



Community

Summer 2000 / 2543

The Upāsikā Newsletter

Issue No. 10



EDITORIAL



Putting Community together is always a lesson in trust - trust in each other as a team and trust in the creative process. The latter never fails to fascinate and surprise me. We embark on each issue like a journey into the unknown, trepidatious yet excited, carrying a bag filled (or more worryingly, half filled) with a multifarious collection of articles, information - and a handful of promises! Like a weaver allowing instinct to guide her hands towards the threads, the colours of your contributions are gradually woven onto the screen. The final piece slowly emerges - a diversity of shape and texture, each finding its place in the patterning of the whole, connected by a more durable strand which becomes visible as the process unfolds.

In this issue, the strand of suffering can be found in the stories of most of the contributions - some more obviously than others. Santoshni and Modgala write of the devastation caused by war, poverty and disease. Closer to home the pain of uncertainty is felt at Hartridge; the challenges of an intensive Zen retreat caught on paper by Bridget. Yet within these and other stories also lies another thread. The writers inspire us to remember that every suffering provides us with a catalyst to be liberated from the bonds of that suffering. "The Buddha points to Dukkha as the window of opportunity for those seeking

liberation from the roller coaster of Samsara" (Santoshni).

It is this experience of suffering which unites us and reminds us of our humanness and interconnectedness, for much suffering is exacerbated by a sense of aloneness and lack of acknowledgement. We forget we are one thread in a whole mysterious tapestry, our lives intertwined with all other living beings. We become blind to the truth that *everything we do matters* and that others *do* see and care. You will find this jewel thread woven through the words and images, from the warmth and joy in AIDs stricken Africa to how the beauty of a poem can touch our hearts at times of deepest despair. May we all keep our hearts open to the pain of life so that we may also live with its deepest joys.

Chris Blain

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Behind the scenes at Community

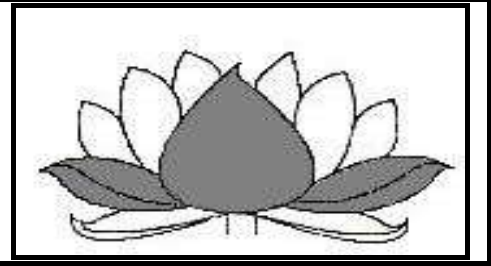
From the outpost of the North East I have once more taken up the reins of co-ordinating Community, a job made possible by the wonders of modern technology!! Tavaro has stepped down from the editorial team due to pressures of work but remains in the background with his support and advice. A huge thanks to him for all his hard work, tolerance and support. Welcome to Tony Spinks who has stepped into the breach by offering to work along side me typesetting this and the next issue. He has impressively survived his initiation into the world of newsprint and his contribution to our ever maturing team is going to prove invaluable. Many thanks also to all those who make each issue possible through their contributions and help. Chris B

UPASAKA [masc. / **UPASIKA** 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

Editorial & Production Team : Chris Blain, Nick Carroll, 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.

Dhamma Action In Zambia

Modgala Dalguid



October 1999. Letters arrive from Zambia, poignant letters from friends I made there. This time last year I was busy arranging my six month sojourn at the Tithandizane Primary Health Care Centre which was in its infancy. The project had been started by Linda Dhammika and Masiku Nambo less than a year previously, though they had long dreamed of such a project in this much neglected area of the Eastern province of Zambia.

Linda is a Primary Health Care teacher, a specialist in AIDS care and management, and a member of the International Buddhist Relief Organisation (IBRO). Nambo, a native of that area of Zambia, had originally been her student. A year previously, he had been an anagarika at Amaravati, which had given some initial support in the form of much needed medicines. The support also went on in another sense. While I stayed at Tithandizane, some nights we listened to a varied selection of Dhamma talks from Nambo's wonderful selection of tapes. Usually it would be very late as days were long and hard.

I was sent out to the project by the Amida Trust, a non-sectarian Buddhist organisation which focuses on therapeutic aid and humanitarian action. The remit was to help Linda, Nambo, the project and the community in whatever ways were applicable. When I first became involved with the Amida Trust, as a student and volunteer, I had no idea that I would be doing this work in Africa. But it had become obvious when we met Linda in 1998 that there were great needs there.

Before I went out, I had little idea of the amount of suffering a large proportion of our world has to endure. It was beyond my comprehension. However, I came to know it well as I joined friends and families in their celebrations, commemorations and many funerals. The work is hard for Linda and Nambo and the others. From dawn to dusk there are knocks on the

‘..The onset of AIDS is also devastating the community....’

door - all manner of people seeking medicine, first aid, advice and transport. As no other vehicles are available, the pick-up truck so generously donated by Buddhist friends in Malawi, is crucial and over-used - carrying people to and from hospital, bringing bodies back for funerals, carrying food in the depth of the famine we experienced last spring, and carting building materials for the much needed Project accommodation.

We never had enough sleep. The needs are huge. Less than half the children born reach adulthood. Before Linda and Nambo became involved, this area had no health care services locally and even now they are minimal. Water sources are mostly very poor, TB is rife and malaria is endemic, causing deaths and brain damage. Poverty, malnutrition and hunger abound. The onset of AIDS is also devastating the community. In some villages the imbalance of young and old can already be seen. A big

part of the Project is education, both in helping the young ones to keep safe, and helping the others to care for their sick and dying - and of course, helping many to face their own deaths.

I helped introduce people to massage, which can help give some pain relief when no drugs are available, affordable or wise to use. As I did this and cleaned and dressed wounds, I talked and supported many people through their illnesses, as well as their families after the event. I also fetched and carried sand, stones and building materials for the buildings that now grow, buildings which are a symbol of hope.

However, as well as the depth of suffering, I had also not expected the extent of friendship and acceptance I was offered. Out in the bush, many of the old traditions survive and Nambo and his family educated me into the ways of this community. Much laughter was directed at my inept attempts to learn their language, or to dress and eat in the proper fashion - not to mention my

‘..many times I felt overwhelmed with gratitude....’

inability to carry water on my head! I was taken into the heart of this community and many times I was overwhelmed by gratitude for having the opportunity to be with and be so warmly accepted by these wonderful

(Continued on page #)

HOW DID YOU BECOME A BUDDHIST ?



ROCANĀ

This is a question which is frequently asked, and although each Upasika has a different story to tell, their individual journey will usually resonate with most of us. We would like to offer you the opportunity to share your story - and Rocanā is starting us off.

As a student in the late 1950's, I heard about Buddhism, and was fascinated. However people said to me, 'It is far too intellectual and YOU will never understand it.' Being a very timid person I was put off, and crawled back into my little corner.

Years later, at the beginning of the 1990's, having been on the Executive Committee of the Notting Hill Council of Churches and the Parochial Church Council of St. James Norland Church, I had become totally disillusioned with any form of Christianity. My son, Robert, who had been living in Yorkshire, came back home and joined the local meditation group. One night he came back from a meeting and said, 'I have offered

our house for the group to meet in.' I had been told that I was not allowed to greet the monks when they came. 'You must not shake their hand or speak to them' - this from a lay person. So whilst the group met,

I would sit in the kitchen awaiting my entry as the tea-lady, having counted the pairs of shoes by the front door to know how many to cater for. I longed to go in to the meeting, but did not like to intrude on Robert's ground.

One night a wonderful Bhikkhu came, I think his name was Nirissimo. He knew that I had just started to become ill, and said, 'I am going to do a special meditation tonight. I think it might help you'. He gave a guided meditation which I later found was a body sweep and it was indeed very helpful, especially later when I did become very ill. This was what I had been looking for all my life. It felt like being really awake for the first time.

A few weeks later, with two friends from the group we went to an Open Day at Chithurst Monastery. When we arrived, Mike the former forest keeper, was giving a talk and showing slides, about the forest, in the reception room, so the room was darkened. As there were a lot of people in the room, the only space that I could see in the gloom, was a little gap

by the feet of a young man sitting in a large white chair. With his long legs stretched out in front of him, there was not much room for me to get on the floor, but in great discomfort and with much irritation I stuck it out. After hearing this young man speak in the shrine room, I wondered how he could know what I was thinking? How could he have such knowledge and wisdom? I later discovered that the young man at whose feet I had been sitting was the Abbot, Ajahn Sucitto. When I heard Luang Por Suedho a few weeks later, to say my mind was blown, was an understatement. For once I was stunned into silence and could only mouth, 'Thank you' to him.

Later, some of the group were going to hear the Dalai Lama at Wembley. I longed to go, but did not like to ask if I could, and was truly elated when my son asked if I would like to join them. Another breathtaking experience.

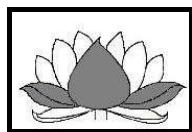
So the dye was cast. My life has truly changed.

I must not regret all those years lost, it would not have been the same.

May all beings be at peace.



(Continued from page #) share so much joy despite their suffering. The laughter of the children sings in my ears even six months after leaving their beautiful country.



No other organisations gave aid to this area apart from the Chipata based CBR (Community Based Rehabilitation of the Disabled). In fact to ensure famine relief earlier this year, Tithandizane had to take on supervision of its implementation, otherwise none would have reached the area. Clinic services are very limited. Often the most basic medicines are unavailable. A strong

memory for me is of the young boy with his intestines hanging out, having been gored by a goat. Our sterile dressings saved his life.

There are many people alive today because of the work of Tithandizane and many lives are enriched because of the project and the community - not just enriched physically, but mentally and spiritually too. It made a big difference to many people I talked with, to know their suffering is cared about in the rest of the world and that their prayers do not go unheard. They had some difficulty understanding my Buddhist faith (Zambia is a Christian country) but we found common ground and shared much. I still share much, as the letters keep coming and

I reach out to support them from afar. They need much support in practical as well as spiritual ways.

If anyone reading this would like to help in any way - for example medicines, laboratory equipment etc.. are very much needed, further information about this and the work of the Amida Trust can be obtained from: Modgala Duguid, Amida Trust, Quannon House, 53 Grosvenor Place, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 2RD Tel: 0191 281 5592



Uplifting the Heart - KATHINA

By Santoshni
Perera

Have you noticed how uplifted the heart feels when making an offering to the monastic Sangha? *Dana*, the act of giving, is one of the simplest, yet essential aspects of being a Buddhist. It heralds the relaxing and opening of the heart making it ready to embrace and absorb the Buddha's teaching. It is listed at the top of the ten *Parami* and promises to bestow "highest blessings" as mentioned in the *Mahamangala Sutta* (Sutta of Highest Blessings). There are of course many ways of giving - giving of one's possessions, wealth, time, labour are just some of these. We can also give in various circumstances and to various people. Out of compassion, we may give to someone who is in less fortunate circumstances than ourselves.

Making an offering to a *samana*, to one dedicated to realising the Truth, is not done out of compassion but out of gratitude and respect for their act of renunciation. This is a giving to one "who is worthy of gifts". This act of generosity uplifts the heart with its purity.

Kathina is the only event in the Buddhist calendar that is pre-empted and organised by lay people. This ceremony offers us a wonderful opportunity not only to express our gratitude to the monastic Sangha, but also to feel uplifted in our hearts by the practice of generosity.

So what is *Kathina*? It marks an occasion that dates back from the

Buddha's time. Mendicants, having spent the rainy season in one place, were made offerings of new robes and other requisites by lay followers before they resumed their wanderings. The moving story of that first *Kathina* is recounted and remembered as part of the latter-day ceremony that takes place in November.

The focus of the *Kathina* is on the offering of material for making robes. The *Pali* word *Kathina* comes from the word for a loom that was used to weave the cloth. In former times in India, we can imagine that the lay people set out at dawn in a group to pick the cotton, spin the yarn and weave the cloth that was to be offered to the monks. The cloth was then made up into a set of robes before sundown and

...You give little
when you give of
your possessions.
It is when you give
of yourself that
you truly give...'

Kahil Gibran

ferred to a mendicant who the monastic Sangha deemed had spent the rainy season in the appropriate manner. Today, we bypass the cotton picking part, but with the growing complexity of modern living, this is replaced by much planning and preparations for the day.

Each year the *Kathina* is "sponsored" by an individual, family or a group. Traditionally, the sponsor would have co-ordinated the cotton picking and weaving the cloth. Today, their role is to purchase the *Kathina* cloth, co-ordinate the donation of requisites offered by lay supporters and supplying other things that are needed on the day.

They will, of course, take the lead during the ceremony by formally offering the *Kathina* cloth to the monastic Sangha.

However, there is much other work to be done for each *Kathina*. At Amaravati, we have a "Kathina co-ordinator" and a newly formed *Kathina* core group. We each take responsibility for different aspects of the work which includes liaising with the sponsors, planning the stewarding for the rice pindapat and car parking, managing the food offerings, flower arrangements and décor, and organising the cleaning and rubbish collection amongst other things. We are also writing up an instruction booklet so that each year others can take on a co-ordinating role.

of- There are many other ways to be involved at *Kathina*, so when the next one draws near and you feel your heart being stirred with a feeling of generosity, write to "The *Kathina* Core Group" at Amaravati to say you'd love to help. If you'd like to play a co-ordinating role, contact us SOON. Be a part of an ancient ceremony that is organised by the lay practitioners of the Buddha's Teaching and let your heart be uplifted with the joy of giving!



KATHINA 2000

Cittaviveka [Chithurst]

15th October

Aruna Ratanagiri [Harnham]

22nd October

Amaravati

5th November

Zen Retreat

by Bridget Hickey

In torrential rain I alighted at Hemel Hempstead station, clad in the same clothes I would wear for the next five days: a bag containing a pillow case, a sheet sown down one side, toothbrush, nightie, sandals comb and towel. I was destined for the Zen retreat at Amaravati. Having no car, I set off to walk the five miles. Luck was with me, I was given a lift by a man who was 'house sitting' next door to the monastery.

By six p.m. the retreatants had gathered for registration, reminding one of displaced persons at a refugee camp with a possible escaped convict or two. We were allotted our working meditation chores [as usual I got the loos] From now on we would refrain from speaking, eye contact, reading and writing for the duration of the retreat. The discipline of rising at 4am and sitting on a cushion by 4.20, continuing the day with sitting and walking meditation for 12 hours is not for the beginner [some went home].

The Ven. Jisu Sunim was from a monastery in Korea. He gave excellent talks and instructed us on the correct way to prostrate ourselves. He told us to wash our teeth in water, massage the gums, without the use of tooth paste. It was difficult not to let the mind wander, speculating on the entire world giving up these items. Perhaps decaying teeth, mass unemployment and so forth. I did without the entire time, realising just how much we 'do' without question. He was understanding of our difficulties as lay people but also strict. He indicated that the first three days would be difficult, then much easier. One could rephrase this as mental and physical agony.

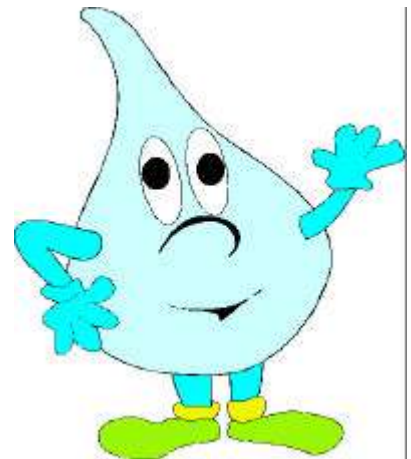
The exercises we did were excellent, giving a feeling of well-being.

Massaging the feet and body gave relief to aching muscles. As time went on, it became easier to relax into the pain without changing the posture. For myself I did not feel sleepy, but for those who did they could request a slap on the shoulders from the monk with a keisaku [the 'encouraging' stick]. A curious business with bows from the meditator and monk. These formalities were given with understanding, respect and compassion.

For me it was hard but not impossible to adapt to the routine and long sitting. I have been on similar and longer retreats before. It must have been difficult for some who had not meditated so long before. However I was surprised that we had supper, therefore we did not take the Eight Precepts. I observed my greed in taking more food than I needed.

The Ven. Jisu Sunim gave us valuable instruction to ponder on while walking outside. For example, he made reference to looking after and understanding mind and body, and being kind to oneself. All the exercises of self-massage inferred that we can be our own doctor by self awareness. He said he excreted once a day and urinated three times a day. [In walking meditation people nipped out to the loo. Maybe not because they needed to but because they needed a break!] This brought to mind running marathons. At the start one gauges the temperature, anticipated time, sweating and timing of consuming three litres of water and finishing 26 miles with an empty bladder. The same applies on retreat, so no problem.

All was going well until suddenly torrential rain. A huge drip started. Somebody got a tiny paper cup to hold the large noisy drips. It struck me as the funniest thing that ever happened. There we all were, poker faced and bolt upright. To control the bladder was child's play but the laughter.....!!! Then a washing up bowl was brought and a towel to stop 'drip'. Drip be-



came a person too. The rain stopped and an hour later no longer funny. Everything is impermanent. By the third day I would have been happy to continue for several weeks. However I was conscious of my practice of Vipassana and what affect this would have later. The Teacher mentioned twice about sticking to one practice. [I came on this retreat because it was the only time free for me.] I thought I was strong enough, but later it was as if the whole of my practice over the years had disintegrated, as if I was a boat at sea without a rudder. It can be difficult after the Zen teaching and discipline to return to lay life on your own. Mixing practices appears to be like mixing drinks.

I liked being given a number. The women had the prefix of Sila and the men Tara. This did wonders for the ego. We were called for private interviews by the monk. He seemed kind and understanding when our prostrations must have appeared extremely wobbly. [The

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ROADS

No need to wonder what heron-haunted lake
 Lay in the other valley.
 Or regret the songs in the forest
 I chose not to traverse.
 No need to ask where other roads might have led
 Since they led elsewhere
 For nowhere but here and now
 Is my true destination.
 The river is gentle in the soft evening
 And all the steps of my life
 Have brought me home

BY Ruth Bidgood

This beautiful poem was sent to me by a friend who had treasured it for many years. Thank you Ruth wherever you are.



SORROW, LAMENTATION, PAIN, GRIEF & DESPAIR

OUR STUDY DAY THEME – 27TH MAY 2000

In response to the subject of this study day, Santoshni Perera offered a slide show about the situation in Sri Lanka. She felt it might help us connect with and reflect on the experience of suffering and its transcendence. Below she explains how the slide show came about - the painful process from inception to the present day presentations.

Ten years ago, my mother wrote to me from Sri Lanka. She mentioned how the cost of fish was escalating on account of the corpses floating in the rivers.

Sri Lanka was being dubbed as the new killing fields of Asia and was in a political turmoil. I was a photographer then, so I travelled back home with the intention of recording the emotional impact all this was having on the ordinary people, particularly on women and children. This was a personal quest; I have always “felt” for those who are downtrodden and exploited. I had no political axe to grind and by then, I hadn’t any specific ardent religious persuasion. I guess I simply cared and my heart was aching for the suffering of the world...

On reaching the land of my childhood, what

struck me were how frightened, confused and suspicious the friendly, easy going people of this beautiful, emerald isle had become. Chaos reigned. Mistrust pervaded everywhere. Yet people seemed to somehow carry on with their lives amidst it all. Spurred by the spirit of my quest, I travelled lightly, carrying in a shopping bag, two cameras and a tape recorder, gingerly lifting the veil of normality to capture on film and tape the deep wounds that lay just below the surface. People had to overcome their fear to recount their horrific ex-



periences. I met a little girl turned mute by the horrors she had witnessed. I could only record the expression in her eyes. In another village, an old woman whose son had “disappeared” kissed my hands in gratitude for taking the trouble to care about what had happened. Soon people began using the tape re-

recorder to deposit their painful past so that they could get on with their lives a little less burdened. I had come face to face with the human reality of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

If I had chucked all the films and tapes into the Indian Ocean, this “artistic” exercise would still have been valid. However, I felt responsible for the stories with which the people had entrusted me. I realised that “burden” as soon as I felt the wheels of the

aeroplane lift off the tarmac. It was then that my own tears were able to flow. For the next twelve months, I would be transcribing tapes, listening anew to heart rending accounts of brutality and loss, the silent pauses in their painful narrative as tragic as the words themselves. I would be cooped in a dark room developing and printing photographs getting to recognise every line of grief, anger and despair etched on faces. I would be trying to make sense of it all - trying to find some order in the vast, chaotic mess of a collective human tragedy. For the next twelve months, I would suffer.

I was putting together the tape-slide documentary in the full glare of media reports of the Gulf War. People? Suffering? There was none. This, the media made us believe, was a “clean” war. But suffering is a universal human condition; no one escapes it, especially where there is strife. The documentary on Sri Lanka explores and exposes this aspect. As I construct the “storyboard” I find that I have to include the chaos, the raw emotion, the senselessness of it all. Above all, I realise that there are no “good guys” and “bad guys”, no right and wrong, no victors, no victories – there is only suffering. The perpetrators suffer just as much as the victims. So, do we take sides? Is compassion conditional? Can anger ever be righteous?

Making the slide show was a journey in itself. I felt I was being used like an instrument and guided right throughout the process. When it was finished, it was as though the slide show had always “been there”; I was a mere instrument in bringing the ingredients together. The people fea-

tured had become my friends, my teachers. Unknown to me, their pain and grief, merged with a good dose of my own, was preparing me to embrace the Buddha’s teachings on suffering and the overcoming of suffering. The final slide is a dedication: “*I dedicate this slide show to all those who gave their lives so that one day we will know the truth...* “. What “truth”? The truth of who killed whom? Who is guilty, who must to be punished? These are but the simple truths. The Noble Truth was waiting for me in the wise teachings of the Buddha.

Eventually, I have come to see the purpose of all this. Indeed, there is suffering so that one day we may know the Truth. That truth is not about despairing and questioning why the world is unfair, why such unspeakable barbarism exists, why there are wars, catastrophes, poverty and misery... and trying to make everything “right” and “just”... It is about our own response to it all. Understanding how the tiniest bit of anger, ill will, jealousy, and delusion in our heart/mind, is contributing to this “global” suffering. Once we realise this, the responsibility shifts on to ourselves, to examine the arising and the cessation of our own suffering and to practising the Noble Eightfold Path at an individual level. Yet, as humans, we remain connected. I realised that all those people in Sri Lanka gave their lives – indeed, suffering exists - so that we may realise the Truth of Suffering and follow the way to Liberation. If we don’t, all that suffering is but in vain!





NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

BY JULIAN WILDE

[aged 48½]

It's about eighteen months now that I have been involved with the Upasika group at Amaravati. What have I learned in that time? (apart from never bothering to tie your shoelaces until you actually leave the monastery grounds!)

I first became aware of the Forest Tradition when a friend, an ordained member of the FWBO, lent me a copy of Ajahn Chah's "Living Dhamma". It gathered dust on my bookshelf for a few weeks - the unimposing green cover giving me little inspiration to pick it up. When I finally did I was astounded by the contents. It was literally like being doused with cold, clean water - that sharp, immediate smack of reality all over the body.

I realised that up until that point my practice had been an "other" - something I did in front of the altar, in group meetings/discussion, when I wasn't actively 'living'. I hadn't allowed it to permeate everything I did. I was a Sunday driver!

I felt as though I had been wandering through an enormous marquee bearing the title of 'Buddha Land', enjoying the sights and sounds, the vast choice, a bit of this chanting, a bit of that ritual, half a dozen of those meditations etc. When I finally got to walk out the exit I found three decades had gone and I hadn't changed much inside at all. It was time to address that realisation and do something about it.

I needed a practice that could help me develop, but in a way that was sustainable. Sustainable is, I think, an Amaravati buzzword, or if it isn't, it should be. I found the concept very appealing, very important. It's very nice to have inspirational moments, to meet inspirational teachers but the real work of practice is in the day

to day minutiae, not in workshops and retreats.

So eventually I found my way to Amaravati and one Sunday took a very public Refuge and Precepts with a faintly amused Luang Por. One of his first questions was, "Why now?" My spontaneous and under-considered answer was that I felt I'd come to a crossroads in my life where my practice, which had got me through the first 47 years of my life, wasn't going to do much else and if I wanted to make progress I needed to change my ways.

Luang Por just laughed and said, "Good decision". Eighteen months on and I feel I have been nurtured enormously by the support of like-minded people and the awareness that the network we called the Sangha exists and functions in this society. The most useful lesson has been the realisation of the cycle where I often try too hard, my meditation gets tense, my daily practice gets rigid and unresponsive, I get dogmatic, my friends get amused, I get defensive and so on.....

I struggle daily with greed, hatred and delusion in various forms and of course

‘....I'm twelve
and a half stone of
pure opinion.....’

sometimes it seems as though I am getting worse instead of better. It just means I have become more aware of stuff to use as practice, more material to work with. There's no danger of ever running out of such material! At least I don't fall into the trap anymore of regarding meditation and daily life as separate practices. I recall vividly one of Ajahn Viradhammo's desanas, where he said (talking about enlightenment) "*Meditation alone won't get you there*". It's the learning to let go that I find a constant challenge. I'm twelve and a half stone of pure opinion.

I also use other wise words from Ajahn V as a meditation, this time when he was talking to the Upasika Group - "*Breathe the whole world in, accept everything. Breathe the whole world out, let go of everything*". I find this helps on those days when the mind is hyperactive or the body

too tense to focus on the breath consistently.

So what have I learned? Well, firstly to be a bit more gentle with myself, not so "steel-willed" as before. Secondly, that a sustainable practice means not necessarily accepting any kind of lowering of standards, but rather adopting a more realistic appraisal of where I'm starting from and trying consistently to raise the standard from that point, rather than towards some imaginary, perhaps unrealistic level.

It is not that life has been any kinder to me than usual during this period. Rather, I have managed to use most of what happens as my daily practice, more able to sit with emotions or physical discomforts, reflecting on impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and corelessness. I don't take things like disappointment, disagreements, criticism and animosity as personally as I used to. I now have the choice to watch emotions that arise and reflect upon them, rather than reacting habitually from a strong sense of self. In fact, this has become my main practice

What I especially appreciate about this particular path is that it keeps me connected with nature - through the observance days and lunar calendar, the walking or sitting outside and using nature and the changing seasons as a teacher. It's very compatible with my Tai Chi and Qi Qong training too. I feel very fortunate to have received that copy of 'Living Dhamma' from my friend. It set my feet on a true path, a sustainable journey.

Okay, enough from this 'new kid on the block'. Time to go and sit under a tree somewhere..... I would just like to express my gratitude to all at Amaravati for the kindness and patience they continue to extend to me. Many thanks.

STORY PAGE

Early one morning a man was taking a walk

along the sea shore when he came upon a beach covered with star fish. A freak wave had washed them up during the night and now thousands upon



thousands, as far as the eye could see, were dying on the sand as the tide went out. With a feeling of sorrow at the scene before him, the man hesitated to walk past them along the water's edge.

Suddenly he spotted an elderly woman in the distance, slowly coming towards

him. With each step, she stooped down to pick up a star fish and throw it into the sea. He approached her and called out,

"Madam, you are wearing yourself out for no purpose. There are thousands of them and they'll be dead soon. You can't make any difference. It's a hopeless task."

The woman bent down once more, picked up a star fish and threw it into the sea.

"It made a difference to that one" she said, looking directly at him; *"and that one"* as she threw another, *"and that one...."*



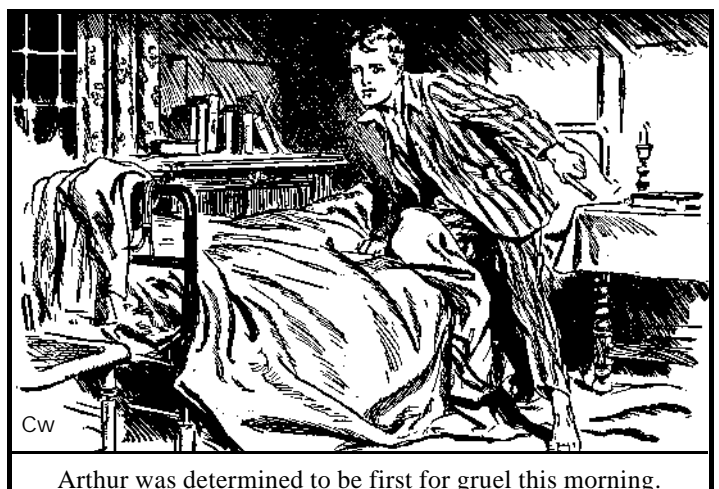
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'The Foundations of Buddhism' by Rupert Gethin; Oxford University Press; 1998

If looking for a scholarly and yet readable, comprehensive and insightful view of Buddhism, then this book is an excellent starting point. It is well-placed to support advanced level religious study or as a first year undergraduate text-book. The style is concise and fluent with useful references to other sources. I particularly liked the coverage of Theravadin and Mahayana traditions and the focus on their common heritage whilst discussing differences of emphasis. The author also presents in a balanced and positive way the position of faith, devotion and ritual, and Buddhist cosmology. These aspects of traditional Buddhist practice tend to be ignored or seen as somehow compromising the intellectual and analytical aspects of Buddhism that particularly appeal to the western mind. Yet, faith, generosity and devotional practices are not only very helpful (essential?) in creating conditions conducive to meditation, but also in keeping the Sangha alive. Most Buddhist practitioners - even those

of many years standing - will gain from reading this book. It is hard to find fault with it as a basic overview of Buddhism.

Chris Ward



Arthur was determined to be first for gruel this morning.

AUA News

AUA Endings and Beginnings

Amaravati Upasika Association activities are managed by a committee of up to fifteen lay people. The committee has a tenure of two years which ended in May 2000. Some of the members have subsequently decided not to stand for the new committee. These are: Bandu Amarwardena, Alex Clingan, Radmila Herrmann, and Keith Matthews

Each of these supporters has been active in various ways. Bandu has been working with school teachers; Alex with various events (including the temple opening); Radmila has played a vital role in administering and organising events, and Keith has been a key player in our mailings to the membership.

We thank them warmly for their support and friendship and hope that they will continue to be involved as far as possible in future activities.

In addition to these departing committee members I would like to mention Tavaro who has relinquished his roles as membership database secretary and as one of the Community editorial team. Although not an elected member of the AUA committee, Tavaro has provided invaluable support over many years. We wish him well.

The new committee with a tenure from June 2000 until May 2002 was elected by a majority at the AGM on 1st July 2000.

The members elected were:
Vicky Assling, Anna Bader, Nick Carroll, Jeffrey Craig, Martin Evans, Tony Fisher, Santoshni Perera, Colin Rae, Tony Spinks, Chris Ward, Gill Williamson, Shanti

We hope that that two additional members will be voted onto the Committee at the Study Weekend in September

These are - Suzy Reindorp and Jenni Jepson.

Chris Ward



EVENTS

The one day and weekend events provide an opportunity to spend time with others, in silence as well as in exploring themes relevant to practice and daily life.

All are welcome.



Day Events

[no booking needed]

28th August – Walk and Talk. Enjoy a walk starting at 9.30 from the monastery and returning in time for Ajahn Sumedho's 2.00pm talk. [please bring picnic lunch]

17th September – A slightly longer but not too strenuous a walk this time starting at 10.00pm returning at about 5.30pm [picnic lunch again please].



Weekend Events

18th November – Study Day – A Day of Practice

please send SAE to the AUA at Amaravati for booking form.

September 29th –October 1st - Greed, Hatred and Delusion

October 13th-15th – Kalyanamitta Weekend in Malvern. Have a relaxing and sociable stay with good friends in pleasant surroundings. Still 3 or 4 places left.

For more information please contact :-
Nick Carroll 0208 740 9748 / Chris Ward 01442 890034 or for walks and Kalyanamitta weekend –
Jeffrey Craig 0207 2219330 / Tony Spinks 01582

Connections



HARTRIDGE, Devon

After the New Year activities, the incumbents at Hartridge withdrew for the Winter Retreat. The lay community maintained limited contact through Sunday chanting and meditation, and regular cooking, this latter providing relief for the resident lay friends.

As Spring began to stir, the garden was filled with great drifts of snowdrops, a glorious white carpet which was a delight to see. Then came an abundance of small, wild daffodils giving a patchwork of gold, followed by clumps of primroses on the banks and under the hedges. The constant cycle of life and death continued.

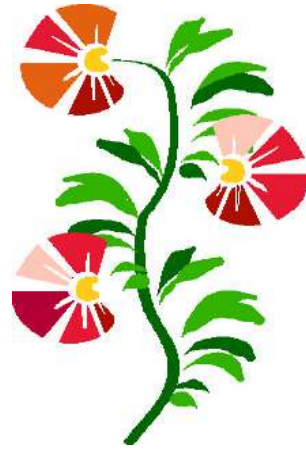
The nuns emerged and it soon became clear that the ever present lesson of impermanence was rumbling on. Now, as May blossom decks the hedges, bluebells carpet the ground and Wesak has been celebrated, we know that the future of Hartridge is unclear. For the lay community of the south west of England this brings sadness, pain, suffering - dukkha - and many questions as we wait; and the waiting, the not knowing and the just being in the present moment are hard lessons to learn.

We are concerned for the Sangha at this time and continue to offer support, but as individuals we are also concerned for ourselves. Personally, I see a developing closeness and strengthening of mutual support which could grow into something of great benefit. Meanwhile, we wait...

Mudita

HARNHAM

One chapter ends and another begins. The area in front of the abbot's cottage has been transformed into a lovely memorial garden with new



stone walls, a pool, trees and a shrine. Almost complete, this tranquil oasis marks the conclusion of many years work on the main monastery site. However, accommodation for lay people is still very limited. Down the lane, the workshop has been neatly moved into a container and the derelict cottage known as 'number five'

has been emptied of many years of accumulated lumber. The next main project is to renovate and extend this building to create an imaginative new lay retreat centre. Plans are drawn up and this new phase of work is well under way.

The supporting lay communities continue to thrive. The Newcastle Study Group now meets weekly and the Hexham Study Group has begun holding quarterly Dhamma Days.

Details: Marion Keay 01388 817974

CHITHURST, Sussex

Lay Forums continue to arouse much interest with a recent meeting discussing "Buddhism and Psychotherapy" being especially well attended. On July 23rd there was a "Kalayanamitta" day enabling lay practitioners to meet informally to discuss ways of collectively furthering and sustaining our practice, as well as how best to help the monastic Sangha.

On September 17th Ajahn Sucitto has kindly offered again to conduct the popular ceremony "Renewal and Resolution", our individual and collective way of taking the Three Refuges and Five Precepts.

The forthcoming rains retreat will be dedicated to a silent meditation retreat for the first four weeks, followed by a continuing 'in depth' study of the Vinaya.

Barry Durrant

LETTERS



Dear Editor,
I am writing to express my thoughts and feelings after attending my first (but by no means last) Upasika Weekend at Amaravati in March, and say thank you to all the committee and other retreatees!

As I drove up the M1 late Friday afternoon, I certainly did not have a clear and empty mind. I arrived with expectations and fears around such areas as 'silence', about being a novice among 'experts', judgements about arising at 6.00am on Saturday (5.30am on Sunday due to the onset of British Summer time) and retiring at 9.30pm - and the prospect of lack of food or freezing through lack of heat.

All my presumptions were wiped out within minutes of arrival by the warm reception of the participants, the presence of central heating, the amazing quantities and quality of meals and a packed schedule which found me crawling exhausted into bed, stimulated yet peaceful, at the end of the day.

I was particularly impressed with the planning meetings which allowed participants to decide on the nature and timing of the weekend's workshops. This resulted in ownership of the programme and evaluation at the end of the weekend. The meditation sessions were longer than I am used to sitting, yet finished far too soon. The sharing in the sutta discussions was profound and intellectually stimulating, demonstrating the range of skills and knowledge existing in the community.

I even appreciated the mindfulness during silent mealtimes and sought out solitary periods when I walked the fields in the uplifting Spring sunshine.

Most of all, I became aware of a new community of like minded people and look forward to attending study days, weekends and longer events in the future.

Thank you,

Marion Baker.

Greetings from Melbourne,
.....I am one of the five trustees of Sanghaloka Forest Hermitage. We have two monks residing with us in our 10 acre forest property. We are following Tan Ajahn Mun's tradition which in turn includes great teachers like Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Maha Boowa. We have strong contact and relations with Tan Ajahn Chah's monasteries and Tan Ajahn Maha Boowa's monasteries. Last month Ajahn Vajiro visited England for his retreat and was very impressed with your association and he brought back some of your magazines for us to read and contemplate. We have taken his suggestion seriously and have decided to form a similar organisation in Melbourne and hope to link with your association. We are very keen to receive help and information as to how to conduct the association and also how to organise dhamma activities.....

Yours in the Dhamma

Kean Lee

NEW KID

[...continued from page 10]

It's about eighteen months now that I have been involved with the Upasika group at Amaravati. What have I learned in that time? (apart from never bothering to tie your shoelaces until you actually leave the monastery grounds!)

I first became aware of the Forest Tradition when a friend, an ordained member of the FWBO, lent me a copy of Ajahn Chah's "Living Dhamma". It gathered dust on my bookshelf for a few weeks - the unimposing green cover giving me little inspiration to

pick it up. When I finally did I was astounded by the contents. It was literally like being doused with cold, clean water - that sharp, immediate smack of reality all over the body.

I realised that up until that point my practice had been an "other" - something I did in front of the altar, in group meetings/discussion, when I wasn't actively 'living'. I hadn't allowed it to permeate everything I did. I was a Sunday driver!

I felt as though I had been wandering through an enormous marquee bearing the title of 'Buddha Land', enjoying the sights and sounds, the vast choice, a bit of

this chanting, a bit of that ritual, half a dozen of those meditations etc. When I finally got to walk out the exit I found three decades had gone and I hadn't changed much inside at all. It was time to address that realisation and do something about it.

I needed a practice that could help me develop, but in a way that was sustainable. Sustainable is, I think, an Amaravati buzzword, or if it isn't, it should be. I found the concept very appealing, very important. It's very nice to have inspirational moments, to meet inspirational teachers but the real work of practice is in the day to day minutiae, not in workshops and retreats.

NOTICES



Share your News!!

Publicise and Advertise – This is the place to let us know what is happening in your area and an opportunity to publicise any event you think may interest other Upasikas.

Donations

We rely totally on your donations to keep *Community* going and pay for the other mailings you receive during the year.

No amount is too small!!!

Please send donations to Community c/o Amaravati, making cheques payable to 'Amaravati Upasika Association'.

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 Roger 253650

The Bodhinyana Group

Wednesdays 7.30 – 9.30 in the Bodhinyana Hall, Amaravati.

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.

September

13 - Does Letting Go = Passivity?

20 - Is Learning a Good Thing?

27 - Buddhist Practice - Virtue and Right Action

October

4 - Share a Favourite Book Evening

11 - Is there a purpose to life?

18 - A Basic History of Buddhism

25 - Buddhist Practice - Mindfulness, Concentration and Wisdom

November

1 - Handling (Sudden) Misfortune

8 - How Do We Know we are not Enlightened?

15 - Dealing with Emotions

22 - Buddhist Practice - Sutta Study

29 - Working with our Bodies

December

6 - Energy, Effort and Making Time

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 822097

Radmila Herrmann 01494 864905

Buddhism for Schools

Amaravati is looking for lay volunteers who are interested in visiting schools to talk about Buddhism and possibly in hosting school parties at the monastery.

We are also looking for people who might be interested in developing resources for teachers. If you would like to help please write to:-

Ven. Dhammanando (Schools Liaison) c/o Amaravati Buddhist Monastery.

Mailing List

PLEASE let us know if you no longer wish to remain on the mailing list as this helps to save us money.

One Day Vipassana Retreats:

Let by teachers from Gaia House, Devon

LONDON:

Sept 17 Christopher Titmus
The Essence of Meditation
Oct 22 Martine Batchelor
Quietness & Clarity
Nov 19 Stephen Batchelor
Meditation & Creativity
Dec 10 Yanai Postelnik
Path of Freedom
Cost: £15.00 + dana
Contact: Clare Brunt 020-8755-0353

OXFORD

Sept 2 Catherine McGee
Nov 4 Stephen Batchelor
Cost: £10.00 + dana
Contact: Jude 01865 242037

BRIGHTON

Sept 16 Christopher Titmuss
Oct 21 Martine Batchelor
Nov 18 Stephen Batchelor
Dec 9 Yanai Postelnik
Contact: Joty Barker 01273 887695

SACRED SPACES PILGRIMAGE

My name is Ruth Ana Gaston. On 1st September 2000, I intend to start a bicycle pilgrimage from the North of Scotland to Chithurst in the South of England. This is approximately 1,500 miles and should take 6 weeks. The purpose will be to experience different sacred spaces and deepen my own understanding of truth whilst raising funds for the new Dhamma Hall at Chithurst Buddhist Monastery.

Sacred spaces are places to relax into something calmer, truer and more meaningful within ourselves. They allow like-minded people to gather, listen to teachings and support each other.

It is with tremendous joy that I prepare for this opportunity to visit some of the most powerful sacred places in the UK and Ireland, be they ancient standing stones, stone circles, trees, natural landscapes, holy springs and wells, churches, cathedrals, monasteries, temples and mosques.

Any sponsorship of my journey will be much appreciated. You can donate a total sum or sum per mile as you prefer [i.e. 1p per mile = approx £15] My address until September 1st is: -
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery,
Great Gaddesdon, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

1st NOVEMBER

Send to The Editor, Community Newsletter, Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesdon, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ [3.5 in floppy disc is good - but typed or handwritten is also fine].
RING: Chris Blain 01207 563305
Email: gillylove@tinyinonline.com.uk

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