



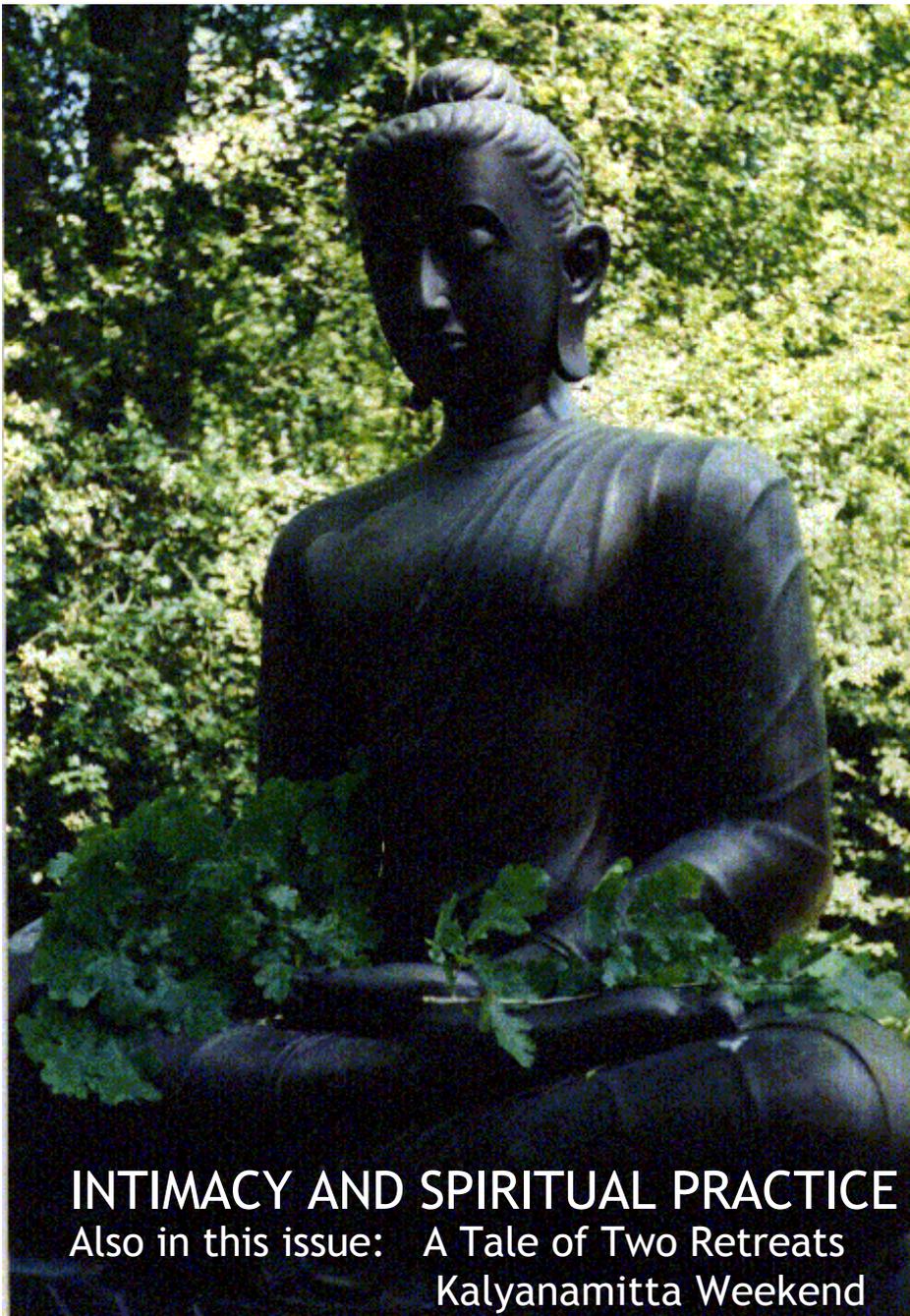
Community



Autumn 2000 / 2543

The Upāsikā Newsletter

Issue No. 11



INTIMACY AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE
Also in this issue: A Tale of Two Retreats
Kalyanamitta Weekend

EDITORIAL

Christmas will be almost upon us by the time you receive this edition of Community. On this bright October morning it is hard to imagine deep mid-winter. But the realisation has set me reflecting on how the contents of this newsletter connect with an annual celebration that has so many conflicting connotations for most of us - Buddhist or otherwise.

Of course, the key is *dana* - giving or generosity, which Christmas and Kathina epitomise. If we can find the time amidst the busy-ness of this time of year, we have an opportunity for reflection on the essence and practice of giving.

In a recent discussion about Christmas presents with my younger brother, he suggested we buy our own presents rather than being subjected to the annual angst of what to get the other, or add to each others collections of 'unsuitable' presents. This was a tempting proposition - he is notoriously difficult to buy for. But I declined the deal. Despite a variety of motives for giving, and our difficulties with receiving, I felt we must hold to the spirit of *dana*. As the first of the 10 Perfections (Paramitas) and embodied in the Second Precept, *dana* is a challenging and heartfelt practice. Once we begin to cherish and reflect on the heart of the act, we see why the Buddha gave it such priority in the spiritual life. Giving is the expression of love and compassion - and to act upon the impulse to give takes us beyond our limited views and conditioning. It makes us free.

Once our eyes are open to it, we see how we are giving and receiving all the time - not just at Kathina or Christmas. We give our wisdom, our skills, time, ideas and knowledge, our innermost selves and creativity, our care for the environment, as well as the many ways we give practically in service to our families, friends and Sangha. At a recent Upasika weekend, Ajahn Sumedho encouraged us to notice and appreciate this inherent goodness, this willingness to give, so evident in

each edition of Community. Some give up precious time to collect the edition from the printers. Others make a commitment to write a review or share their insights and reflections. In each article we find the force of generosity and openness of spirit, whether it is the willingness to sacrifice personal comfort and safety for the welfare of others in Africa, or expose ourselves and offer inner reflections on a sensitive subject such as intimacy.

We have chosen a community and culture of generosity as opposed to the worldly culture of taking and achieving and in doing so we commit ourselves to opening our hearts to others. In this issue are reports from the Kalyanamitta and Upasika weekends, study days, Sangha picnics and annual festivals, all telling of times when we experience, enjoy and take refuge in the specialness of heartfelt community, giving on every level and soaking up the love and friendship of others.

Some day we will truly *know* that there is no difference in giving and receiving. In the meantime, Christmas brings an opportunity to reflect on the meaning and importance of *dana* in our daily lives. Let us also include what it means to truly give to ourselves as well as others.

May all beings in the world be free from danger.

Chris Blain

The wise
hold on to nothing as theirs
And reject nothing as not
theirs

Sutta Nipata

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.

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/>

Kalyanamitta Weekend

From 13th -15th October, a group of 13 friends gathered at Anybody's Barn, near Malvern, Worcestershire to enjoy a weekend of walking, chatting and sitting in the most gentle and beautiful of circumstances. Some impressions of the weekend follow:-

We knew we'd come to the right place, it was pitch black,
Black as a sooty cat. We wandered, directionless, lost,
Like one, or two, who were a few stones short of a path.
Past a haunted house, through a gap in a wall, through a muddy orchard,
Till lo! We saw a light and lo! A door and through the door, people.
A happy throng imbibing in a hearty repast of Tony's Allotment Soup.
A welcome of good friends, a glow of kindness on a dark autumn night.
At the first croak of the sparrow Tony led us forth to conquer yon lofty mount.
Over and round, up and down we puffed until the promised teashop we
espied.
To all the world it pretended to be open, yet, in spite of the menu, food was
off.
Rejected and dejected Diana dragged us back over the hill to a jolly public
house
Where I thought Tony looked surprisingly at home with his pint of apple juice
And it was funny how they seemed to cater so well for groups of twelve.
By the time we left the mist had come in. Thank goodness Gary brought a
compass.
Then we went on a nature walk, twenty miles by road, in the next field.
Isn't it the way with nature that it's never there when you want it,
It's good to know it's got the intelligence to go somewhere else.
Poor old Tony. He had to make it all up.
At least, I don't think you get hippopotami in Worcestershire.
Fungi but not hippopotami.
Nevertheless we all loved it Tony and good luck with your career as a guide.
Well, the next day we really did have a walk in the next field.
Unfortunately we got gloriously lost in a nearby wood.
As it was Gary's fault Diana made him go and negotiate with a lady to let us
out.
He must have done this very badly as although she let us trample through her
garden
She didn't offer us a cup of tea.
Perhaps she knew we were Buddhists and capable of bending spoons.
Or had she been warned about Gill's rude jokes?
Thank you Tony and Jean for organising the weekend and for all your hard
work
And to everyone who came for being such fun. Here's to the next time.
Martin

'This was one of the first spiritual walking weekends I have participated in which has brought a new meaning to one's life
Being surrounded by like-minded friends, the sheer beauty of the countryside and the soothing views from the Malvern Hills were simply breathtaking.
Though one realises with this path that things are not permanent and change constantly, one can only appreciate the beauty of nature without clinging to it.
Our gratitude to Tony for making such simple things in life truly worthwhile
With metta
Living in Dhamma
Shanti'

The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities.
But to know someone here and there who thinks and feels with us and who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.
Goethe

I have not gone away for a weekend with such a large group of friends since I was at school. It was something that I was really looking forward to.

Three of us travelled together and it was fun to be driving into unknown territory sharing the experience. Anybody's Barn was difficult to find in the dark and an owl and a few bunnies were witness to the detour down a farm track! But,

having found the place it was so nice to walk into a lighted room full of friends, with hot soup and bread waiting. It was a very welcoming feeling and reminded me of the excited feeling I experience when the last guests arrive on Christmas Eve and the holiday can begin!

The barn was warmer and nicer than I had expected. The bedrooms were quaint shapes, the

bedding was comfortable and the bathrooms were far more civilised than I had hoped for!

The next morning it was dark when we arose to meditate but light by the time we had finished.

Having never visited the Malverns before, it was pleasant to be driven to the starting point for our first walk and to observe the locality on the way. Tony had planned the walk well and we were lucky with the weather. It was after a fine lunch in the pub that life felt good enough to start telling rude jokes! Something that would never occur to me as appropriate at the monastery!

Back at Anybody's Barn, Tony and Jean had overestimated our capacity to eat, and the scones, doughnuts etc kept appearing. However, we had chance to walk them off when Tony gave us a conducted tour of a wildlife centre. Then back to the barn and time to eat again. All the chores and cooking seemed to be done without anyone directing proceedings. I think the experience of weekend retreats was useful and something of that routine seemed to be understood by all.

Martin showed us photographs of Sri Lanka and explained how the lay Buddhists there have nowhere to invite monastics to for dharma talks. We discussed setting up a fund to help them build a shelter.

The fresh air, exercise and good food made for a great nights sleep and bed was just a bit too cosy the next morning when we rose early to sit in the

living room turned shrine room.

After another very pleasant walk, some of it passing through orchards heavy with apples, all too soon (yes, all good weekends are impermanent) it was time to eat, share birthday cake with Tony, tidy the barn and leave.

For the whole of the weekend I felt very 'looked after'. As someone who usually ends up looking after others it was great to be on the receiving end of care and compassion. Tony and Jean's preparation allowed the whole weekend to feel very relaxed.

The happiness I experienced over the weekend stayed with me for days and I felt that I bounced through the subsequent stressful week. The change of routine, visiting beautiful countryside and the company of good friends is clearly a good remedy for stress.

Without wishing to be clinging and displaying craving.....can we have another weekend like this please?

Gill

Watch out for the Meditation on the Countryside lay weekend next summer at Amaravati. Ed.



Getting rice to the Sangha seemed to be getting harder



**Meditation Camp
Dartmoor August 24 - 29 2001**

Incorporating Insight Meditation and Qigong with an emphasis on Dhamma community and Sangha sharing. Silent morning, afternoon discussion groups, evenings around the campfire. Participants limited to 40 with communal meals and large heated meditation space. Led by Yanai Postelnik (Gaia House teacher) and Brad Richcouer. Contact Brad tel 01364 631 185

A TALE OF TWO RETREATS

by Linda France

Whenever I go on retreat I take my camera and try to capture something of that special way of seeing that seems to develop while my mind is focussed, alert, appreciative and free from distractions. If it's true that every picture tells a story, the photographs that arose from the two weeklong retreats I've been on this year tell very different tales.

I went to Taraloka, a Friends of the Western Buddhist Order Women's Centre in Shropshire, in March; the theme was 'Metta'. Maybe it's not so surprising that my pictures were of a very beautiful magnolia bursting into blossom. The retreat was metta-ful in every detail: gentle and affirming, with regular creative and resonant meditations, nightly pujas, honest and inspiring talks and discussions. In the afternoons there were body awareness sessions. The three retreat leaders were friendly and encouraging and, with the other twenty or so retreatants, there was much laughter and rich silence. My practice was strengthened and deepened and I was also able to resolve a then-current personal issue. I came home brimming over with loving-kindness, feeling rather like the white magnolia myself, very alive and content.

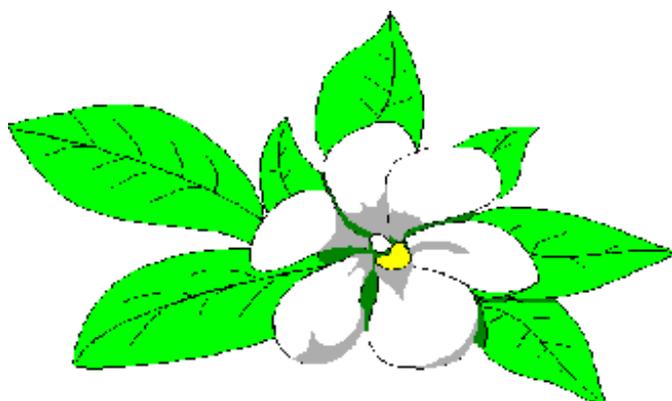
The photographs I took at Gaia House during my retreat there in August (called 'Meditation on the Nature of Mind and on Compassion' led by Charles Genoud) are all of the harsh lines of the building - dark, complicated, incomplete. Gaia House used to be an Anglican convent and it still tends towards austerity in both inner and outer form. The strict rules of silence, no non-verbal communication, reading or writing, without any space for 'checking-in', for me, added to the sense of constriction and isolation. The rain that fell unrelentingly for most of the week didn't help either. It was a larger retreat - about thirty-five men and women from all over the world; the number fluctuated as people came and went

throughout the week, contributing to my mood of confusion and insecurity.

I wanted some comfort and support but the rigours of the regime and the general air of coolness provoked more challenging and painful issues than at times I knew how to handle. And I had nowhere to direct them other than the extensive meditations - demanding and unfamiliar Tibetan practices - and my own, less than positive, reflections. More than once I considered leaving early. On Newton Abbot station that last Sunday morning, I felt like I'd been let out of prison; I was raw and uncomfortable and immensely grateful to be going home.

Looking back, four weeks on, the picture from Gaia House isn't as fresh and gorgeous as Taraloka's white magnolia but it is gritty and interesting. There's something authentic and altogether necessary about all those shadowy angles that I'm still exploring and will be for a while yet. Sometimes it's good to get more than you bargained for, especially if it teaches you that there are many different ways to blossom. But that's a tidier ending than it really is. I doubt if I'll ever return to Gaia House but I can imagine visiting Taraloka again. And so the story continues.....

'....feeling rather like the white magnolia myself, very alive and





HOW DID YOU BECOME A BUDDHIST ?

This is a question which is frequently asked and although each person has a different story to tell, each individual journey will usually resonate with most of us – perhaps you would like to share the first steps of your journey with us?

Insofar as anything can be said to have a beginning, my first real contact with Buddhism came at the Friends Meeting House in Bedford back in the late 80's. I had asked my husband, Tony, to drive me to the meeting and although he was not searching for anything spiritually at that time, as Head of Religious Education at a school in London he was interested to see what happened.

Feeling a little apprehensive, we entered the building and were immediately welcomed by the group. The first thing I noticed was a line of shoes outside one of the rooms; then on entering, I noticed a lot of cushions on the floor with some chairs around the sides. Having no idea what to expect we rather foolishly sat on a cushion but it didn't take too long before I made a hasty retreat to the chairs. We were told that a monk or nun from a nearby monastery would be coming to give a talk that evening on Right Speech, this meant nothing to me but at that moment the door opened and in walked a monk who was introduced to the group as Ajahn Succito. As soon as he started talking, I was immediately filled with a sense of, 'this makes sense and I want to know more'. At one point, my eyes filled with tears as I remembered that I definitely did not have Right Speech earlier that evening when I was talking to one of my sons and trying to get ready for the meeting.

After the meeting Tony and myself just sat in the car outside the Meeting House speechless. Both of us were absolutely hooked!

The next meeting we attended had a different monk giving the talk, Ajahn Amaro. In the following weeks we were also privileged to hear Sister Thanisara and Sister Candasiri.

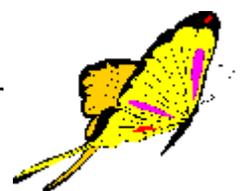
After a few months one of the group in Bedford asked us if we had been to the monastery yet. We had not and didn't even know where it was located, when we looked on the map we found that instead of the 20 miles to Bedford it was only 10 miles to the monastery and so started our much appreciated and loved association with Amaravati and the Sangha.

What brought me to this point? In the late 80's, although I was happily married and had two wonderful sons, I had a real physical ache inside me as though something was missing, I started going to the local churches searching for something but was left feeling bored and that this was not it. I have always been drawn to the East, even at school I would choose India or Japan when we had to write a project, and with Tony's job there were always books around about world religions I started reading all I could and was drawn to the Buddhist way of life.

Now, some 12 years later, I am blessed with so many like-minded friends and when I book my summer holidays at work, the first two things I check are the dates of the retreats and the date of the Buddhist Summer School at Leicester.

The Path is not always easy, but nobody said it would be, and only the other week I said to Tony that I felt more confident in life in general but did not know why I felt like this. He said, "perhaps you know there's nothing to fear". That's good enough for me!

Supañña





STORY PAGE

Once there was a very old man who used to meditate early every morning under a large tree on the bank of the Ganges River in India. One morning, having finished his meditation, he opened his eyes and saw a scorpion floating helplessly in the strong current of the river. As it was pulled closer to the tree, it got caught in the long roots that branched out far into the river. The scorpion struggled frantically to free itself but got more and more entangled.

When the old man saw this, he immediately stretched himself on to the extended roots and reached out to rescue the drowning scorpion. But as soon as he touched it, the creature jerked and stung him wildly. Instinctively, the man withdrew his hand, but then having regained his balance, he once again stretched himself out along the roots to save the agonised creature. But every time the old man came within reach, the scorpion

stung him so badly that his hands became bloody and his face distorted with pain.

At that moment, a passer-by saw the old man stretched out on the roots struggling with the scorpion and shouted, "Hey, stupid old man, what's wrong with you? Only a fool risks his life for the sake of an ugly, useless, ungrateful creature. Don't you know that you may kill yourself to save it.?" Slowly the old man turned to look at him. "Friend," he said, "because it is the nature of the scorpion to sting, why should I give up my own nature to save?"



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Wordsearch eh?..... Shouldn't I be meditating?

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| BUDDHA | MOON |
| CHANT | NIRVANA |
| COMPASSION | NUN |
| DANA | PATH |
| DHAMMA | PUJA |
| GENEROSITY | RETREAT |
| JOY | SANGHA |
| KATHINA | THERAVADA |
| MEDITATE | UPASIKA |
| METTA | WESAK |
| MONK | WISDOM |

N O I S S A P M O C G K E F K
 I M E E A D A V A R E H T A P
 R O P W C Q M T T S N Q A T W
 V N A I H Y B B T A E R T E R
 A K I S A P U A E N R B I R U
 N U N D N T D M M G O X D I W
 A B T O T X D O G H S O E A J
 D M K M S V H O G A I O M U U
 Z R A B E Q A N I H T A K B F
 Q H T Z U O M H T A Y J L T Z
 K P Z K R W M K I W O U N Y E
 F M S E C K A S E W J P R V C
 J T C B E R R C Z V Q R T I I
 R F Q X S P N I D T U O K Z C
 H C E C A D I I B J D B I I Q

Intimacy and Spiritual Practice

From a talk given at the Bodhinyana Group at Amaravati

This is an interesting and quite sensitive subject area especially with regard to physical intimacy. We have complex views on physical intimacy. For some of us our Christian heritage has conditioned us to experience guilt and anxiety in relation to sexuality. We can also believe from the existence of many suttas which proclaim the dangers of sensuality that Theravadan Buddhism is opposed to physical intimacy. The monastics are celibate and this can suggest that this is important for lay-people who are committed to spiritual development.

What I would like to do is to separate this whole subject into three parts. Firstly, I want to focus on biological drives and the nature of 'replicators'. Then I want to look at the spiritual dimension – what it is like to have an animal body with a drive for physical contact. Finally, I want to consider non-physical intimacy.

The biological term 'replicator' identifies one key feature of living things – that they reproduce. All living things are replicators. Each of us exists because of the success of our ancestors in replicating their genes. We are the survivors. The unsuccessful replicators have no descendants. So being good at reproducing is a key capability of our animal bodies. From a biological perspective we have inherited our ancestors drives to identify a suitable healthy mate and to procreate. Without this drive the human race would have died out.

It can be quite difficult for us to come to terms with our sexuality, not only our orientation – whether we are attracted to the same or different sex, but also with the sometimes overwhelming desire for sexual contact that we can experience. This can be especially difficult during adolescence. I have personally found sexual desire a difficult energy to come to terms with. It can be a fiery and

powerful drive which can sweep all other considerations before it. It crops up at unexpected and unwanted times. It can be like being permanently hungry.

Theravadan Buddhism takes an noteworthy position on sexuality. It is really not that interested in it. It is much more concerned in fostering our spiritual qualities – our specifically human qualities, so sexuality is viewed in this light. Unlike the traditional Christian view, sexuality is not condemned and Buddhism does not have the obsession with specific sexual acts that characterises our Christian tradition. So there is no condemnation of homosexual practices or just about any other common expression of sexuality.

There seems to be no Buddhist equivalent to the approach that sexuality is basically nasty and something to be repressed and avoided, giving rise to guilt and anxiety. However, I think that Christianity has identified and amplified a widespread underlying discomfort or ambivalence that most human cultures seems to feel towards sexuality. I doubt that there has ever been a 'golden age' of innocence where sexuality has been trouble-free. Because of the discomfort many of us experience towards our sexuality we can be manipulated into adopting a negative view or into trying to control these drives in unskilful ways.

Instead of obsessing over specific sexual acts or orientations, Buddhism focuses upon the intention behind sexual intimacy and the situation within which it takes place. It stresses taking responsibility for our actions, being faithful and living in accordance with the five precepts. So that for partners who follow the lives of householders, sexual intimacy is perfectly acceptable and virtuous and can be a joyful and enhancing exchange.

Buddhist practice encourages us to see our sexual drives as part of the deal of having a

'Buddhism focuses upon the intention behind sexual intimacy and the situation within which it takes place.'

Human body. These drives are 'not-self' and if attached to lead to lust and hunger – to suffering. We are encouraged to recognise sexual drives for what they are and to leave them alone. We do not repress them or identify with them, so that we can gradually develop a perspective and be freed from compulsive actions.

Humans are not simply animals driven by automatic instincts – our reflective capacity and wisdom enable us to understand our biology, learn to let go of desire and make choices which are appropriate to our situation.

Intimacy at the spiritual level means being patient, open, and honest with both ourselves and our partners. It is about trust, giving generously and freely to another, developing restraint and self-control, compassion and mudita (delighting in the joy or good fortune of others). Accepting graciously [– why do we sometimes find it so hard to accept from another?]. Being patient.

These qualities can be developed in any close relationship (whether non-physical or otherwise). This is the challenge we have taken on in intimate relationships. We are working within a defined situation and within the five precepts to develop these positive qualities. Often things are difficult. We can get angry, impatient or dislike our partners at times. Or just get bored with them. We make mistakes. As householders with partners these factors are where our practice is focused

Reading the Suttas it is stated that as one progresses along the spiritual path, celibacy will be adopted. Now we could interpret this from a 'should' point of view. We should be celibate if we are to be spiritually advanced. I do

not think this is necessarily what the suttas are pointing to. I think they are identifying one of the results of spiritual practice - a natural and unforced disinclination to take part in physical intimacy. I have noticed during periods when I have experienced more refined mental states, that desire for sexual contact is of much lesser interest, (as well as desire for food). I personally do not have much of a problem with lust whilst on retreats. I think this is partly because it is a low stimulation environment – there is not much to excite desire or lust.

However, although chastity can be a natural and happy result of practice we can also intentionally adopt periods where we avoid all sexual contact in order to motivate ourselves to develop refined mental states and to see what happens when our habitual tendencies are thwarted.

' Intimacy at the spiritual level means being patient, open and honest with both ourselves and our partners'

In conclusion, intimacy is not really dependant on physical contact. It is about developing an open and trusting relationship with another person in which we can share our thoughts and reflections without fear of these being abused or exploited. Kalyanamitta – or spiritual friendship – covers this aspect of intimacy. One could also hope that in an ideal therapeutic or counselling situation this intimacy may arise. Sometimes a trusted friend can point to habits or behaviours which we are blind to or which are just too difficult for us to understand without some support. It is in this close relationship with another that we can learn from our strengths and failings and strive to develop compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

Chris Ward



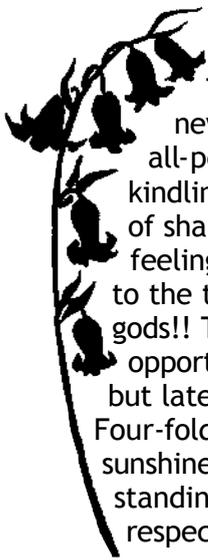
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



To help with the Hertfordshire Hospital Trust Chaplaincy. Occasionally there are Buddhist patients in Watford and Hemel General Hospitals who would appreciate a visit. Are you interested in offering some time?

Connections

Chithurst:



The first Kathina Ceremony of the new millennium was graced by an all-pervading air of generosity and kindness. This extended from the spirit of sharing, the joy of giving and the feeling of camaraderie and bonhomie, to the thoughtfulness of the weather gods!! The latter not only provided the opportunity to take the meal 'al fresco', but later encouraged members of the Four-fold Sangha to walk in the autumn sunshine and bask in the warmth of long-standing friendship and mutual regard and respect for Dhamma.

Ajahn Sumedho headed the list of senior members of the Sangha (many of whom had travelled from monasteries far-afield) and gave a thought-provoking talk on generosity, its role and ramifications within human society. The afternoon closed with a musical interlude and exhibition of childrens' pictures and poems.
Barry Durrant.

Harnham

The day dawned dull and cloudy on the morning of the Sangha picnic. We had arranged to meet at a spot just south of Amble on the beautiful Northumberland coast, so we set off early, along with umbrellas and contingency plans for a down pour, for a remote north-east beach. Lay supporters travelled from as far afield as Scotland and Lancashire, as well as parts of the north-east, and for some it was to be a rare glimpse of the coastline and the majestic but uncompromising beauty of the sea. Maps of the area had been distributed at the monastery with instructions to 'look for familiar faces on the beach'. 'Spot the saffron robes', might have been more appropriate but everyone arrived well in time to offer the meal to the members of the monastic Sangha. As the morning wore on, the sun began to burst through

the clouds so that by the time we had found a suitable spot for the picnic, and we had all found each other, it was an unexpectedly warm and pleasant day.

We had a spectacular view of Coquet Island which still has a lighthouse built on a monastery which was home to the twelfth century hermit St Henry and was visited by St Cuthbert. After the shared meal, the monks were joined by some of the lay people for a walk along the sand, and there were quite a few bare feet to be seen enjoying the benefits of a paddle in the North sea, not renowned for its pleasant temperature, but bracing nonetheless.

All in all, a very pleasant experience and an opportunity for a more relaxed and informal gathering of lay people and monastics. Two opportunities arose for reflection on the First Noble Truth: one being the ubiquitous sand in the car for the next three weeks, and the other, the knowledge that the nearest toilet was approximately one mile away in Amble village!

Liz

Hartridge, Devon

The summer months have been a strange and unreal existence for the lay community in the West Country. In June and July there was a 6 week period with no monastic Sangha member in residence. Ajahn Sundara returned for about 4 weeks but left on 15th August to spend the Vassa at Chithurst. So the lay community is left without a focal point, except for a monthly visit from a monastic. We do not know how long these visits will continue.

In early July, a group of us gathered to try to formulate what we felt we needed from Hartridge. It was clear that everyone valued the monastery greatly and saw it as a place of strengthening and renewal in the turmoil of modern living - a sanctuary - an oasis. We felt a need for a monastic presence, preferably a constant presence, with someone available at weekends to meet lay people, lead a Sunday Puja and give teachings. On the other side of the coin, we needed to be able to welcome the monastic Sangha and offer dana and practical help.

Hartridge, Devon..continued..

an oasis. We felt a need for a monastic presence, preferably a constant presence, with someone available at weekends to meet lay people, lead a Sunday Puja and give teachings. On the other side of the coin, we needed to be able to welcome the monastic Sangha and offer dana and practical help.

The regular Meditation Workshops and occasional Dhamma Workshops have met a need for instruction beyond the immediate lay community and it seemed important that these should continue. There was also a need for guest accommodation to be available for personal retreat for both lay men and women who could join the daily life of the monastic Sangha. It was further felt that there was a need for a Lay Group; to provide mutual support and that Hartridge would be an ideal venue for this. The Group would



Mudita

almost certainly need spiritual direction from the monastics from time to time.

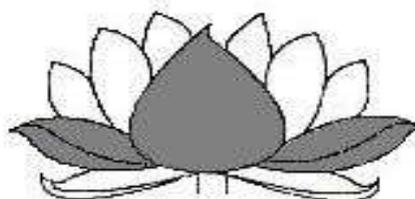
These perceived needs, together with our concern for the monastic Sangha at this time, and a suggestion that a free and frank two-way dialogue might be useful, were conveyed to the monastic Sangha - and the waiting continues.....

A friend wrote recently asking, "Are there Burmese or Sri Lankan residents nearby who may have a Vihara you could visit?" The answer is that here in the West country there is, as far as I know, nothing comparable with Hartridge.

The loss is great.

Dhamma Action In Zambia

Modgala Dalguid



In the last edition of Community, we included a report from Modgala about her work in Zambia where poverty and AIDS were taking their toll on a small community. She is now back in the west, but maintains contact with Nambo and Amrita who are currently working there. This update starts with a report from Amrita:

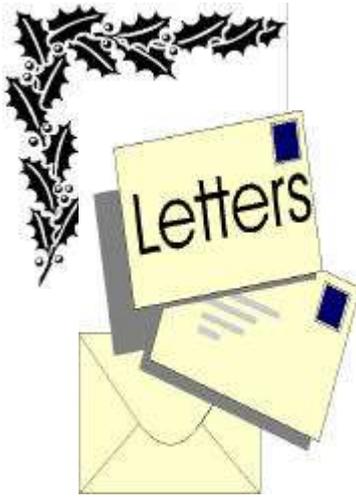
"Dear friends,

On Thursday this week I experienced evidence of how little control we have over the 4 elements. I reached the house to see a huge bush fire sweeping towards me across Tithandizane land. The wind had blown it across the fire barrier. I started with a wrong idea that water could do something to stop the fire, but backed off when one of our shelters burnt up within minutes. The builders who just hacked off bush branches and started beating the fire without worrying so much, did a much better job. I experienced ill-will towards the ones who had started the fire looking for mice to eat, and felt pain that all my trees and insects were being burnt. We just managed to push the vehicle out of range and save it along with the house which would have been damaged by a full tank of diesel blowing. We thought 2 of the chickens had died, but found them up a wall in the hostel. I held one in my arms for a long time not wanting to let go of that moment of painful joy.

This experience has reminded me that greed and hatred have to be removed to eliminate suffering. The all-black landscape proves the Tithandizane land is not in our control and hence not belonging to me - only wrong view (delusion) made me think otherwise" Amrita

Slowly and surely work on the buildings progresses. However, as usual life there is far from easy and I am making a plea on their behalf for any spare medicines, especially those for epilepsy, asthma and diabetes. Plasters, antiseptic creams and bandages, painkillers, arthritis drugs and ointments are always needed as well as vitamin C (- fresh fruit and vegetables run out at this time of year). There is a continual struggle to keep their old vehicle running - it has done a sterling job taking people to hospitals, carrying building materials etc. More than anything, it carries the message that they are not forgotten in their suffering and that there are friends the other side of the world.

If you can help, please make cheques payable to Amida Trust and send to Amida Trust (reg charity no 1060589) Quannon House, 53 Grosvenor Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 2RD . Thankyou. Modgala.



Dear Editor,
I have attended my first Upasika weekend at Amaravati (on greed, hatred and delusion). I found it informative, enjoyable, thought provoking and conducted in a friendly and stimulating atmosphere which, nonetheless, brought out some aspects of myself which were not very pleasant.

In one of the discussion groups we talked of the difficulties some people coming from the Christian tradition experience, either in themselves or as a result of their nearest and dearest fearing or disapproving of their interest in Buddhism. I also experience the same and would like to offer those interested a suggestion to read a new book entitled 'The Hidden Gospel' : Decoding the Spiritual Message of the Aramaic Jesus, by Neil Douglas-Klotz (pub. Quest Books).

Aramaic was the language Jesus spoke. In this clear and thorough exposition, the author juxtaposes an Aramaic translation with a standard English one, using the authorised King James version of the Bible. What emerges is a very different picture of Jesus from the one mainstream Christianity portrays. Here, Jesus' teachings approximate the Buddhist emphasis on, amongst others, practice, breath awareness, impermanence of the body and views of good and evil as conditions rather than personal qualities. The following quotes give a flavour of this:

"Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit"
(Matthew 7:17)

The Aramaic version reads:

"A ripe tree brings forth ripe fruit, an unripe tree brings forth unripe fruit".

The author goes on: "This makes a world of difference. The tree is not morally bad, but rather unripe. This is not the right time or place for it to bear fruit. The lesson is to do with time and place, setting and circumstance, health and disease."

The meanings of phrases like 'Son of God' and 'The Son of Man' are explored in the light of the Aramaic language and usage at around the time of Jesus as is the meaning of the Eucharist. Extensive translations of words like 'body' and 'blood' give a totally new interpretation of Jesus' sayings at the Last Supper, giving a notion of recycling of matter (the body) and relating forgiveness and renewal to blood.

"Unlike the later Christian church, the earliest Christian movements seem to have emphasised Jesus' words and wisdom and his teaching ministry, rather than his origin and his end. His words and actions as a prophet and mystic inspired them to incorporate his way of being in their own lives."

The book could be viewed as a stepping stone between Christian and Buddhist traditions and may allay some of the fears and concerns that 'new buddhists' or their relatives may experience.

with metta,
Eva Zoltowska

The world is too much with us.
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.
William Wordsworth

Kindly note:-

If you have letters or any other contributions for COMMUNITY, please send them to the Editor, Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesdon, Herts HP1 3BZ.
Or ring Chris Ward 01442 822097
Email upasika@btinternet.com



The Way of Healing - Chi Kung for Energy and Health

By Master Lam Kam Chuen

published by Gaia Books Ltd 1999. £12.99

Bookshelves groan under the weight of books about exercise. But this book deserves space, not on a bookshelf, but beside you.

Physical meditative exercises are best taught directly, but failing a good teacher or class in your area, or to complement your current exercise routine, your practice and understanding of how to cultivate your energy will be enriched by this sensitively and well produced book. Beautifully illustrated, with a concise, clear and poetic text, it conveys the gentleness and power of a system of training that skilfully used, can complement and wonderfully support your sitting practice. Applied well, it could help transform your life. Highly recommended.

Nick Carroll

The Zen Path Through Depression

by Philip Martin Harper books, San Francisco £9.99 pbk

Depression can be frightening and disorientating - both for the sufferer and those around them. I came across this book thinking it might help my brother-in-law who has had several spells of depression in recent years. I have to confess that I have yet to give him the book because it's been so helpful in coming to terms with my own anxieties, fear and even despair.

This encouraging guide is filled with clear insights and practical advice, arising from the author's personal experiences in which he used well-known Zen practices to alleviate his own depression. Different aspects of depression are dealt with in a positive and uplifting way by Martin, who ends each chapter with a useful meditation or reflection.

What I found so refreshing and inspiring was that although this book is undoubtedly aimed at helping sufferers, it is a must for anyone (Buddhist or non-Buddhist) seeking to understand more clearly the mystery of their fluctuating mental states.

As for my brother-in-law, I'm going to buy him another copy!

Jenni Jepson



AUA NEWS

LAY PEOPLES WEEKEND SEPTEMBER 2000



Retreatants poised to start their walk

Greed, Hatred and Delusion are not exactly the most attractive of topics for a weekend retreat, but sometimes it feels as if the topic is really a secondary issue. Balance, Connection and Heartfulness were my experience of this truly special time. From the moment that Robert and I staggered out of the car into the retreat centre kitchen, the 6

hour journey faded into a memory. We sank into the companionable warmth that is so characteristic of these weekends - personified by Jenni's delightful welcome as she abandoned the soup to ply us with tea and biscuits!.

To be able to relax, share with others, walk, talk and relish the rich silence is a precious gift, made all the richer by being at home among those I have come to know and trust over the years. Yet the balance of having newcomers each time is also important as is the opportunity to experience the diversity of offerings from the participants. Sutta study was balanced with Chinese energy exercises; discussions about coping with strong emotions balanced with a damp walk in the countryside: - our co-operation and good humour seeing us through the more challenging moments. The cherry on this particular cake was Ajahn Sumedho who spent a couple of hours with us answering questions and imbuing us with his special presence of spaciousness and ease.

Come along next year if you have the opportunity. It is a unique experience - every time!

Chris Blain

The Amaravati Upasika Association was formed to foster and encourage good Buddhist lay practice. It does this by providing a lay forum for all those interested in the Buddhist path in the form of one day and weekend events, as well as other informal gatherings. At the heart of good dhamma practice lie commitment and determination. Whether you are simply interested in just beginning or whether you have a well-established practice, there is the space and opportunity to develop all aspects of the Buddhist path in a supportive lay context.

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 lay people.

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

SPRING PROGRAMME

- Jan 17th - Community and Sangha ,
- Jan 24th - Making a living - right livelihood
- Jan 31st - Concentration and Insight Meditation
- Feb 7th - Guest
- Feb 14th - Partners and Family Life
- Feb 21st - Power and Authority
- Feb 28th - The Three Refuges
- Mar 7th - Chanting, Symbols and Worship
- Mar 14th - Virtue and Ethical Conundrums
- Mar 21st - The Seven Factors of Enlightenment
- Mar 28th - Anxiety and Unwholesome States
- April 4th - Gardening or Cultivating the Cauliflower Heart

For further details contact:

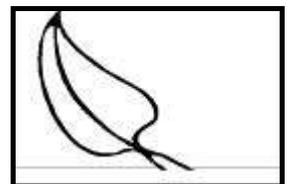
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- STROUD** John Groves 0796 7777742
- TAUNTON** Martin Sinclair 01823 321059
- WATFORD** Ruth 01923 462902 or 253650
- WOKING** Rocana 01483 761398



AMARAVATI LAY EVENTS 2001

The one day and weekend events provide an opportunity to spend time together exploring themes relevant to practice and daily life. Whether you are just starting or whether you have a well established practice, you are most welcome to participate. No booking is required for the one day events.

April 20th-21st Dana - Sila - Bhavana

June 2nd The 5 Spiritual Faculties

June 28th - July 1st The Countryside

July 28th The Four Noble Truths

September 28th - 30th The Creative Arts and Buddhist Practice.

October 7th The Noble 8-fold Path

December 1st A Day of Practice

For more information contact:-
Nick Carroll 020 8740 9748 or
Chris Ward 01442 822097

Vipassana Meditation Day Retreats with teachers from Gaia House

Brighton:

20 November Stephen Batchelor
9 December Yanai Postelnik
20 Jan Catherine McGee
17 Feb John Peacock (to be confirmed)
10 March Christopher Titmuss
19 May Christina Feldman
9 June Christopher Titmuss
Cost: £10 + dana send SAE & cheque to Joty Barker, Brighton
Interbeing Sangha, 55 Lowther Rd, Brighton, BN1 6LF 01273
887695

LONDON

19 November Stephen Batchelor
Meditation & Creativity
12 December Yanai Postelnik
Path of Freedom
21 January Catherine McGee
Stillness & Insight
18 February John Peacock
11 March Christopher Titmuss
Awareness & Wonder
Freedom despite Retraints
22 April Stephen Batchelor
Practice of Being
20 May Christina Feldman
Acceptance
10 June Christopher Titmuss
The Seeing that Is Freeing
Details: Clare Brunt: 020 875 50353

OXFORD

10 February Yanai Postelnik
28 April Martine Batchelor
2 June Christopher Titmuss
Cost £10 (£5 concessions) payable to Oxford Meditation
Retreats,
c/o Anne-Lise Clift, 43 Millway Close, Upper Wolvercote,

LAY WEEKEND RETREAT At Amaravati Monastery DANA, SILA & BHAVANA 20th - 22nd April 2001

Come along to enjoy the space and peace of Amaravati and consider the themes of generosity, virtue and mind development through discussion, and meditation, in the company of like-minded companions.

For booking forms and programmes please send a SAE to AUA, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddeson, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 3BZ
For specific enquiries, please contact:-
Nick Carroll 020 8740 9748 or Chris Ward 01442 822097