# Community

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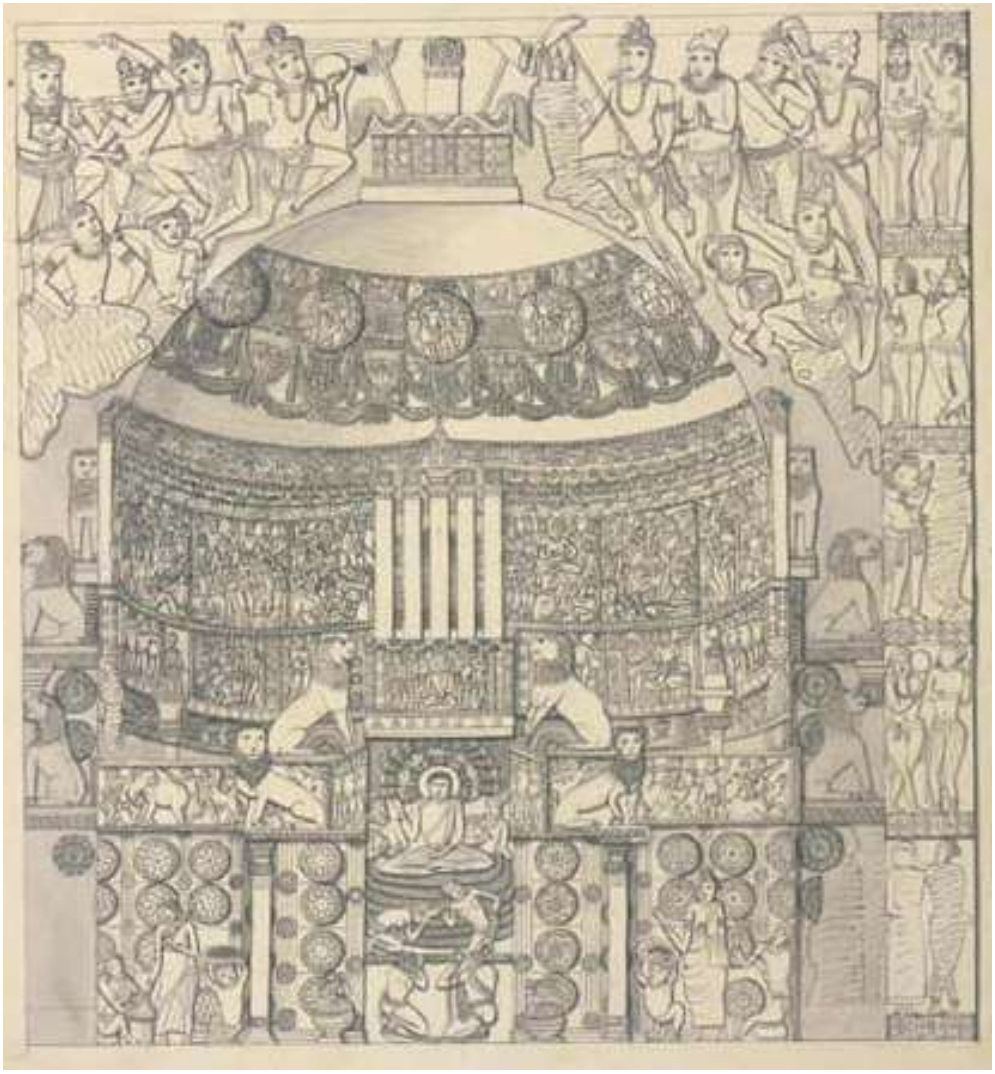

By permission of The British Library— Manuscript WD 1061 f33 —The Amaravati Album

## In this issue.....

*Virtuous Institutions?*
*The Perfect Pot*
*Retreat Reflections*
*Letters*
*Buddhist Cosmology*
*The Essential Buddhism Course*
*Right Mindfulness*
*The Amaravati Album*

# EDITORIAL

## Virtuous Institutions ?

Nobody seems to like institutions any more. Whether businesses, governments, religions, schools or the family, they are all targets for much criticism and blame. Perhaps this is because some of us are convinced that we have suffered in some way at the hands of one of these groups. And this may well be true.

And yet institutions are vitally important and at their best are invaluable gifts from wise ancestors. One great thing about institutions is that they persist. They can be an act of great *dana* to future generations, who do not have to struggle so hard to create something, but can find a ready made vehicle to help them.

Perhaps there are those who think that the struggle is the important thing and that religious institutions stifle this. But all well-constructed religious forms requires effort from those who follow them - they are not simply ready-made instant solutions. Without the active involvement of people, institutions would cease to exist.

I would like to be more comfortable with appreciating - and tending - institutions and more motivated when working to do this. As a part of the conditioned world, communities and institutions are not-self, impermanent and dukkha, but this simply means not being blinded by them, rather than destroying or neglecting them. Just as we care for our bodies from motives of generosity, compassion and intelligence so we can care for our communal institutions

What would we have done if the Buddha had not gradually and carefully created the *Vinaya* - the body of precepts and guidelines that govern the monastic community, and the Dhamma - the teachings? And what would we have done had not generations of monks and nuns cared for the early teachings of the Buddha and his disciples and eventually committed them to writing?

We would not be practising the Dhamma, we would not have Amaravati, and we would not have an institution devoted to virtue, meditation and wisdom.

Nobody would deny that some organisations and institutions become wholly or partially harmful. Even (or perhaps especially) religious institutions. But this is all the more reason for us to work together to keep our communities healthy and based upon non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion.

The aim is not to create institutions which lead to personal aggrandisement or to the accumulation of wealth and power. Nor is it noble to create organisations based upon unfairly exploiting or coercing others.

But what we can do is to carefully refine and test out processes for sharing knowledge, delegating power, motivating and empowering individuals and establishing conditions which encourage virtue, 'collectedness' and wisdom.

The need for virtuous organisations is becoming very important as we head towards growing ecological problems, arguably generated by institutions which regard endless growth as desirable. Problems of over-consumption and environmental degradation are likely to increasingly dominate the 21st century. The impossibility of continuously expanding production and consumption has been obvious for many years, and yet there are many institutions who do not recognise this truth.

All the more reason to support communities which encourage sustainable lifestyles based upon generosity and simplicity.

*Chris Ward*

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# Buddhist Cosmology

Cosmology in the context of this article refers to teachings which identify the position of humanity with respect to the physical universe. Such teachings are found within most religious and philosophic traditions and often include a description of how the universe came to exist, theories on the nature of physical matter; the position of the Earth within the universe; and the relationship between human and non-human beings including animals, gods and spirits.

An abiding curiosity in the position of humanity within the universe can be considered to be a unique attribute of human kind, reflecting our capacity for self-awareness and abstraction and our desire for meaning.

From evidence in the Pali Canon, Buddhism presented various 'cosmological teachings' from the earliest times. These were not simply copied from other existing traditions such as Brahmanism, but represent unique Buddhist positions.

Buddhist teachings do, however, include a number of reinterpretations of some ideas which were current in India at the time. These include the positioning of various gods within an overall framework which both makes sense of the relationship between gods and men, and also emphasises the Buddhist view that gods are essentially in the same position as ourselves. They are beings who are still trapped within *saṃsāra* but have been reborn temporarily within a heavenly realm.

Interestingly *Māra,* the being who tempted the Buddha after his enlightenment and at other times in his life, is regarded as a god inhabiting the highest of the heavens in the realm of sense-desire. Like other beings *Māra* will eventually be reborn in another rebirth realm; indeed *Moggallāna*, one of the Buddha's two chief disciples stated that long ago he had been a *Māra* named *Dūsin* (*Majjhima Nikaya I.333*).

In addition to delineating the thirty one rebirth realms of *saṃsāra,* early Buddhism teaches that the universe has no distinct beginning and end but goes through vast cycles of expansion and contraction. These concepts include some which are very similar to modern ideas on solar systems, galaxies and galaxy clusters.

Early Buddhism also proposed an atomic and molecular theory of matter. Buddhism proposed that these atoms formed the four great elements of earth, air, fire and water (to which the element of space was added later, forming five).

What are we to make of these ideas today? We can just dismiss them as somewhat ill-founded superstitious myths, or as a mixture of early 'scientific' observation combined with conjecture. But I think it good to be careful about beliefs and views. Just as getting blindly attached to early Buddhist ideas and regarding these as true in all senses would be a mistake, so too is becoming a blind believer in the current predominant materialist / scientific world view. These are partial viewpoints which are valuable in certain circumstances but which can become burdens if applied as the answer to everything. Greed, aversion and delusion can easily be aroused by fixed viewpoints.

Because Buddhism is not a dogmatic religion, it has avoided conflicts with changing views on the nature of the physical universe (for existence the heliocentric universe, or the theory of evolution are not a problem for Buddhism).

I enjoy studying Buddhist cosmology, and am interested in, for example, the ambiguity of rebirth realms as both physical and psychological 'abodes' which we may temporarily inhabit as part of meditation practice, (or spontaneously).

The early teachings also strongly suggest that the Buddha actually *knew* from his own experience about the existence of rebirth and rebirth realms, gods and other cosmological ideas.

In the Majjhima Nikaya (II.212-3) we find the following:

*Sangārava* : ' But how is it honourable Gotama, are there gods?'
*The Buddha*: ' It is known to me based on good grounds …..that there are gods'.

*Chris Ward*

*(Editors note: Buddhist cosmology is a large subject. For further information come along on Oct 4th to Amaravati for a day of practice on this theme.)*

# Creativity and the Silent Mind

How do you make a perfect pot?

How do you make a violin sing?

Why is a well trained mind like a well tuned harp in the wind?

What is the sound of the silent mind?

I remember how I struggled when I first started throwing pots. What a mess I would get into. The teacher used to try to persuade me to learn other ways of making pots but I insisted on throwing. I'm sure she only taught me out of pity.

But we can learn how to do anything if we apply ourselves to training.

My son is a violinist. If you want to make a violin sing, you have to train every day. You need a good teacher who will show you how to hold the violin and the bow. How to relax the arm, how to relax the body. How to hold a good posture. How to let the natural weight of the bow do the work.

Why do the young learn so quickly? Because they accept that they don't know, they accept training. Why is it so difficult for adults, because we think we know – so we struggle.

If we train every day, we will eventually learn how to make a violin sing. Any violin. We like to think we need the perfect violin, golf clubs or whatever, but a good violin player can make any violin sing.

The violin already makes the perfect sound – it is only waiting for the bow to be drawn across the string.

It's the same with a pot. It takes years of practice to know how to turn a ball of clay into a simple bowl. Preparing the clay, centring it on the wheel, drawing the clay upwards with the fingers. Training is what is needed. Someone to show us how to get the balance between too wet and too dry, someone who can show us how to use our hands, how to control the speed of the wheel etc. Training, not struggling.

Then, one day we will hold up a pot and say to ourselves, 'that's perfect'. We will hold it in our hand and see it is perfectly balanced, perfectly proportioned. When we have made a perfect pot it will change how we look at clay. When we look at a ball of clay we will see the pot it can become.

In the same way struggling and striving only gets in the way of training the mind. The well trained mind is like a well tuned harp in the wind. The wind is like thoughts which arise in the mind. They just blow through. When the mind is well trained, we can let thoughts make their own tune. 'Good' thoughts, 'bad' thoughts, all perfect. Even thoughts of anger or lust make a beautiful sound when there is mindfulness. They arise and cease and the ceasing of thought is like the sound the harp makes when there is no wind blowing. What is that sound? It is silence, the sound of the silent mind.

Mindfulness is like tuning a harp. If there is craving or attachment, it's like the string is too slack, if there is aversion, it's too tight. If we're too relaxed and sleepy, it's slack, if we're too energetic, it's too tight and so on. Mindfulness is about finding the middle way, that point of balance, where the string is perfectly tuned.

Like the pot. What makes it perfect? When the clay has been well prepared there are no air pockets. When is has been well centred on the wheel all the grains of sand lie in the same direction. When it has been well thrown the sides of the pot are strong but not too thick and even all the way up. When you hold it, it is well proportioned. When you hit it after it is fired, it rings. It's glaze is simple and pleasing. Most of all, it is useful for the purpose it is intended. And it should be used, not put just on a high shelf to be admired.

When we see a pot as already broken, we can really enjoy it. Then when it finally breaks there is more a sense of curiosity than sadness.

Mindfulness comes and goes. When we're mindful we should enjoy it. We know it is impermanent. No problem. Nothing to attach to.

Mindfulness for me is the coming together of subject and object. It is being one with the moment, whatever we are doing. Me being mindful misses the point. It's when we bring subject and object together we can reflect. Then cessation is just the ending of a thought away. The silent mind.

*(Continued over)*

What is cessation? It's not the ending of everything, as you might think, but it's the ending of the world we attach to as me and mine. In fact that world ends every time we see through our attachment and let it go. You must know that feeling of freedom or release when you don't just act with your conditioned mind, say, when you don't act with anger but let it go. We just don't do it enough to recognise the flavour of freedom, and the silent mind that follows, but it can be developed through the practice of mindfulness.

But letting go of, say, anger isn't just getting rid of something we don't want. That tends to come from our self-hatred. Letting go arises through insight, seeing through the cause of our anger, which always comes down to an attachment to something. Seeing that it is impermanent, it leads to suffering and that it's not worth identifying with as me and mine. The pot is already broken, that is why attaching to it leads to suffering, and identifying with it as mine is just a view or an idea, in reality it's just a pot.

If we can start to look at life in this way, however much we let go of our attachment, we gain freedom. When we let go of what is possible, everything is possible. When we can let go of perfection, whatever we do is perfect.

*Martin Evans*

# Retreat Reflections

## On Ajahn Candasiri's ten day retreat—2003

For me a retreat is a brilliant holiday. Ten days to defragment the mind as you would any other computer!

Or maybe the mind is more like a river, the thoughts flowing between its banks carrying debris which gradually silts it up. I think I can stand on the bank and watch, but the truth is I can't. Not only that, most of the time it is even hard to fully realize that I'm not one and the same as the processing, problem-solving mind. Pare away the thoughts, pare away the feelings, the moods and what remains? I don't know, I'm just a hopeless beginner!

In a retreat I choose to extricate myself from both worldly cares and material values which influence the way we live our lives. In deciding to attend a retreat we are following an ancient tradition of renunciation followed by Eastern and Western ascetics. Withdrawing from daily life in this day and age means drawing away from the sheer intensity with which consumerism is propagated by the media and reified as the ultimate path to happiness. Beyond living memory and before the age of television there were simpler, more easily avoidable forms of distraction and happiness: music halls, sing-songs people went to and, before and after the war, people went to the pictures twice a week forming queues all round the red brick Odeon cinemas. Now a world of self-image and glossy images of others envelop our line of vision wherever we are. It has all got very loud, very insistent and hard to avoid.

Small wonder, then, that it is only on retreat that one becomes increasingly aware of how deeply implicated we are in this getting-what-I-want-when-I-want-it culture. And even on a course our cultural conditioning is bound to come into play. How can we expect it to disappear, simply because we'd like it to? It determines our patterns of behaviour, whereby we have always been taught to strive in order to achieve, to push ourselves, to overcome our limits by sheer will-power, and then, having set ourselves impossible standards, to taste the bitterness of failure. Unknowingly, we transpose the same desire-based expectations onto the retreat setting and wish, even demand, to see and experience results from our efforts immediately. Sister Sucinta pointed out in her Dhamma talk that we are called human *beings* when really we should be called human *doings*, because we are constantly trying to achieve something!

We arrived a little late this time, which is a good thing, because it meant that there was no chance of chatting to the others before the retreat began and later on hearing in the mind the echoes of the social labelling that inevitably follows chit-chat. Another consequence of arriving late was that we couldn't choose our working meditations (by volunteering for one task rather than another). I was assigned to the kitchen, my wife to the loos: I've done loos before, but I must say I do like the hum of collective activity working in the kitchen requires, because it resembles, to some extent, everyday life. A flickering intermittent mindfulness, the human capability of self-reflection, sets in: in other words, an internal, psychic CCTV aimed at how you do what you have been asked to do and how it

feels while you are doing it. Having to relate to others in noble silence when they may irritate you or you them is not easy. Every mood seems magnified enough not to be comfortably ignored or denied. And there are endless possibilities to invent a narrative based on false perception. I wonder how often this occurs in daily life too?

In the group interview, I could feel my growing excitement at the prospect of breaking silence. There were also feelings of pride and self-importance I didn't like. I'd brought two unwelcome guests to the retreat: my voracious appetite for books as fodder for the machinery of my intellect. In the monastery library I'd found and read an entire BA dissertation in Italian about the teachings of Ajahn Sumedho. Then there were the characters in a half-written story of mine which claimed my attention, 1970s characters caught between social change and a desire for spiritual evolution. Yet I had moments of physical and psychological peace when the compulsion, a very real form of addiction to intellectual activity, let up a bit.

On retreat you feel that you have shouldered, through the five precepts, an added sense of responsibility towards yourself and those around you. It makes it more difficult to be so oblivious of what is actually going on inside while it happens. But even then, a conflict can kick in, a rejection of the practice. It sometimes did.

And yet, in the protected and nurturing space of the retreat, sooner or later the time comes when it is possible to attend to the intractable mind, despite the *hindrances* which encourage a feeling of defeat, a sense that, try as we might, no progress can be made. I tried reminding myself that it was I who chose to be on the retreat in the first place, I who turned up on the right day. But still, when the time to do the work came, I was often miles away...

As for my experience, even if I had the impression that I spent most of the retreat in cloud-cuckoo land, nevertheless I was conscious of the fact that that was my pathological condition, so to speak; given that I was unable, and possibly even unwilling, to be in a different frame of mind.

Ajahn Candasiri led us gently away from effort and striving in meditation practice towards an opening of the heart and a healing, through recurring reminders not to expect too much and to be kind and forgiving to ourselves instead (a tall order when the deeper levels of consciousness surface with characteristics we'd rather disown).

And healing was all around us when our thoughts were not distracting our attention. Time at last to notice small things: dew drops, the random pattern of tiny scattered feathers of a bird whose body had left no trace, and the all but hidden mushrooms in Amaravati woods. Towards the end of the retreat, an early morning mist drew a thin white circle around the meadow, partly obscuring the *kuti*, a monastic's meditation hut, at the edge of the field and giving the trees a fairy-tale soft contour, turning them into colour smudges. And what to say of the beauty of the Buddha *stupa* also surrounded by a mysterious haze? Or the funny sound of the hooting pheasant? And which day was it seven of us witnessed a crimson sky in silence, seen through a gap in the bordering trees? We stood and watched the enormous red disk gently parting company from the sky and merging with the horizon. What was it that made it so special? The clear heavens? Our stillness?

For the first time I noticed the Chinese proverb in the connecting wing of the retreat centre, written in a beautiful calligraphic hand:

> *'Grant yourself a moment of peace and understand how foolishly you have scurried about. Learn to be silent and you will notice that you have talked too much. Be kind and you will realize that your judgement of others was too severe.'*

Each one of us came away with a little more insight. And the heavy burdens were lighter too. I am sure of this, because on the last day every single one of us was invited to say what he or she had gained. In the chinks of space between thoughts, isolated moments when the workings of the mind are caught unawares, the silence came to me and the others also; silence is the colour of *Samatha*, the foundation of calmness on which to base one's practice.

This was during the retreat. The day before, a problem had arisen at work which I tackled, rather than postponed, partly not to have it prey on my mind for ten whole days. But after the retreat came the sequel: an intimidating email was waiting for me. I went to work with fear permeating my body, and a tightening of the throat, a sense of heaviness. I remembered Ajahn Candasiri's advice to stay with our sensations, rather than deny them or distract ourselves from them to avoid experiencing the pain. So I did. What I noticed was that while the first day I had a sense of total dread, by midweek it had lessened. I was cheered up by the thought that 'this too will pass'. And it will.

*David Brancaleone*

*Allocating Sleeping Places on Retreat*

'Yes that's right, he gets the cave due to his snoring problem.'

## Buddhist Philosophers?

'What is the relationship between the doctrine of Sunyata (emptiness) and scientific determinism ?'

Bruno Bertotti, an Amaravati retreatant from Italy and professional physicist would be interested in exploring this theme with a practising Buddhist philosopher who is perhaps familiar with K.Nishitani's book "Religion and Nothingness".

You can contact Bruno on: bb.142857@pv.infn.it or write to him at Via Chiozzi,11 27100 Pavia, Italy.

## Amaravati Day of Practice

4th October 2003 9.45 till 5.00 pm

**On the theme of :**

# Buddhist Cosmology

All welcome. No prior booking necessary

Please bring a little food to share at lunch time.

What is samsara? Do other realms actually exist, or are they psychological states?

The Masters of the Creation of others
Those who Delight in Creation
The Contented
The Yama Gods
The Thirty Three Gods
The Gods of the Four Kings
*Human Beings* ← You are here!
Jealous Gods
Hungry Ghosts
Animals
Hell Beings

*For enquiries please contact - Nick Carroll (0208 740 9748) or Chris Ward (01442 890034)*

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika Association (AUA)

# The Essential Buddhism Course

A recurring question at lay forums at Amaravati is whether we are providing enough support for those new to Buddhism. A related question is whether we are properly supporting those who have been practising for many years! These are the sorts of questions that do not have definite answers, or at least not lasting answers. The important thing is that we are open to change and consider possibilities. Sometimes ideas gestate for several years before resulting in activity, and sometimes this is because they are waiting for the right conditions (and volunteers) to make them happen.

One such idea that has come to fruition is that of a course which focuses on key aspects of Buddhism. This is a course for both beginners and those with some years of practice.

We have decided to call the course - the Essential Buddhism course - since this best describes what we are aiming to achieve. Although many of us have read books and listened to talks about Buddhism we can be hazy about the historical roots and overall structure of this great religious tradition.

The course will focus upon those teachings which are widely considered to be important across all Buddhist traditions. The historical placement of early Buddhism will also be examined. The purpose of the course can be summarised as follows:

1. To provide a sound and up-to-date intellectual appreciation of Buddhist doctrine and history
2. To examine issues of belief and authority
3. To challenge some of our preconceptions
4. To appreciate the purpose of the Dhamma (the Buddha's teachings)
5. To understand certain key Buddhist terms and doctrines
6. To encourage the practical application of Buddhism
7. To motivate further investigation and practice.

The course is not intended to define a set of 'Buddhist Beliefs'. The intention is to present a framework of understanding; some key concepts and propositions to work with, and the motivation to put these teachings into practice and to investigate further. All of the material in the course should be considered carefully and critically – it may not be absolutely correct!

Starting in early September 2003, we are organising the Autumn 'term' of the Bodhinyana Group to form the first Essential Buddhism course. All of these meetings remain open to both those following the course and those who wish to drop in.

For current Bodhinyana Group members, there will not be much difference, apart from the meeting themes being linked into a connected framework.

The course will run over 16 weeks with one week to introduce a subject and the subsequent week providing further opportunity to discuss it.

Each group meeting will take place in the Bodhinyana Room at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, from 7.30 till 9.30 on a Wednesday evening.

The evenings will start with a short chant, followed by a period of meditation. The subject for the evening will then be introduced and this will be followed by open discussion.

Those following the course should aim to read session notes and assigned material, and make any notes prior to the appropriate meeting. Each session meeting - designated with an (***S***) - will be followed the next week by a related theme so that reflection may continue.

*(continued over)*

The programme and course sessions (S) are as follows:

## The Bodhinyana Group Programme

We meet in the Bodhinyana Room at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery – from 7.30 till 9.30pm on Wednesday evenings

| | |
|---|---|
| 3rd Sep | ***Essential Buddhism – Introduction(S1)*** |
| 10th Sep | What is Truth? |
| 17th Sep | ***Early Buddhist History (S2)*** |
| 24th Sep | Inspiration and Faith? |
| 1st Oct | ***The Four Noble Truths (S3)*** |
| 8th Oct | Suffering? |
| 15th Oct | ***The Noble Eightfold Path (S4)*** |
| 22nd Oct | Virtue before Wisdom? |
| 29th Oct | ***Kamma, Rebirth & Conditionality (S5)*** |
| 5th Nov | Buddhism without Belief? |
| 12th Nov | ***The Three Characteristics & Meditation (S6)*** |
| 19th Nov | Samatha, Vipassana, Metta practice |
| 26th Nov | ***The Buddhist Community (S7)*** |
| 3rd Dec | Renunciation and Mindfulness |
| 10th Dec | ***Summary, feedback, questions and answers (S8)*** |
| 17th Dec | Generosity & Gratitude |

If you are interested in taking part in the Buddhism Course then please register your interest so that we can gauge numbers and materials required. The group also welcomes those who wish to drop in on any Wednesday evening and are not formally taking the course. Please note that as of early September we still have room for one or two more on the course

Please email upasika@btinternet.com with your details. For more information contact Chris Ward or Martin Evans who will be the course tutors.

## Sources …..for Buddhist Ethics

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4. Keown, D., (1995), Buddhism and Bioethics, London, Macmillan, and New York, St. Martin's Press.

5. Crosby, K. and Skilton, A., (1996), The Bodhicaryavatara, World's Classics Series, Oxford , Oxford University Press.

Web Sites :

P.A.Payutto, (1994), Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Market Place Bangkok, Buddhadhamma Foundation. And: http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9280/econ.htm

Journal of Buddhist Ethics: excellent free web-based journal: UK site: http://jbe.gold.ac.uk USA site: http//jbe.la.psu.edu

# Letters & News

**Re: Pause for thought in Community - Spring 2003 - Sacrificial slaughter in Islam**

I sympathise with the editor's feeling disturbed by the sacrificial aspect of the Islamic Hajj festival. All killing and harming of animate beings – whatever the context – is disturbing from a Buddhist perspective. My own path to Buddhist practice led me from joining CND in the early eighties, to becoming a vegetarian overnight in November 1984, to starting meditation a few months later. I remember vividly an argument I had in December 1984 with a Lutheran minister friend of mine who objected to vegetarianism, about the Christian assertion that man has been given dominion over the animal kingdom. This in particular alienated me from my own Christian background.

However, such disagreements can easily lead to dogmatic attitudes; probably not helpful in our personal practice, and certainly "unhelpful" in community relations. And in our present world, riddled with strife and fundamentalist self-righteousness, we urgently need to find common ground with other religions. For this reason last autumn I joined an Interfaith group in Liverpool. Meetings with Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Baha'is and fellow Buddhists create such a new perspective and help us understand other paths better.

*Ursula Haeckel*

**News from Hartridge.**

Hartridge is once more experiencing the motion of the great Wheel of Life. Hartridge will be host to a resident Sangha once again after a gap of nearly three years when Ajahns Suriyo and Ghandasilo arrive in early August for the Rains retreat. There was a celebration of Ajahn Suriyo's 40th birthday on August 23rd to which all were invited. The change means a sad farewell to our wonderful retreat manager Diana (Jones) who has given her time and commitment over the last year in ensuring Hartridge has continued in good health as a retreat centre. She is moving to Amaravati and we wish her much happiness. So Hartridge looks forward to renewed energy and good practice.

*Nick Ray*

**Letter from Cittaviveka - July 2003**

As we all know, life is typified by uncertainty and change and members of the Sangha, both monks and nuns, have been embracing these qualities in leaving the protection and routine of the monastery precincts for the vicissitudes of the open road—on *tudong*.

Another fairly recent venture into the unknown has been the adoption by the Sangha of a monastic regime determined by the solar calendar rather than the time-honoured lunar one, so that, as Ajahn Sucitto puts it, "*we are in the same time zone as the local society*". To date this seems to have been a very welcome change for both monastics and lay practitioners. At a more mundane level, however, the much needed maintenance and repairs to the roof at Cittaviveka, have been progressing well.

True to life, this steady progress was suddenly interrupted when a combination of heavy rain, the accumulation of debris and the vulnerability of the current roof structure led to a sudden flood of water into the hall below! Talking of building works, the Dhamma Hall has been well used and greatly appreciated by members of the Sangha and indeed, all those who have come to experience its peace and beauty. Final touches to the Hall, however, remain in abeyance until such times as the necessary funds can be raised and allocated.

*Barry Durant*

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# Good Friends

*Over the past few issues, people have been asked to write about a book, poem or sutta which they found supportive or inspiring – a 'Good Friend'. You are again invited to send any offerings to the Editor.*

*The wonderful book chosen this time is, 'What the Buddha Taught' by the Rev. Walpola Rahula. If you already have this book, perhaps this may be a reminder to take it off the shelf again.*

'This book was first published in 1959, written by one of the most qualified and enlightened representatives of Buddhist Teaching. The Rev. Rahula received traditional training and education as a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, then went on to various universities to study all schools of Buddhism.

I came across this book nearly 40 years ago and have always found his exposition of The Four Noble Truths and The Eightfold Path so clear, concise and helpful.

Today's followers of the Path may find the wording a little old fashioned with its Pali names [always with an English translation], but there is also a good glossary at the back together with a selection of verses from The Dhammapada.

For anyone who is interested in Buddhist Teachings or is walking the Path I would recommend that this book is read and referred to regularly as it is the basis for the whole of the Buddha's Teaching.

Also there are selected texts on 'anatta', 'metta', 'mindfulness', 'blessings' and 'getting rid of all troubles' ; what more could anyone ask for?

May all beings be happy.
Joan Peaty.

*(Editors note. 'What the Buddha Taught' by W. Rahula is still published by G. Fraser and may also be found printed for free distributio*n.)

## The Next Nuns Pilgrimage

We are continuing to invite donations towards supporting Sister Metta to go on a pilgrimage to India in Dec 2003. Sister Santicitta also hopes to go at a later date. Any contributions however small will be most welcome. Cheques should be sent to Amaravati and made payable to the English Sangha Trust and on the back write - 'Nun's Pilgrimage'. Any Further information or enquiries please contact Jen Thomas on 01239 820138, or Jill Osler on 01179 631610.

# AUA News

## The Membership Database and Ritual Immolation

I recently developed some insights into the Hindu practise of Suti in which the wife of a dead husband throws herself onto the funeral pyre to die. I must admit that no man or social circumstances have ever made this seem appealing until April. On this particular occasion it was not a man that I would have jumped after, but a laptop computer! The database on which we have stored your names and addresses so that we can generate labels for mailings of Community or details of study days crashed at the 11th hour. I really did want to build a funeral pyre for the laptop and in frustration jump on top myself. However, if one calms oneself and takes lots of deep breaths it is sometimes possible to retrieve something. Unfortunately some data was lost. I realise that if you received this in the post you are not one of the unfortunates. If you know of anyone who is suddenly not receiving their copy of Community and wants to, please send a note into the office at Amaravati for the attention of Radmila who will pass the information on to the next keeper of the database. (The time has come for me to pass this task on to someone with more skills and less of a death wish!)

Many thanks,
Gill Williamson

*(Editors note: we warmly thank Gill for her efforts in managing the AUA database for many years, and warmly welcome Alison Moore who is taking over this role)*

*A Day of Practice at Amaravati on the theme of:*

# Community

(Including our Annual Community Meeting)

**Nov. 8th 9.45 till 5.00 pm**

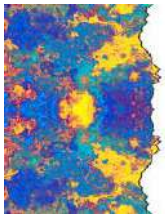
*Are Buddhists alone in their practice, or is friendship and community the 'whole of the holy life'?*

Come along to enjoy the space and peace of Amaravati and join in day of meditation, discussion and practice, in the company of like-minded companions.

No booking is necessary, just bring a little food to share.

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika Association (AUA)

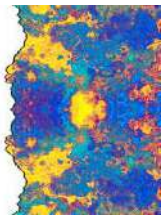
The Amaravati Upasika - Upasaka Association (AUA) was formed to foster and encourage good Buddhist lay practice. It does this by providing a lay forum for all those interested in the Buddhist path in the form of one day and weekend events, as well as other informal gatherings. At the heart of good dhamma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



## The Path Re-viewed

*The eight-fold noble path from a lay perspective*
Part 4

# *"Right Mindfulness"*



To see mindfulness as 'the path to the Deathless', as it was described by the Buddha some two and half millennia ago, is quite extraordinary in the context of human evolution. Living at the mercy of the forces of nature and their personification as spirits and gods, these gods then became increasingly refined as human complexity increased. As we know in the West, the concept of one Supreme Being was a watershed in history and in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions it has lead to many historical consequences that continue to affect us so powerfully today. In the Buddha's time, India was experiencing a growth in rationality and science including astronomy which put our planet and humanity into a different perspective as a phenomenon in an unimaginably vast cosmos. There was also a diversity and liberality in philosophical thinking, which coexisted with a long tradition of individual religious practice as exemplified by the wandering *samanas* or 'strivers'. All these factors together with the Buddha's unique individual qualities came to fruition in his insights and teachings in which he articulated a sophisticated non-theistic understanding of the human condition and the world and a pointed a way out of the suffering of this world.

In his own practice the Buddha looked within himself and found that there was no single external cause either of suffering or release from suffering. He saw that there were simply conditions and that everything came into being because of changing conditions, existed in dependence on them and ceased in dependence on them. This applied to everything both within and without the human body and mind. He fully realised the causal nature of existence, the importance of morality, the need to consistently attend to experience as well as to reflect on it. At a critical point of his investigation and practice he fully realised his freedom from past conditioning and recognised his purity of being. He spent a long time processing the implications of his realisation before he began to teach.

Central to the Buddha's teaching is the practice of mindfulness, or paying attention to the phenomena that arises in our consciousness. The emphasis is on practice, of knowing 'oneself' directly for oneself through experience. To know, one has to experience. To experience one has to be present to the experience. Being present to the experience means being aware. So observing, noting, paying attention, being mindful became the foundation of the practice that the Buddha encouraged. He went further in his encouragement by saying,

> *"The only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering of the right path and to the realisation of Nibbana, are the four foundations of mindfulness."*

It is only in the two *Satipatthana Sutta*'s (Discourses on Four Foundations of Mindfulness) that this degree of emphasis is given to a specific practice as a key for transformation.

The *Satipatthana* are generally translated as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, but it can be helpful to know other translations of the term such as the ' four frames of reference', the 'four establishings of mindfulness' or the 'four focuses of mindfulness', which give different slants to the meaning of the teachings.

In the practice of mindfulness, attention is directed towards what we consider to be 'our*self*', i.e. the body, feelings, mind states and the contents or objects of the mind (thoughts), an experiential version of the *khanda's* or the five aggregates that make up the body-mind organism. The practice of mindfulness is encouraged both throughout all the routines and activities of one's daily life as well as a form of focused practice in a dedicated place and time by paying attention to our basic modes of walking, standing, sitting or lying down. The most familiar and generally practiced as a form is that of sitting practice, that allows one to go into ever deeper and more focused quieter states than say when walking.

In the first foundation of mindfulness as outlined by the Buddha, it is the body that is the focus of attention. It begins by directing attention to the physical body as it breathes, a function basic to being alive and very directly connected with the present moment. In sustaining attention on ones breath for any

length of time one quickly begins to discover the relationship between breathing, body sensations, and ones emotional and mental states. With regular practice one finds that as the mind becomes still, so one's breathing settles, and vice-versa. As one learns to stay with the changes in the flow of the breath so one's attention becomes more refined. One becomes increasingly aware of the subtlety and constant arising of sensations throughout the body down to what feels like a cellular level. One experiences different types of pain, some related directly to posture, such as backache, or pain in the legs or perhaps a variety of apparently quite unrelated pains. With regular practice these pains or 'blocked' areas ease up, often with an associated release of deeper emotional tensions. Observing these body processes one is able to reflect on the nature of the body, the changes it is constantly experiencing, what it is composed of as well as what happens to it in the inevitable process of ageing and decay as it breaks up after dying.

*'It might be easy to think that mindfulness on its own is sufficient'*

As the sensations change in our body so we observe the feelings that arise with them, feelings that are either pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent. These three modes of feeling are identified as the second foundation of mindfulness. Experiences during meditation can be quite pleasant, some sensations are in-between, just there, neutral, and some are unpleasant. They all inevitably change. With practice it becomes easier to notice clearly as each of these modes arises and passes away.

The third foundation of mindfulness is about noticing our general state of mind, our 'take' or mind-set at the time. This may be greed, aversion, distraction or the opposite of any of those. Our state of mind is related to our feeling reaction and that in turn is related to our body sensations.

The fourth foundation is that of mind objects, or the thought content of the mind. This is the reflective function of the mind where knowing as opposed to the perceiving of phenomena can come into fruition as insight. It is the most abstract of the four frames of reference. Having focused on the different types of phenomena be it physical, feeling or the mental, the fourth frame of reference is concerned with the reflective process. This is where the witnessed causal inter-relationships of the objects of consciousness are reflected on, for none of what arises in any of the frames of reference does so in isolation from any of the others. Through continuing practice this interdependence is increasingly recognised. Combined with the practice of staying with the phenomena of experience irrespective of its feeling quality it becomes easier to settle into a more stable sense of equanimity. A deeper realisation can them follow where even this frame of reference is seen as yet another manifestation of impermanent phenomena.

It might be easy to think that mindfulness on its own is sufficient, but this overlooks the fact that transformation requires insight. The first three frames of reference are the 'objects' as it were, of our attention. We can be very aware of them but that does not mean that we have insight into them. The emphasis in mindfulness practice is to make us aware of phenomena, the raw data, and to see the characteristics of it. If we don't have the data, or if we distort it, we are not in position to have clarity and see it for what it is. The fourth focus is about reflecting on this phenomena in the context of the teachings, as manifestations of the five *khanda*'s, the *ayatana* or twelve bases of mental activity, the *samyojana* or the ten fetters that keep us in ignorance, the *bojhanga* or seven factors of enlightenment, and all of these reflected in the context of the Four Noble Truths. It is this process that results in insight.

What we practice on the cushion relates to all our waking and sleeping states. What we develop in our 'formal' practice begins naturally to be applied to our 'daily' life situations. The ability to disengage from a challenging moment by shifting attention to ones body sensations or breathing for instance, can help provide a broader, more objective perspective. This can weaken the instinctive reactive patterns that normally prompt our actions.

So in summary, we can see how mindfulness fits into the Buddha's exposition of the eight-fold path, not only its sequence where ethical and moral behaviour forms a good basis for meditation, but also in how mindfulness meditation in turn can affect our behaviour by stabilising our ability to stay centred and in tune with the needs of the more interactive and challenging aspects of our lives. We can also appreciate why Right Effort precedes the description of Right Mindfulness practice, and is itself in turn refined and developed through mindfulness.

*In part 5 of this brief series we will look at the more focused aspect of mindfulness practice, samadhi, and its relationship and significance in the context of the eight-fold noble path to peace.*

*Nick Carroll*

# NOTICES

## Amaravati Monastery Contact Details

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For Guest Information: please write to the Guest monk / nun or visit the website at www.amaravati.org

## Donations and Mailing list

If you do not wish to remain on the AUA mailing list please let us know. This enables us to reduce the size of mailings and to save money.
If you wish to continue on the mailing list then you need do nothing. However, any contributions you can make to cover the production of the newsletter and the three or four mailings each year would be greatly appreciated.

Please send donations to
AUA , Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ, England

## Mailing List Address Changes

If you change your address, please let us know either by emailing your changes to : **metta@petalmoore.net**, or posting to the AUA as above.

***CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE:***
***30th Nov 2003***

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

***E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com***

## Meditation & Study Groups

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Bath** | Catherine Hewitt | 01225 405235 |
| **Bedford** | David Stubbs | 01234 720892 |
| **Berkshire** | Penny Henrion | 01189 662646 |
| **Belfast** | Paddy Boyle | 02890 427720 |
| **Billericay** | Rob Howell | 01702 482134 |
| **Brighton** | Nimmala | 01273 723378 |
| **Bristol** | Lynn Goswell (Nirodha) | 0117 968 4089 |
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| **Canterbury** | Charles Watters | 01227 463342 |
| **Dublin** | Eugene Kelly<br>Rupert Westrup | Eire 285 4076<br>Eire 280 2832 |
| **South Dorset** | Barbara Cohen Walters (Sati Sati) | 01305 786821 |
| **Edinburgh** | Muriel Nevin | 0131 337 0901 |
| **Glasgow** | James Scott | 0141 637 9731 |
| **Harlow** | Palmutto | 01279 724330 |
| **Hemel Hempstead** | Chris Ward (Bodhinyana Group) | 01442 890034 |
| **Hexham** | Robert Bluck | 01434 602759 |
| **Leeds** | Daniella Loeb<br>Anna Voist | 0113 279 1375<br>01274 691447 |
| **Leigh-On-Sea** | Gool Deboo | 01702 553211 |
| **Liverpool** | Ursula Haeckel | 0151 427 6668 |
| **London Buddhist Society** | 58 Eccleston Sq, SW1 | 0207 834 5858 |
| **Hampstead** | Caroline Randall | 020 8348 0537 |
| **Notting Hill** | Jeffrey Craig | 0207 221 9330 |
| **Machynlleth** | Angela Llewellyn | 01650 511350 |
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| **Midhurst** | Barry Durrant | 01730 821479 |
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## Community Newsletter by Email

**We can send Community as an Acrobat file attached to an email. You can also simply read and download the newsletter from our web site: www.buddhacommunity.org.**

**The Acrobat file looks virtually identical to the printed version except that it is in colour. We are trying to keep the file size to around 1 to 1.5mb per issue so that a download takes just a few minutes. If you wish to receive Community in this way then email :**

**Upasika@btinternet.com**

## Internet Site

This Newsletter and other Upasika information ( including late changes to the lay events programme) can be found on the internet at:–

http://www.buddhacommunity.org

*Feedback on the layout or content of the site are welcomed. Email to: info@buddhacommunity.org*

**Editorial & Production Team :**

Chris Ward, Nick Carroll,Tony Spinks, Martin Evans
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.

# Amaravati Lay Events - 2003/4

These events provide an opportunity to practice together and explore themes relevant to practice and lay life. They include silent and guided meditation, sutta study groups, yoga, discussion groups and other workshops. All groups are optional so you can participate in silence if you wish. All are welcome.

*Days of Practice – no need to book*
*9.45am for 10am-5pm (please bring food to share)*

*Retreats – advance booking essential*
*Fri 5.30pm – 4.00pm on last day*

**2003**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sept. 12-14** | **Weekend Retreat** | **- *Creativity*** |
| **Oct. 4** | Day of Practice | - *Buddhist Cosmology* |
| **Nov. 8** | Day of Practice | - *Community* |
| **Dec. 6** | Day of Practice | - *Monastic and lay life* |

**2004 (Winter days of practice)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Jan 17th** | Day of Practice |
| **Feb 14th** | Day of Practice |
| **Mar 13th** | Day of Practice |

**PLEASE CHECK FOR LATE CHANGES TO THE PROGRAMME ON THE WEB SITE :

www.buddhacommunity.org

*Please download a booking form from our web site or write to AUA for booking form (see address below)*

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika Association (AUA)
Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP1 3BZ

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**Hemel Hempstead,**
**Herts, HP1 3BZ, England**

## *The Amaravati Album*

The British Library has kindly granted permission for images from the Amaravati Album to be reproduced in 'Community'. The Amaravati Album is the document produced by the archaeologist Colin Mackenzie (1754-1821) who visited the stupa at Amaravati in 1798, making him the first European to discover this Second Century Buddhist monument. He returned in 1816 to Amaravati with a team of draftsmen who drew pictures of the sculptures found on-site. The pictures of these sculptures in the Amaravati Album document the earliest known systematic excavation of a Buddhist site in India.

For further information visit the web site :
http://www.bl.uk/collections/amaravati/mackamaravati.html