25-27 - Retreat Centre work week-end
- November 23 - Upāsikā Review Day

Amaravati lay Buddhist group

1996 Winter Meeting Programme. Fridays at 7.00pm

- Feb 16 - Right livelihood.
- March 1 - Open
- Feb 23 - Completing the Spring programme
- March 8 - Brahma Viharas
- March 15 - Free Will

For more information please contact:

Cliff Grover 01582 768001 Chris Ward 01442 890034

We are putting together a list of all the small local meditation groups in UK associated with the Forest Sangha tradition. If you belong to one or if you are looking for other like minded people in your area to meet with on a weekly basis to share some quiet time with, please let us know. We hope to print a list in the next edition of 'Upāsikā Newsletter'.

Cittaviveka, Chithurst

Lay Forum

- March 24 - Living with the refugees
- April 21 - Religious pathways
- May 19 - Finding joy in the mundane
- June 16 - Parents

Sutta Class

- March 13 Aug 14
- April 10 Sept 11
- May 8 Oct 9
- June 12 Nov 13
- July 10 Dec 11

Contact: Barry Durrant. Telephone 01730 821 479

Ratanagiri, Harnham

Upasika days will be held every three months, the next one being on Sat. 30th March.

Contact: Mike Downham Telephone 01697 748 214

Devon Vihara

The next Upasika day will be held on Sat. 30th March.

Contact: Ray King telephone 01363 772 007

Financial Statement Feb '96 UPASIKA NEWSLETTER/TRAINING

Dana/Offerings	£ 759.00
Expenditure	£ 879.00
Balance	£ 120.00 Debit

If you wish to make a financial contribution to help cover costs, please make cheques/PO's payable to: Upasika Newsletter/Training

Editor: Nick Carroll Design & Production: Frank Watkins Distribution: anonymous offering

Your contributions, letters, suggestions are welcome, in fact necessary for future issues, but please don't be disappointed if they are not always acted on. Please address them to:

The Editor, Upāsikā Newsletter, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 3B2, England, U.K.

The Upāsikā Newsletter is put together and published as an offering to others. Its material costs are covered entirely by donations.

A financial statement will be shown at the back of each issue. All views and comments expressed in the Upāsikā Newsletter are personal.