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Meaning in Myth

In these extracts from a Sunday Afternoon talk given at Amaravati in September 1993, Ajahn Amaro draws on his extensive knowledge of mythology to show how such stories can illustrate facets of our own spiritual quest.

A fuller version appears in a collection of Dhamma reflections called Silent Rain

I found out a while ago that in ancient Greece the theatres, which had strong religious connotations, and the hospitals were always built close to each other. Spiritual and physical health were both very closely related to the use of theatre; it was not just entertainment, but rather the comedies and tragedies that were portrayed in Greek drama were there as a type of psychiatric treatment, as a way of helping to understand and balance out our mental life. This is very much how one should understand the use of myth and legendary tales; they can be employed as a way of understanding our own life in a direct and complete way.

Since we live in a very multi-cultural society, we are in contact with a great variety of influences; we are surrounded by different stories and we have access to ones that not only come from our own European or Asian background but we live in the middle of a whole confluence of different cultural patterns. One can see that there are fundamental human questions, problems or qualities that appear all over the

world. Different traditions, different groups have evolved stories and ideas to help symbolise these and to effectively bring them into consciousness.

Wherever humanity has appeared, one of the questions that has arisen is, 'How did we get here? What made the cosmos happen?' and then, 'What should I do with my life?' Everywhere in the world, each culture has its own creation myths of

how the universe came into being....

But the Buddha was one of the few religious teachers that did not make very much of a creation myth. In fact, he made the point of saying that the ultimate beginning of things is fundamentally

inconceivable, it is one of the imponderable things. Which does not mean that he did not know the Truth but rather that this is something that cannot be put into thought or word; the thinking mind cannot conceive the reality of the situation.

The way that we see the universe in terms of human-centred perceptions of time and space is restricting to the quality of true vision, so the Buddha said to not bother trying to figure out

The way that we see the universe in terms of human-centred perceptions of time and space is restricting to the quality of true vision

how it all began. He actually said that if we try to, we will either go crazy or our head will explode into seven pieces. He avoided talking about the ultimate beginning of things... What he was trying to point to was that it is not a matter of how it all began in the first place, or how we can develop a universal picture of it, but to recognise how our experience of the world arises; this approach brings it more inside. He talks about the genesis of problems, how our experience of separateness and our difficulties in life arise. So, rather than having an average creation myth, the Buddha taught what is called Dependent Origination*, which describes how it comes to be that we experience dissatisfaction or unhappiness in the moment. How do our sense of alienation and our problems arise? And how do our problems cease?

...It is interesting that we can look at the biblical myth of the creation of the world in seven days and at Dependent Origination and find many correspondencies. The Buddha describes how ignorance, not understanding the truth of things, is the cause of alienation and dissatisfaction. From ignorance comes the apparent separation of mind and body, and of self and other. Attachment to the senses becomes solidified, which leads to deepening of sense contact, and the concomitant feelings of pleasure and pain becomes something that we absorb into and attach to, so that we run away from pain or we chase after pleasure. The mind thus becomes caught up with self-based desire of one sort or another; attaching to that desire then causes us to invest further in trying to possess the beautiful and escape the painful. When the beautiful slips through our fingers or the painful catches up with us, then that is what we call dissatisfaction or *dukkha*.

So from the Buddhist point of view, ignorance and

footnote: **Dependent Origination: Ignorance (*avijja*), mental formations (*sankhara*), consciousness (*vinnana*), mind and body (*namarupa*), the six sense bases (*salayatana*), contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedana*), craving (*tanha*), clinging (*upadana*), becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jati*), suffering/dissatisfaction (*dukkha*)

desire are portrayed as the cause of suffering and alienation; in the Judaic myth we find that it is pretty much the same. ...Rather than looking to it to describe the origins of the human race, the Jewish people and so forth, the first three chapters of the Bible can be seen to be talking about this same process of Dependent Origination:

At the source, all there is is God –Ultimate Reality.

The traditional translation reads: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' However, I understand that in the Hebrew version of Genesis, rather than 'God created' – as a being that acts on a volition – its meaning is more like 'Out of God, heaven and earth arose,' which equates more with the the kind of pattern that I have been describing. Heaven and earth, here and there, represents the basic division and separateness of 'sankhara', heaven and earth are set apart from each other. The spirit of God moving on the waters is like arising of consciousness in that world. The land is then separated from the sea and all the creatures are brought forth into the world. Here again is the same form of branching, complexifying elaboration of the pattern, to the point where there are creatures and Adam and Eve living in the Garden.

This takes us through the levels from *vinnana*, *namarupa*, *salayatana*, *phassa* and *vedana* – the mind and body, the six senses, sense contact, to the level of feeling. So that, symbolically, living in the Garden of Eden is like living at the level of pure feeling, being responsive to the world in a state of innocence in invulnerable pleasantness where we are not being

driven by desire or fear but just being responsive to life...

...Then the serpent arrives on the scene... the fruit of the tree of knowledge is 'advertised' and Eve is persuaded; this is the arising of desire. Following that desire, the attachment to it leads to the choice to eat the fruit, *upadana* or grasping. The actual eating of it is *bhava*, the moment of knowledge arriving – the impact of getting what you are after. Then *bhava* leading to

continued on page 4



EDITORIAL

Points of View

It is interesting that the first factor on the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the Extinction of Suffering is Right View (or, Perfect Understanding), and also that the first of the Four Noble Truths concerns suffering – that it is a fact of life and also that it should be understood. It is almost as though the Buddha out of his infinite kindness and compassion is taking us by the scruff of the neck and pointing our nose at the very uncomfortableness

or tension of this moment, saying: 'Look! This is what you should be attending to. You will not escape, you will not be free, you will not find peace until you have attended to and understood this!'

And yet, somehow, even with this clear and uncompromising instruction from the Buddha, we still manage to spend a great deal of time and energy caught up in debate both with ourselves and with each other about how things are, and how we should be responding to them. We get stuck in the web of views that we have unwittingly tumbled into.

It seems in fact that the main problem is not so much to do with the different points of view in themselves, but in the clinging to our own as being the 'correct' one – which immediately puts everyone else's view into the category of 'incorrect'.

Years ago, long before I discovered the Buddha's teaching, I used to be part of a group that acknowledged the validity of each of the great religious teachings and found myself focusing particularly on practices from the Christian tradition and on certain of the mystical teachings of Islam – both seemed 'right', but it was impossible for me to reconcile the apparent contradictions on a rational level. Eventually I came to the point of realising that was neither necessary nor particularly helpful – that it was possible for both to be correct if the heart could expand beyond the frontiers of each convention to encompass the vastness of the Ultimate

Reality towards which each, in its own way, was pointing; or through the simple acknowledgement that there could be different points of view and therefore different approaches to the realisation of that Truth. It was such a relief; I didn't have to be right, I didn't have to have the perfect answer to the problems of existence – there were many possibilities and, without compromising one's integrity in any way, it was possible

to remain open and to learn from each.

In a sense the Buddha's teachings on Right View and Suffering bring us to a point concerning which there can be no room for debate. The answer is always apparent to the discerning eye: 'Do I feel a sense of tension? What's it

*It is through not understanding, not realising
four things that I, as well as you,
had to wander so long through this round of rebirths.
And what are those four things?
They are: The Noble Truth of Suffering...
the Origin of Suffering...
the Extinction of Suffering...
the Path that leads to the Extinction of Suffering.*

Digha Nikaya 16

about? Where's the investment, the clinging?' Once this work of the heart has been done, there is the opportunity to undertake the next step – to stop clinging, to let go of the attachment to the particular view, method, identity that we have invested in.

From the time of birth until now we have each had innumerable opportunities to develop our own views or to adopt the views of a particular group to which we may be affiliated. We're all familiar with the tendency to fixate of some particular 'party line', e.g., 'Samatha (the practices that emphasise calm) is not necessary, it's vipassana (insight practice) that is important for liberation' – or the reverse; or, 'No need to study the scriptures, you can learn everything from Nature', or, 'It's vital to build a foundation for practice through studying the scriptures, otherwise there can be no real progress in practice'. As a result of such a fixation, either we can end up totally confused if we try to allow any kind of acknowledgement of the validity of another approach; or even more firmly entrenched in our own 'party line' – thereby eliminating the possibility of experiencing another way of practice that could perhaps in fact be more suitable for us at that time – such a

continued from page 3 shame.

So, how do we find the middle, the way between these extremes? The answer is, of course, 'Mindfulness'; mindfulness of our own confusion or reactivity – the tension or distress, in short, the dukkha of the moment. This leap of faith, whereby we relinquish our trust in the conditioned thought process and bring our awareness right into the moment, allows us to witness the insecurity or fear that keeps us bound, identified with our view point. With practice our sense of Refuge grows stronger, and we know that clinging to any view point or identity is a very precarious form of security. When that Refuge becomes instinctive, we can avoid those things that keep us bound and helplessly wandering in search of what can never be.

Evam.

Ajahn Candasiri

In the last stages of composing this article and supervising this issue of the Newsletter, Ajahn Candasiri was taken ill and had to go into hospital for surgery. So I have accepted the responsibility of getting this issue to the finishing line; and of all the shortcomings that may be apparent in these pages. At the moment of writing, there is every expectation that she will be back to normal in due course. This editorial is a tidied-up version of her first draft: I didn't feel it was my place to substitute phrases that she might well have altered if condition had allowed. Aspects of this are no doubt not the way she would have liked it, but that goes for quite a few things, doesn't it?

Ajahn Sucitto

continued from page 2 birth is when we hear the voice of the Old Man,

'Adam, where are you?'

'Oh God!'

The point of no turning back has been passed, they have emerged into raw knowledge, which then leads to the two of them being driven from the garden.

Alienation, separateness....

So we can take a myth, a story, in many different ways and it is always up to each of us to see how these different images affect us. Because these are talking about deep and complex aspects of our own being, these patterns can help and guide us even if conceptually we cannot follow it or put it all together.

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In many ways our spiritual life is built around the sense of longing for home – we feel a bit like Adam and Eve outside the Garden, we have been chucked out, we feel separated from other people and uncertain of ourselves. We long for security and comfort, we long for that feeling of 'Ahh...we're HOME' – like returning after a long journey or just that feeling of getting back to our home after work. It is that same heartfelt quality that is expressed in this story – 'Ahh...safe, we're home at last, this is good.' This is a religious symbol in that a spiritual homecoming is a realisation of our true nature; that quality of longing for home, is in a way the spiritual longing that we have for Reality, for completeness, for fulfilment.

Another of the most famous and powerful myths is the story from ancient Greece of the journey home of Ulysses from the Trojan wars. Interestingly, it takes him ten years to make what is, if you look on a map, a journey that should have taken him just a few weeks. He is drawn in by all kinds of events both painful, beautiful and disastrous – being attacked and imprisoned or being distracted, seduced, being shipwrecked and so forth. When looking at the trials of his journey and comparing that with our own spiritual life one can say, 'Yes! That is what it is like!' It is also interesting, however, that Ulysses had Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom, as his protector, his mentor, she was always there looking out for him and making sure that, even if everything else fell apart, he would somehow manage to survive.

For seven years of that time he lived on an island of nymphs. It was a blissful existence: a lovely Mediterranean island, surrounded by beautiful people, an idyllic, dream-like existence, but after seven years of this he feels in his heart, 'I want to go home. This is all very lovely but this is not home, I want to go home – I have to return to Ithaca.' Then there were many other encounters with different kinds of danger or distractions along the way.

Ajahn Sucitto once compared meditation to the journey of Ulysses and his sailors past the sirens. The sirens represent the desire mind. Ulysses knew that the only way that he and his crew could defeat and get past the Sirens was if one of them could hear the Sirens' song and not be entranced by them. Passing sailors would hear the Sirens singing their beautiful intoxicating songs, promising bliss and knowledge and then would land on the shore of their island. These beautiful sea-nymphs would then turn into terrifying monsters and summarily devour the sailors. He

commented that the spiritual powers and faculties are very much like Ulysses' crew, who – following his instructions – filled their ears with wax so they could not hear the song, and then they tied him firmly to the mast. They then rowed past the island and of course the Sirens start calling to them, singing their bewitching song. Ulysses is straining at his ropes trying to break free but the crew just rows on. He is desperately yelling at his crew, saying, 'Come on, it's all right lads! Change of plan, I'm sure this is going to be all right. Untie me!' But the crew just hauls away. The ropes are like the Five Precepts and the crew are the Five Indriya: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom – these are our spiritual powers, they are the things that power us through even though the desire might be overwhelming; the fickle mind is tied to the mast and screaming. This is what it feels like being on a meditation retreat sometimes, strapped to the mast and screaming to be let out, but it is only by being patient and letting the spiritual powers carry us through that we actually get past the Sirens. This represents how we have the ability, if we have good friends, a moral commitment and the right spiritual powers at our disposal, we can get through the most intoxicating, bedazzling, entrancing pulls upon our hearts.

...When Ulysses finally reaches Ithaca, Athene puts a haze over his eyes so that he discovers slowly where he is and that the island has been taken over in his absence. He eventually meets up with his son, Telemachus and a few other friends. His old nurse also recognises him, from a scar on his leg, but many of his old servants and friends have turned against him. Others, like Eumaeus, his swineherd, are still faithful – after all this time he is still looking after the pigs. In his disguise as an old man, he goes and stays with Eumaeus; they sit and talk through the evening, but what really impresses Ulysses is that, even though it is late at night and it's dark and cold, Eumaeus says, 'I have to go out and look after the pigs. I should not just stay in here chatting.'

...Thinking about this some years ago, it struck me that this story, was very like the stages of enlightenment: Ulysses leaving Troy and heading for home indicates the entry onto the spiritual path and from there the whole story unfolds as a spiritual analogy. When he arrives on Ithaca, he is home but there is still danger, he still has not completed the task. This is rather like the third level of enlightenment, what is called *anagami*, non-returner – he is home but there is still work to be done. The main opponent, the main obstacle to regaining the throne is what is called *asmimana* or 'the conceit of identity'. This is the final battle: even if we have developed enormous

virtue, clarity of mind and purity of heart and we are home, back in Ithaca, if we do not deal with the sense of self in a very intelligent way and we are incautious, then we are going to end up getting skewered by the sense of 'I'. We are never going to make it back to the throne. (Perfection here is symbolised as the rightful king back on the throne of his kingdom with the country at peace and in harmony.)

This seems to be very much like the final battle of spiritual life. The last three of the ten fetters are *asmimana*, *avijja* (ignorance) and restlessness – these are the final tasks that are laid out before someone on the spiritual path. Of these, the sense of 'I', the sense of identity, is perhaps the main protagonist that one faces. Confronting it can be a gory business, but with wisdom, symbolised by Athene, on one's side, with humility, simplicity and faith, the hero of the saga must win out.

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In the West nowadays we seem to be losing our myths, and the ones that we have do not really apply so well. Because of this we find ourselves adrift as a society, and very much at a loss as to how to steer ourselves. There are whole areas of our life where we simply do not know what to do...It struck me that one thing we are particularly lacking is a mythology for spiritual heroes...We also lack any mythology for death now; death is looked upon as a life having failed. But a society that rejects death has no way of understanding and accommodating the fact of it. The other great area of lack that sprang to mind is that we look upon elderly people with disdain, as if they have somehow failed as young people – almost like spare parts in society. We have lost our mythology of the old as being our sources of wisdom. I was talking yesterday with a Sikh, and he was saying how he likes to hang around with the old members of the Sikh community just because he soaks up so much goodness and wisdom from them. I thought, 'How rare!' One just does not find that in Western culture very much; even elderly people themselves are in this way and think, 'I don't want to be a bother, please put me in a home, your life is more important than mine.' One can understand the practicalities of it, but it is a shame that we do not look upon our elders as our guides and our sources of wisdom.

... I do not know how one can turn things around, but I see that until we do develop ways of generating respect and value in these areas, our society is going to continue to drift, degenerate and wander off course. So I leave these thoughts for you to consider for this afternoon. ❖

Mindfulness of Dukkha

– a talk given by Sr. Jitindriya at Hartridge Monastery
on 14th September 1997

I assume we all have the basic feeling of a certain amount of dissatisfaction with what we can find in the world. We've tasted some gratification in the sensory realm but find that it doesn't actually fulfil a deep inner need, so we come to spiritual practice to find something that fulfils that deeper need.

In one of his more famous quotes, the Buddha said: 'There is the unborn, the un-originated, the un-created, the unformed. If it weren't for this unborn, un-originated, un-created, unformed, there would be no escape from the born, the originated, the created, the formed. But since there is this unborn, un-originated, un-created, unformed, then there is an escape from the born, the originated, the created, the formed.' He's talking about our psychological reality, the creation that we experience as our world, and directing us to examine it as we receive it through the senses. If you think about it, there is nothing in the

world as we know it that does not come through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or the mind (discriminating consciousness). So he is directing us to examine these sensory doors, in order to come to

understand the world, because it's only through this understanding that we can begin to appreciate what this unborn, uncreated, this Deathless – this ultimate Refuge – might be.

In his teaching, the Buddha points us to look at the obstructions to this ultimate peace – to know them so fully that they can then be put down and abandoned; seen through as not who and what we are. This is a tremendous undertaking – primarily, because much of what we experience is painful, and our natural response and reaction to pain is to try to get rid of it. But this is a misunderstanding, and so it takes quite a training to begin to turn towards what we experience as un-peaceful or productive of dukkha; that's why the Buddha started with dukkha* as the beginning of his teaching: "I teach dukkha and the end of dukkha." In fact, these are

footnote: *Dukkha – one of the characteristics of conditioned existence; it can be translated in many ways, unsatisfactoriness, incompleteness, dis-ease, stress, suffering are among the most common.

conjoined – because it's only through coming to understand our pain, our reactivity, that we can then experience that which is beyond it.

For me, dukkha is the primary reflection in my practice. Some people think this seems rather pessimistic but I find it to be a very realistic approach, because it's about our actual experience in the present moment. We tend to deny so much of what we're feeling. This is because we haven't developed the capacity or confidence to truly feel what we're experiencing, to bear the pain of it. To really allow ourselves to feel what's going on there needs to be this confidence or faith: *saddha* – because we're letting go of our hold on our world, our life; we're letting go of the very attempt to make our life comfortable, bearable, happy. To be fully present in the moment means that we have to let go of the habit of creating ourselves in the future: always thinking about

what I'm going to do next, tomorrow morning or what might happen in ten years' time.

In our meditation practice we may experience times of being fully present, and recognise the

peace of those moments, but the difficulty is in sustaining this reprieve from the creation of 'self' and 'the world'. It's not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with 'self' or 'the world'; rather, it's the ignorance with which this habit continues, keeping us in darkness; until we can break free of this cycle of recreating pain for ourselves, we won't experience the full depth of the liberation that the Buddha's saying is available, is possible. But if we bring our awareness to this point of dukkha, or unsatisfactoriness then that's the position in which we can find freedom.

Inevitably, dukkha is painful because of our identification with it, and so there's a certain degree of unconscious activity that keeps us bound up and struggling with any kind of painful physical, mental or emotional state – whether it be a major trauma or just minor things. For example, just in meditation, when we find we're caught up in a run of thoughts or a mood of the mind that feels trapped. Any sense of self at all is limited, and has a sense of grief involved in it; so we need to begin to know it as it is, which means entering right into the struggle. This is difficult, because we're

often judging: 'This is not right. This is not what the Path is, I should be free of this.' These aren't conscious thoughts, they're just attitudes – hidden assumptions. So then we can begin to ask: 'How am I relating to this struggle?...' really being right in the midst of it, recognising that: 'This is dukkha; this is pain, grief or anger. This is how it feels.' Whatever it is, we allow our mindfulness to be big enough to hold it, to bear with it. But if the heart can't expand to hold that pain, then it continues to be a struggle, there is a tight, contracted response to what is happening, and it's pushed back into the unconscious or denied, or even fully expressed – but still clung to.

There are different ways opening up to dukkha. One way is to feel it in the body, as a hard knot of tension. If we are able to allow our awareness of that knot to remain relaxed, we can begin to find a peaceful relationship with the feeling. Of course we don't know how long this is going to take – maybe we can be mindful of a difficult emotion, and then get awfully frustrated because it's not changing! But if we can just be prepared to feel it as it is, then at some point there will be a release, an opening: and 'the world' will change. There'll be a recognition of what the Buddha meant by transcendence; it no longer carries this sense of 'self' and 'the world', of 'me' and 'other', past and future. The whole mental construct can be dissolved in that moment – and that is a tasting of the Deathless.

This is perhaps the experience the Buddha was talking about when he said, in one sequence of teaching* that dukkha can condition the arising of *saddha*. As we turn to dukkha more and more, bearing with it unconditionally and experiencing release, that then feeds into our sense of confidence: 'Ah yes, this does work. This is the way...', and we find that we can actually bear with what we might previously have thought to be unbearable. That's really

This 'the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence' is very common and runs very deep in our attitudes, but this is just discontentment, a lack of ability to fully be with the dukkha, right here and right now.

important, because so much of what we need to face are great monsters in the mind that seem to have a power to darken our awareness, actually turning our mindfulness away from them. So we have to keep turning to re-apply that attention, that openness of heart. However, when something ceases and there's a relaxation into the place of no identity, no self, it can be a frightening place for people – which is possibly why we can't sustain it for very long. To be able to sustain that place of Buddha, the place of pure awareness, there needs to be an incredible faith: to not need to be reborn again.

In another quite famous quote, the Buddha said that the true nature of the mind is luminous; it is only defiled by transitory defilements. Often we take what's occurring in our minds so seriously: 'I've got a problem with anger' or, 'I've got a problem with lust' – we believe

* see *The Upanisa Sutta – Samyutta Nikaya XIII-23*

❖ *The five spiritual faculties: faith, energy, mindfulness, collectedness, wisdom.*

that to be who and what we are. But the true nature of the mind really has nothing to do with that: our problems, or whether we have a great personality or a pathetic personality, a great intellect or a dull intellect. Rather, it has to do with our capacity to look honestly

FOR SISTER UPPALAMUNI

Nothing really happens here. The grass grows unhindered, seeds, then rots away. Trees shed sibilant leaves, then grow some more. Clouds pass, most of the time. Sometimes the sky is clear, and if it is night, the stars shine. The sun rises, and the sun sets.

People come and go. People come simply to be, no more or less than that; to spend some time with trees and grass and clouds; to be able to say with joyful certainty, such as one feels when meeting an old friend, 'This is the way it is. It is like this.'

Near a particular tree a particular stone has been inscribed and set into the ground, placed there because it is stronger than the bones which lie beneath it, and will outlast them; because we do not want our memories of a loved one, of our ancestors, to fade.

The stone, too, will be worn away in time. The weather's sweet abrasion will erase those temporary characters, and moss and lichen will embrace and decorate the surface of that simple monument, claiming it for their own. And so at last,

when nature and brief artefact combine, when those who, mourning, placed it there, and those who witnessed it, are likewise passed away, its separate significance will cease; and trees, grass, clouds and stone will join as lovers with the earth, and with the bones they cover.

Nick Buxton

within – whether we have the courage to bear with what's really there, and to continue to go deeper and deeper. This doesn't mean putting ourselves up in a cave or a kuti for years (though we might long for that at times), but to keep facing into what life is presenting us with. So what we find ourselves involved with in our daily lives need not be seen as a distraction, in fact those are the very things that can teach us the most. Are we willing to face them? When I look at my own practice I often find an unwillingness to face what's presenting itself; there's a picking and choosing going on and the idea that there's something better to be had elsewhere. This 'the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence' is very common and runs very deep in our attitudes, but this is just discontentment, a lack of ability to fully be with the dukkha, right here and right now.

Every strand of technique that the Buddha taught comes into this practice of mindfulness and facing dukkha. When we look closely and examine what is happening, that involves the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Eightfold Path, and also includes cultivation of loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity, and the balancing of the spiritual faculties^o. But it's not as if we first have to understand it all on an intellectual level. I heard that Ajahn Chah often encouraged his Western disciples to put their books away; he'd say: 'Read the book of the heart' – that's where the real knowledge is and where true understanding can arise. With what we learn in this way there need no longer be any doubt. Even if everyone we meet disagrees, we don't have to argue or make a show,



AMARAVATI PLANTING PROJECT

Give the nuns a hand with their ground clearing and hedge planting project

Please let me know if you can help in any way. If you require overnight accommodation, contact: Jenni Jepson at Amaravati.



because we know it for ourselves.

However, we often don't have the confidence to go ahead with this kind of private investigation – having been undermined by certain aspects of our cultural conditioning and education – so we can grow up with the tendency to feel that everyone else knows how to be happy, but somehow we don't. We tend to look to other people for affirmation of how we should be and how we can be happy – whereas, actually, we can only know that for ourselves. And the Buddha gave us a direct route, he provided hundreds of teachings to point us back towards ourselves – clues as to how to look at experience, in order to reap the most beneficial results – rather than gaining knowledge *about* many things that won't necessarily lead us towards liberation.

The first of the Four Noble Truths is phrased: 'There is dukkha.' It comes with the instruction that dukkha should be understood. The second Truth says that there is the cause of dukkha that this cause should be abandoned. Now although I can say that the cause of

dukkha is craving, in fact that won't help to bring about understanding what craving is, how it arises in ourselves, or how it can be abandoned – all of that work we have to do ourselves. The third Truth directs us to realise the cessation of dukkha, and the fourth Truth is that of the Eightfold Path to be developed, leading to complete liberation – this Path is understanding dukkha, and

abandoning its cause in each moment. Actually, it's not such a great undertaking after all, because we can deal with things moment by moment – we have that capacity – if we don't try to take on more than what this moment actually is. That's the simplicity of it, but of course it's not that easy,

because of our habit of taking on too much at one time.

So don't believe that liberation is a long way off, it's always here and now. Although the Path is often described as a gradual one, it's not something particularly done in stages, like cultivating the first foundation of mindfulness then the second one. It's the coming together of all of this – a deepening spiral of understanding that can arise in a moment, and deepen over time. ❖

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LAY RESIDENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES AT AMARAVATI

THERE ARE a number of lay residents at Amaravati fulfilling supportive roles; with responsibilities in the office, maintenance, retreat centre, kitchen, library and grounds. Opportunities to fill these positions

WHAT WE OFFER:

The chance to live at Amaravati, joining in as part of the community. Time for group and private practice and retreat, with a variety of Dhamma friends. A five day working week in a supportive and changing environment. A modest stipend is available if necessary.

occasionally come up and we would be pleased to receive expressions of interest for future reference. At the moment we are looking for people to take up the following duties.

WHAT WE ASK:

Commitment to meditation practice and to the 5 precepts, and respect for the style of training offered. Our life is busy, physically demanding and can be quite testing, so a good standard of health, as well as the ability to live and work harmoniously with others is also necessary. Commitment for one year and competence within your area of responsibility.

MAINTENANCE This is an excellent opportunity for someone to enjoy a diverse range of challenges. These include planning, co-ordinating and executing all types of building works over 22 buildings, from carpentry, decorating, plumbing, roofing and electrics. You would be working both with the Sangha and Lay Guests, as well as arranging outside contractors. A broad range of experience would be highly advantageous.

For more information please contact the Secretary.

Before I describe the funeral itself, I wish to give a brief account of the background to his death. Earlier this year Ven. Ananda Maitreya had been invited to visit Taiwan, Singapore, and Thailand, and had gone there in May. On returning to Sri Lanka he had developed chest problems – a build-up of phlegm in the lungs – for which he was warded in the Sri Jayawardhanapura Hospital, near Colombo, for perhaps a week or two. On Saturday, 13 June, Ven. Bodhi, Ven. Vimalo, and I, along with a lay supporter, went to visit him. When we arrived at the hospital we learned that he had been discharged that same morning and had returned to his branch temple at Maharagama, close to Colombo. We immediately went there to find him apparently fully recovered and in good spirits. We had a very nice talk with him, for about half an hour, in the course of which he gave us some illuminating insights into his own approach to the practice of insight meditation.

Five weeks after that meeting, close to midnight on 18 July, Ven. Ananda Maitreya passed away in that same Sri Jayawardhanapura Hospital. Apparently the phlegm had continued to accumulate in the lungs and pneumonia set in, bringing his life to a close. He had been in the hospital for twenty-four days prior to his death. Thus he must have been re-admitted about ten days after we met him.

The funeral was announced for the following Thursday, 23 July, at Balangoda. It was to be a state funeral, attended by government ministers and numerous dignitaries, both Sri Lankan and foreign. Ven. Bodhi and I decided to make the trip out to Balangoda (a 5-6 hour drive from Kandy), and we were joined by a third monk, Ven. Kosiya (originally from Surinam), who had been ordained by Ven. Ananda Maitreya and also wanted to attend the funeral. We decided to go the day before the actual cremation so that we could pay respects to the Mahanayaka Thera's body. The body had been brought out to Balangoda in a solemn procession on Tuesday (the 21st), after a stopover the previous day in Ratnapura (about 50 miles out towards Balangoda) to enable the people in that area to pay final respects to him.

As we left Udawattakele (the Kandyan forest reserve where the Forest Hermitage is located) after the midday meal the first thing we came upon at the entrance to the access road was a banner stretched across the road, expressing grief at the demise of the late Venerable Ananda Maitreya. Many shops and houses in the city



The Funeral of Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya

Ven. Bhikkhu

On 18 July 1998, Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, the most eminent contemporary Buddhist monk of Sri Lanka, passed away at a hospital near Colombo after a brief illness. At the time of his death he was 101 years of age and would have celebrated his 102nd birthday on 23 August.

In 1969 he was elected the first president (Mahanayaka Thera) of the United Amarapura Nikaya, the monastic fraternity to which he belonged, and though he relinquished this position in 1975 he still continued to bear the honorary title Mahanayaka Thera. Ven. Ananda Maitreya's manifold services to the cause of Buddhism were not confined to Sri Lanka but extended over many countries. Perfectly fluent in English

also displayed yellow or orange flags. It seemed that his passing had affected the whole nation; but obviously, in contrast to such events in the West, there was no sense of sombreness in such displays.

This was only the beginning. When the southbound road down from Kandy linked up with the cross-country road leading from Colombo to Balangoda, we found to our pleasant surprise that every town and village we passed through was decked out with yellow and orange banners and streamers inscribed with words



Funeral of Ananda Maitreya

by
Tha Khantiko

and at home with Western modes of thought as well as with classical Buddhism of several schools, he was as popular with Western Buddhists as he was with traditional Asian Buddhists who admired his vast learning and simple, humble ways. During the 1980's and 1990's he had been particularly active in Britain and the United States. The monks of the Amaravati and Chithurst monasteries in Britain regarded him as a trusted spiritual friend and often sought his advice and help. Last year the government of Myanmar conferred on him Myanmar's highest ecclesiastical title, Abhidhaja Maharathaguru, which means something like "His Eminence, the Great Spiritual Teacher of the Nation."

of homage to the Mahanayaka Thera. Almost every home and shop had yellow flags and plastic strips hanging out from their windows and facades. It seemed more like a carnival than a funeral that we were heading towards. Many vehicles we passed also displayed yellow flags, signifying their owner's grief over the death of the monk. We were all deeply moved by this, and the feeling became stronger the closer we came to Balangoda.

When we reached Balangoda, a little after 6 pm, we

found the town fully decorated from end to end with banners, pennants, and pictures of Ven. Ananda Maitreya. People were thronging the streets, drifting towards the Sri Dhammananda Pirivena – the monastic college that the Mahanayaka Thera had founded in 1936 – where the body was laid out in state. On the long road to this temple the “mourners” – hardly the appropriate word for this generally smiling and happy looking crowd – were channelled and directed by an army of attendants and supervisors. I was struck by the orderliness of the whole affair: people of all ages, who had probably travelled long distances, often on rickety and uncomfortable public transport, inched their way towards the pirivena in the late afternoon light, but with hardly a sign of fatigue or impatience. The column, two or three abreast, must have stretched well over a mile, and was constantly being added to from the rear as more people arrived.

Along the side of the road a number of Muslim households had set up stands and were offering the people on line glasses of water. Later we learned that other Muslim establishments in the town had offered free meals as well. Ven. Ananda Maitreya had enjoyed very cordial relations with the local Muslim community and had a number of close Muslim friends from the time of his childhood.

Once we had arrived at the pirivena and had refreshed ourselves with a soft drink, we went over to the open hall where Ven. Ananda Maitreya's body had been laid out. The body rested on a raised bier covered with a shining golden silk cloth. Four youths stood guard with ornamental spears at the corners; others supported ornamental fans. Below the coffin there were photos of Ven. Ananda Maitreya at different periods of his life. Monks sat on the ground at two corners with their heads to their knees, a small fan resting against the top of their heads. These seemed to be the ones keeping the wake. We were ushered through the crowd and could pay our respects as we circumambulated the body. I was most deeply struck by the complete composure of Ven. Ananda Maitreya's face in death: though he had passed away the previous Saturday night, in that light he looked as if he were just asleep. The file of lay people continued to pass by, as they had done all day and would continue doing late into the night.

At about 7:30 pm, after we made a second visit to the hall, we went out to Udumulla, the tiny village about three miles from the pirivena, on the other side of the town. This is the site of Sri Nandaramaya, the small

temple where Ven. Ananda Maitreya had been ordained in 1911 and had received his training during his first nine years in robes. The temple had been constructed by Ven. Ananda Maitreya's father at the beginning of the century. In his later years, the Mahanayaka Thera had spent most of his time here, but it was only in the last few years of his life that any significant changes had taken place in the physical premises. Ven. Bodhi remarked that the only changes he could see in the main residence and refectory, since the time he had lived there (1972-75), were the installation of electricity and some cement to replace the compacted cowdung-&-mud floor of the verandah. In fact it seems likely that this building, constructed along with the other original buildings, had not changed at all. I did notice, however, that a new roof had been raised on the vihara. In his biography, Ven. Ananda Maitreya makes the comment about his teacher, Ven. Denihene Silananda, the first incumbent of the temple, "He was not at all interested in things like beautifying the body, decorating the residence, and amassing possessions. I also acquired this way of life from him."

More recently, on the hill above the old temple complex, a large cottage for the Mahanayaka Thera along with an even larger library-meeting hall had been built by a group from Japan. The library houses most of Ven. Ananda Maitreya's enormous collection of books. The fiction section in English was an interesting browse. The Collected Works of Agatha Christie stands out in my memory now. Ven. Bodhi was struck by a novella by Hermann Hesse, translated from the German, placed among the "Classics of English Literature."

The next day, after breakfast, we returned to the pirivena and once again joined the throng of lay folk and monks paying final respects to the body. This time the mood was accentuated by the somehow appropriate dirge of a Japanese Nichiren monk chanting "Nam mo myoho rengo kyo." In the morning light Ven. Ananda Maitreya's features were truly those of a dead person. It seemed right that the cremation would take place that afternoon.

The funeral rites commenced in the early afternoon, at the playing field of the Balangoda Mahavidyalaya, the local high school right next to the pirivena. A public holiday had been declared for the town of Balangoda, which allowed the town's citizens to attend the cremation. It would seem hard to believe that any residents of Balangoda, apart from the sick and their caretakers, did not turn out for the occasion. When we arrived we found that a very large gathering of people had already settled down to await the proceedings. People sat on rooftops and in the trees; all available space was filled. The next day's newspapers estimated that 100,000 lay people and 4,000 monks had attended. There were also government ministers, opposition politicians, and delegates, both monastic and civilian, from foreign countries.

The funeral pyre was again, in keeping with the Mahanayaka Thera's ways, a rather simple construction:

the pile of wood was covered by a kind of decorative tent of four tiers, with a wooden frame and pinkish orange cloth. Funerals in this country tend to be rather long-winded affairs, and this one was no exception. The various speeches and addresses continued from 3 pm until shortly after 5 pm. All this time the coffin was displayed in front of the large makeshift hall erected to accommodate the monks.

By the time the actual cremation took place many of the Sangha members had left. The last rite began when the direct disciples of Ven. Ananda Maitreya lifted the coffin and bore it to the awaiting pyre, where it was placed on the heap of wood inside the tent. One could feel the intensity of emotions building up, and as this small group made the triple circumambulation of the pyre many of the close disciples shed tears. Finally two lay disciples, bearing flaming torches behind their backs, made a triple run around the pyre – in opposite directions – before depositing the flaming brands in amongst the wood to start the incineration of the body. The doors to the pyre were then closed so that the coffin was not in view.

At this point most of the monks left, but some of us waited around a while longer. The lay people moved in close to the pyre; some had brought incense which they cast in towards the flames through a small slit in the orange tent around the pyre. I felt sorry for one old lady who had brought a few small pieces of firewood but had nowhere to put them! Finally, as we made our way back to the pirivena, we were waylaid by large numbers of lay people of all ages who wished to pay respects to us. It took us some time to cross that small space of a few hundred metres to get back.

It seemed as though some benign influence prevailed up above to hold off the rains that might well have made the cremation a washout. A thin cloud cover shielded us from the overhead sun and allowed us to sit or stand outside quite comfortably all afternoon. Ven. Nandasara, the chief incumbent of Sri Nandaramaya, insisted we return to Udumulla for the night. It seemed the better choice, as the pirivena was still in disarray after having had so many monks passing through it over the previous few days and nights.

The next day at 5 am we left Balangoda for Kandy. As soon as we were out of Balangoda the rain began – one of the heaviest rainfalls I can ever remember – and continued almost nonstop for most of the journey. It abated only when we were within a few miles of our destination.

The papers reporting on the funeral quote a number of different people, both monks and lay people, who believe that Ven. Ananda Maitreya was probably the most important monk to have lived in Sri Lanka in this century. Yet the temple where he lived speaks volumes for his simple, unostentatious ways. His funeral a very dignified affair but also low-key, was the same.

Although the Mahanayaka Thera is no longer in our midst, the example he set will inspire all those who came within the orbit of his wisdom and compassion. ❖

Mundane Right View

Ajahn Vipassi offered these reflections on Mundane Right View at Amaravati during his visit to England in June of this year.

Since leaving England I've probably lived in about twelve or thirteen different places for varying lengths of time. This opens a whole load of new vistas and has enabled me to reflect upon the situation that I have come from and to be exposed to different ways of looking at the Dhamma, different ways of doing things.

I spent a year in Sri Lanka where I had some quite interesting encounters with forest monks, many of whom have studied Pali to the point where they feel quite at home reading the scriptures in the original and then practising from them.

There was one, Venerable Ñānavimala, a German Monk of about 40 - 45 Vassas. When I met him I felt rather intimidated by his presence; when he asked me about the meditation approach of the Ajahn Chah tradition I spluttered a bit, and found myself saying few things

about Satipatthana and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. His response was to give me a lecture: 'First of all you have to take the Buddha as your teacher, and then you begin with Majjhima 107, and then you go on to Majjhima 117 and then to Majjhima 44' (suttas which are key scriptural passages). I relate this because it's quite far outside our range of experience; also, I noticed a feeling of wanting to kind of thrust this away – to not take it in. But something sticks from these interactions, and I found such a quality of commitment to the Buddha Dhamma deeply touching. So these kinds of encounters have highlighted the sense of holding back in certain areas or wanting not to look at certain aspects of the teaching, wanting to cling to things that I like and make me feel comfortable.

While there, I also met many lay people who tend nowadays to question things more. For example, they'd ask: 'What's the point of dedicating merit to our relatives? If we make a meal offering and dedicate the merit, where does the merit go? How does this work?' I had never really looked into some of these matters, so I decided to investigate, and discovered in the scriptures a whole series of terms relating to what's called, 'mundane right view'.

As Westerners, we tend to be interested in the

meditation, and maybe also in cultivating *dāna* (generosity) and *silā* (morality), but there are aspects of mundane right view that we tend to push away; for example, the view of kamma and rebirth, particularly rebirth – we prefer to think just in terms of this life. But the Buddha recommended that a person who becomes a disciple picks this up as a belief system. This may come as a surprise because we like to think that Buddhism isn't about believing anything, an idea that comes from the Kalama Sutta. In this sutta a group of people, who

weren't Buddhists, had asked the Buddha: 'How can we tell the genuine teachings from the teachings which are hollow and false?' and he had given them a series of criteria, encouraging them to practise those things that lead to wholesome states and to abandon those leading to unwholesome or unprofitable states – but we tend to

overlook the fact that this teaching was given to people who weren't his followers. To people whose faith had arisen, the Buddha said something quite different: 'The right attitude of the disciple is: "The Lord knows, I do not know. The Lord is teacher, I am the student"' – in other words to understand that his vision was vastly greater and more accurate than our own limited vision, to trust his guidance, just as a blind person would hold on to the hand of a sighted person.

So we can consider these teachings on mundane right view. It's a bit of a dry list so we have to work a bit to bring it alive. It begins with: 'There is gift, offering and sacrifice.' In the suttas the power of *dāna* is spoken as something that has a beneficial result both in this life and in life to come. The Buddha actually encouraged concern for this (like building up a bank account) – saying that we should create a treasure store for ourselves by doing whatever we can in this life to make merit in order to ensure rebirth in the human or deva realms in the next life. I don't think many Westerners think like that, to us it can sound very mercenary – but it's something to consider quite deeply. The Buddha's compassion was vast, he wasn't just concerned with trying to enlighten those who were fairly ripe to hear the teachings, he wanted to bring anyone on board – no matter how long it

*To people whose faith had arisen,
the Buddha said something quite different:
'The right attitude of the disciple is:
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The Lord is teacher, I am the student"'*

would take them to reach full enlightenment. Human beings and devas are able to benefit from these teachings, but those in the lower realms – the hell realm, the animal realm or hungry ghost realm – are so beset by suffering that their faculties are impaired; so you can try teaching Dhamma to animals but it doesn't do much good.

Now the Buddha said that it's very difficult to have rebirth in the human realm. He said it's as if a blind turtle swimming in the ocean came up every 100 years, and were to pop its head up through a rubber ring floating randomly on the surface of the ocean – the chances of that happening are greater than the chances of returning to the human realm, having taken birth in the animal realm or in the lower realms. So it seems that he was concerned at all costs to try to keep beings in either the human realm or the deva realm, so that at some point their faculties might mature and they could progress in Dhamma. It was a very long term perspective, greater than just this life.

Because of this many people in the East are not much concerned with developing their meditation practice this life – instead they do good works and dedicate merit, with the aspiration to be reborn in more fortunate conditions, so that they can practise next time. Sometimes in the past I've felt a bit dismissive of this approach, but I don't think like that any more – we can be too impatient, in too much of a hurry and have rather a limited view. So gift, offering and sacrifice are wholesome kamma, bringing good results in this life and in the next life. Besides laying down suitable foundations for the development of collectedness, concentration, they also bring happiness to oneself and others.

The second aspect of mundane right view is: 'There is the fruit of good and bad action.' If we do wholesome things, there are wholesome results; if we do unwholesome things, there are unwholesome results. So we can choose how we live – but it's important to be



careful about what we do, because there will be consequences. The third aspect is: 'There is Mother, there is Father, there are spontaneously born beings'. The Buddha said that our debt of gratitude to our parents is so great that even if we were to carry them around on our shoulders for the rest of our lives, anointing and massaging their limbs, and feeding them; and if they, in their turn, were to excrete and urinate all over us, we would still not repay this debt! This is because parents do much for their children, they bring them into this world and look after them. He said that the

only way to repay them is by establishing them in virtue, generosity and wisdom. In addition it is said that killing either parent is one of the five great crimes (along with killing an Arahant, splitting the Sangha and shedding the blood of a Buddha with malice) that result in immediate rebirth in the hell realms.

There is the tale of Angulimala who killed 999 people and strung the fingers on a necklace. According to the Dhammapada commentary, King Bimbisara raised a great army to go off and kill him. When Angulimala's

mother heard of this, she went into the forest to warn him, undeterred by his reputation. The Buddha must have realised that Angulimala had potential for spiritual insight and also that if he killed his Mother this potential would be blocked, so he

intervened and managed to tame him with his psychic powers; in due course he was transformed into a fully enlightened being. So you can still become an arahant, even if you have killed 999 people!

But there is another story in which, according to a prophesy, Prince Ajatasattu killed his father, King Bimbisara, in a most cruel way and seized the throne. Later on he was filled with remorse so Jivaka, the Buddha's physician, took him to see the Buddha who gave a most inspiring discourse on fruits of the holy life. At the end of the discourse the King confessed to the

...desire is very fickle. It has a tantalising prospect and yet what do you find when you get there?...
After a while it just kind of slips through your fingers; the gratification that we looked for is illusory.

Buddha that he'd killed his Father, and the Buddha said, 'Yes indeed, that is a great wrong doing, but in this Dhamma and discipline there is growth for one who confesses and seeks to be more restrained in future,' offering him some encouragement. But then after he had left, the Buddha said to Ananda: 'The King is done for. If he had not killed his father then at the completion of that discourse the stainless, spotless eye of the Dhamma would have arisen in him.' But, as it was, this was denied to King Ajatasattu. So Angulimala killed 999 people and still became an Arahant, but for King Ajatasattu who killed just one – his Father – his spiritual progress was blocked. This seems to indicate that the kammic relationship that we have with our parents is something to be considered extremely carefully – so remember to be as kind as you can to Mum and Dad!

Next: 'There is this world and there is the next world.' This again is about rebirth, alerting us to the dangers of *samsara* and getting us to consider our predicament. This can bring about a sense of dispassion, disenchantment with this endless being born, growing, growing old, getting sick, dying – achieving all kinds of things, and then losing them again. *Samsara* is fuelled by desire, for example: that feeling when we get the computer that we've always wanted and we feel really pleased with it for a while, but then they bring out a new model...so what happened to the desire for the thing that we had really wanted, and been saving up for? 'I don't want this old thing, it's really slow; I don't want last year's stuff.' So desire is very fickle. It has a tantalising prospect and yet what do you find when you get there?... After a while it just kind of slips through your fingers; the gratification that we looked for is illusory. So recollecting of the danger of *samsara* in this way stimulates the desire to be released from it, which brings forth the motivation to practise. This can underpin our faith in the Buddha and this teaching, bringing appreciation for such an extraordinarily privileged opportunity to be released from the awful, endless repetition through ignorance and desire; it gives rise to a sense of urgency, and helps to throw a lot of our mundane concerns into perspective, so that we don't get too caught up in the things that tend to attract and hold our attention.

Finally: 'There are recluses and Brahmins who have practised well; who have realised through their own super-knowledge this world and the next world, and teach about them.' This really applies to the Buddha and the Arahants, those people whose enlightened perspective informs us. Without them we wouldn't have

this possibility, we wouldn't be interested in doing this. So these factors comprise what is termed, 'mundane right view', and this is what the Buddha recommends believing in.

During this talk you may have noticed the mind going, 'Well, I don't really want to believe in that. You don't really have to believe in *that*, do you?' But, as one monk I know in Thailand says, 'The Buddha didn't lie.' The teaching he gave was for our benefit; and he taught only what would be appropriate for our awakening, so I think at the very least there is a call to investigate that in us that thinks, 'No, no. I don't want that. I want to do it my way.' – That is a sign that we are resisting, negotiating, trying to strike a bargain so that we can have an easier time. We tend to console ourselves all the while, to reassure ourselves that somehow we are doing well enough; anaesthetising our discernment in regard to our defilements – our subtle desires – that bind us and perpetuate our ignorance.

So I'd like to offer these words for your consideration. ❖

*...as one monk I know in Thailand says,
'The Buddha didn't lie.' The teaching he gave
was for our benefit; and he taught only what
would be appropriate for our awakening...*

Buddha image

*Like a mother, like the sacred tree,
how this wood has loved him!
The improbable logic of awakening
echoed in the gracious declension of rigid mass
into a harmony of sweeping curves
that renders form as an act of consciousness;
and the unforced dependence of things and time
that adds the supreme delicacy:
the gold leaf flaking, the splintered foot
with its wormholes, honouring transience.
All of this while the wood goes on,
authentic, worn naked around the chest,
grain muscling through the balanced spheres of cheek
and shoulder
to speak of subtler forces in the way of things.*

*As if the art and the wood have met to say something
that I can barely manage to hear within me
in the deep soil where their roots entwine:
that, knowing the way I shape myself,
he rose from the root of definition
(simply standing, simply walking)
to be this image: a blossoming in perfection
that, with such whole and undying heart,
is knowingly, utterly, breaking up.*

Ajahn Sucitto

Signs of

A FAMILY DAY OUT?

I've just returned from something billed as a Buddhist Festival. Bright yellow signs with an unmistakable outline of the seated Buddha, and bobbing balloons led the way along the A272 inviting everyone to take part. Unlike Wesak or Kathina this took place at the Hamilton Arms in Stedham – a pub with a difference. Here lives Mudita, who certainly knows how to combine the religious life with joyful living in the world.

Like an English village Fete this had stalls at which one could buy all manner of things, food and drink, and an arena for entertainment, but the flavour was definitely international. Alongside the beefburgers were Thai delicacies freshly cooked in the rows of hot woks. As well as Morris dancing there was classical Thai ballet and music on the kora. One could relax with Shiatsu massage and Reiki treatment, colour in a giant piece of art work, or sponsor a master knitter for the number of rows completed in half an hour.

How was it Buddhist? Mainly because many of the people attending had heard of the occasion through Buddhist meeting places. This was an opportunity for Buddhists of all styles of practice to come together and enjoy each others company, delighting in the opportunity of giving something to each other. Mudita commented that this chance to develop harmony between us all was just as important as the substantial material benefit from the sale of food and raffle tickets and donations. Certainly the presence of a Chithurst monk gave a very special feeling to the event and there was a steady flow of people under the canopy to talk with him. We were also able to see the plans for rebuilding the coach house alongside the beautiful photographs Angela took of the existing rooms at Cittaviveka. The organising group made donations from the proceeds to Cittaviveka and to build two rooms for a group of Tibetan nuns living in arduous conditions in exile in Derha dun.

I could have come home with a bag of all kinds of goodies, including Cambodian silk, soothing aloe vera, a Dhamma school T-shirt or a prize air ticket to Calcutta. What I actually brought home was a tummy full of strawberries and cream, a plant to grow in my garden and a heart nourished by the company and energy of many people having a good time in a really happy atmosphere.

Mudita wrote on the handbills "First Annual Fete"(my underline, not hers!). There is confidence for you. It was planned to be a success and it was. After all the rain we had during June and July the sun shone out

for us and the marquees and canopies that might have been sheltering us from the rain offered shade from the heat. What is it they say about good works and good kamma?

So many said that they will come back next year I suspect the car park as well as the lawn will be brimming full of activity. Put on your thinking caps now. Lets tap all the talent in the community and share it together. We're lucky to have such a lovely opportunity to offer support to that which supports us in our spiritual practice, in a way that allows us all to meet together in this joyful manner.

Medhina

SAYING GOODBYE

Over the years we have said goodbye to a number people of who have spent varying amounts of time as monks and nuns with the Sangha here in England. At first we were taken aback, perhaps subconsciously because of our European tradition of Christian monastics who make lifetime vows, and I know that I recognised in my mind that resistance to change that the Buddha referred to constantly in the teachings. "Oh no. He can't do that. Why? I didn't expect that. Can't we fix it so she stays? Were some of the thoughts that sprung readily to mind in the early days.

Now I detect less shock and more sadness when someone leaves the robes, more like saying goodbye to a good friend who is travelling abroad for a season. The way that the order of monks and nuns has been set up by the Buddha is that the determination to practice the mendicants life is for a set period only – a vassa, or previously discussed period with the preceptor. I remember listening to an Ajahn's talk in which he said that he joined up in Thailand for a period of three months and he's still doing it (twenty years later)! Some may enter with a much longer term view but still have the opportunity to review it "in the moment". Is this not the teaching?

If we find the adjustment a little disturbing, we can imagine what a major adjustment it is for the samana concerned. Deciding to leave requires such a lot of reflection and reformation that there must be very little energy left for practical matters like finding appropriate clothing. When a reasonable period of notice is given then lay supporters are able to come forward with offers of accommodation, cash, or the necessary baggage of life in the world: but sometimes the decision crystallises and craves action in an instant. The English Sangha Trust

Change

acting as stewards for the money donated to the monastery has responded by offering travel funds to all disrobing monks and nuns, and a capital sum for subsistence in the first few weeks to those that needed it.

What would be the most skilful way to support our friends as they go on their way? We realise that a lot more information, guidance and advice is needed about the availability of resources for people setting out on an independent life. The amount of financial help we can offer from monastery funds is so difficult to decide – is it ever enough to offer comfort, physical or emotional? Should there be a separate fund for support of disrobing or should it come from the general funds offered for the four requisites?

In Thailand the disrobing monks often go back to an extended family that will value their religious practice and support their material needs on return. They will often stay at the temple for a while after disrobing to give service to the community in gratitude for the teaching received and so have the opportunity to adjust and slip gradually into a householders life. This is obviously not Thailand and while we can learn some lessons from them we have to take into account European differences.

The lay Directors of the EST feel that feedback is necessary from those who offer their money to support the Sangha in this country. The desire to help our Sangha friends make a successful transition leads us into a minefield of hard financial decisions. Please drop a line or phone Medhina or Colin Ash with some response to our dilemma. What is a reasonable amount of financial assistance and from where does it come?

The Sangha community always offer hospitality for an ex-monastic to stay as a lay person with food and accommodation found during the period of adjustment. Should there be a half way house? a self-help group?
Medhina, 2 Kenmure Avenue, Brighton BN1 8SH.
(01273) 554988

Colin Ash, Woodthorpe, Manor Crescent, Seer Green,
Beaconsfield HP 2QX (01494 671043)

UPDATE ON PLANS FOR THE OPENING OF THE TEMPLE 2ND – 4TH JULY 1999:

Plans are now developing to have three days of events. The first day the 2nd July will be an Intermonastic/ Interdenominational event, with friends from Buddhist, Christian and other faith communities, invited to take part in a sharing of friendship and blessings.

The second day the 3rd July we'll hold an Open Day for the local community. This is an occasion to give

people from the locality a chance to see what we are doing. This will be for local villagers, businesses, dignitaries and officials, plus people involved with the construction work.

The third and final day will be Sunday the 4th July. This is the main Dedication Ceremony for all our supporters of Amaravati, where, amidst Paritta chanting, reflections and silence, the Luk Nimit - the great Marble Orb - will be lowered into its place in the centre of the Temple floor.

Invitations to people overseas have begun to be sent out. At Amaravati accommodation will be very squashed, with many Sangha and lay people staying in tents. Some people are already planning to stay in local bed-and-breakfasts. It would be helpful to know if there are any lay supporters living in the area, even as far away as London, who would be interested to offer space in their homes for friends from overseas to stay. Please contact Ajahn Attapemo at Amaravati.

STOP PRESS FROM ITALY

It is with great regret that we announce the untimely passing-away of Mrs. Natchari Thananan, on August 7th, 1998. During her several years in Rome as wife of the Thai Ambassador, Mr. Anurak Thananan, she dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the realisation of a suitable forest monastery for disciples of Tan Ajahn Chah and Tan Ajahn Sumedho in Italy. Despite many obstacles, not least of which was the leukaemia she bore as if it were a minor inconvenience, her dream came true just as she was to return to Bangkok at the time of her husband's retirement.

With sincere gratitude we recognise that, without her relentless energy and enthusiasm, the new Santacittarama could not have come about. In a recent letter she expressed her happiness and gratification that her dream had been fulfilled, and appreciation for the many messages she had received wishing her well. We hope that the sadness of her passing may, at least in part, be offset by the joyous memory of her good deeds. In the final act of a truly generous heart she requested that, instead of offering flowers at her funeral, donations be made to a children's charity.

Our kind thoughts and heartfelt condolences go to Mr. Thananan, his children, family and friends.

A special remembrance for Khun Natchari will take place, at Santacittarama, during the Kathina ceremony on October 18th.



SANGHA NOTICES

WINTER RETREAT**Jan – March '99**

Contact the relevant monastery if you would like to offer help at this time. A minimum commitment of one month is requested.

During the 1999 monastic retreat January, February and March there are opportunities for lay people (who have experience of long, silent retreats and who have had previous contact with the Sangha) to help with the general running, particularly kitchen duties. It will be possible to join with some of the meditation sittings and talks.

Amaravati: A minimum commitment of one month is requested. All those interested should apply to the monastery's secretary by November 15th.

AMARAVATI NOTICES

Family events in 1999**Rainbows:** 30th April–3rd May.**Summer Camp:** 21st–29th August.**Young Person's Retreat:** 3rd–5th December.

The childrens Sunday Classes will no longer take place.

'Early Days' Photographs

Does anyone have 'early' photographs of daily life at Amaravati, for several projects in the near future.

Please send a photocopy with your Name, Address or Telephone number on the back (so that you can be contacted if needed). **Please note:** we can not return photocopies or prints at this stage without a SAE.

Sound Request?

Are you upgrading your sound system? The tape library at Amaravati will gladly receive a tape system which allows for high quality dubbing. Also, small portable tape players and headphones remain in great demand here. Thank you for your kindness.

CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

Lay Forums**Nov. 8:** Dealing with Negativity

Dec 6: Keeping calm in the storm
These forums are discussions headed by a couple of keynote reflections from a lay person and a Sangha member. They take place between 2 and 5pm.

Forest Work Volunteer Days:

Oct. 17th General work in the woods.

Nov. 15th Treeplanting

Dec. 13th Bluebell planting

These afternoons will be spent helping the Sangha in the ongoing Hammer Wood Restoration Project.

Meet at the monastery at 1.00pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation, please contact the guest monk/nun in advance. *Bring work clothes.*

Forest Month: There are places for three men to join a small team of the Sangha who will be spending October 13th – November 9th working and living in Hammer Wood. If you are interested contact Nick Scott at Chithurst Monastery

Year end happening**Renewal & Resolution. January 3rd**

There will be the opportunity to take the Refuges and Five Precepts with Ajahn Sucitto at 3pm. The formal going to Refuge and Precept Resolution will be followed by a discussion. *Telephone for details.*

OTHER NOTICES

NEW PUBLICATION

Copies of a recent publication called "THE GIFT OF WELLBEING" – six talks by Ajahn Munindo – are available at Aruna Ratanagiri: Harnham Buddhist Monastery, Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland. NE20 0HF Please send SAE A4. @ 45p postage.

BUDDHIST/CHRISTIAN RETREATS in 1999

MAY 28-30

Meister Eckhart – from a Buddhist Christian Perspective

A reflective Interfaith weekend in a Benedictine setting, exploring the mystical teaching and practice of Meister Eckhart, so relevant today.
Stephen Saslav & Turvey Benedictine Nuns

SEPTEMBER 10-12

Meditation and Mindfulness

An Interfaith weekend, learning from Christian and Buddhist teachings and practice in the monastic setting.
Stephen Saslav & Turvey Benedictine Nuns

New friends

I would like to hear from fellow Buddhist's in the Ilford/Newhan area for friendship and sharing dhamma. Please phone Ray 'Sparra' Everingham on 0181 220 8418.

We try to bring out the *Newsletter* quarterly, depending upon funds and written material. In the spirit of our relationship with lay people, we naturally depend upon donations: any contributions towards printing/distribution costs can be made to: 'The English Sangha Trust', Amaravati. In that same spirit, we ask you to let us know if you wish to be put on (or removed from) the mailing list, or if you have moved. Write to *Newsletter*, Amaravati. The newsletter is also available on the internet from: <http://www-ipg.umds.ac.uk/~crr/newsletter/>
Data Protection Act: The mailing list used for *Forest Sangha Newsletter* is maintained on computer. If you object to your record being kept on our computer file, please write to *Newsletter*, Amaravati, and we will remove it.
This Newsletter is printed by: *Ashford Printers*, Harrow. Telephone – (0181) 427-5097

Teaching and Practice Venues

MEDITATION GROUPS

These are visited regularly by Sangha members.

BATH Catherine Hewitt, (01225) 405-235	LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY 58 Eccleston Square, SW1 (Victoria) (0171) 834 5858 Meditation Sundays: led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday classes – 6.00pm
BERKSHIRE Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646	
BRISTOL Lyn Goswell (Nirodha), (0117) 968-4089	
SOUTH DORSET Barbara Cohen-Walters (Sati sati), (01305) 786-821	LEEDS AREA Daniella Loeb, (0113) 2791-375 Anne Voist, (01274) 670-865
EDINBURGH Muriel Nevin, (0131) 337-0901	
GLASGOW James Scott, (0141) 637-9731	SOUTHAMPTON Ros Dean (01703) 422430
HAMPSTEAD Caroline Randall, (0181) 348-0537	SURREY/WOKING Rocanā, (01483) 761-398

MEDITATION GROUPS

These meet regularly & receive occasional visits from Sangha.

BEDFORD David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892	MAIDSTONE Joan Hamze, (01622) 751-202
BELFAST Paddy Boyle, (01232) 427720	MIDHURST Barry Durrant, (01730) 821479
BRIGHTON Alex Clingan, (01273) 327-925	NEWCASTLE ON TYNE Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726
CAMBRIDGE Gillian Wills, (01954) 780-551	OXFORD Peter Carey, (01865) 578-76
DUBLIN Eugene Kelly, (1) 854-076	PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES Peter and Barbara (Subhdra) Jackson, (01239) 820-790
ESSEX (Billericay) Rob Howell, (01702) 559-241 (Harlow) Pamutto, (01279) 731-330	PORTSMOUTH Dave Beal, (01705) 732-280
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD Bodhinyana Group Chris Ward (01442) 890-034	REDRUTH Daniel Davide (01736) 753175
LONDON / NOTTING HILL Jeffrey Craig, (0171) 221-9330 Nick Carroll, (0181) 740-9748	STEYNING / SUSSEX Joe Bartlett, (01903) 879-597
LEIGH-ON-SEA Gool Deboo, (01702) 553-211	STROUD John Groves, 01453 753319
	TAUNTON Martin Sinclair, (01823) 321-059

AMARAVATI CASSETTES

Cassette tapes of Dhamma talks given by Ajahn Sumedho and other Sangha members, plus tapes of chanting and meditation instruction are available for sale at cost price. For catalogue and information send SAE to:

Amaravati Cassettes,
Ty'r Ysgol Maenan,
Llanrwst,
Gwynedd, LL26 OYD

Amaravati

Retreats:

1998/1999



Oct.	16 – 25	10 days	Ajahn Sucitto FULLY BOOKED
Nov.	13 – 22	10 days	'Teacher to be decided'
Nov.	27 – 29	Weekend	(Death & Dying)
Dec.	11 – 13	Weekend	Ajahn Candasiri* & Sister Lucy Brydon (OSB) 'Christian/Buddhist Retreat'
Dec.	27 – Jan.1	5 days	Ajahn Candasiri*

* Due to recent illness Ajahn Candasiri may not be able to take part in these retreats, in this case another Sangha member will be available.

1999

April	2 – 11	10 Days	Ajahn Viradhammo
April	16 – 18	Weekend	—
May	7 – 9	Weekend	—
May	14 – 28	14 Days	Ajahn Sumedho (Experienced)
Sept.	3 – 5	Weekend	—
Sept.	10 – 19	10 Days	Ajahn Sumedho (Beginners)
Sept.	24 – 26	Weekend	Ajahn Sumedho (In Thai)
Oct.	8 – 10	Weekend	—
Oct.	15 – 20	5 Days	Sister Thanasanti

The retreat schedule for November and December '99 is as yet to be decided and will be published in the next newsletter.

Retreat Centre Work Weekend 1999

March 26 – 28 : June 4 – 6 : October 22 – 24

Please note that bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form and booking fee. The fee is refundable on request, up to one month before the retreat starts. To obtain a booking form, please write to the Retreat Centre, stating which retreat you would like to do.

Unless otherwise stated, all retreats are open to both beginners and experienced meditators, and are led by a monk or nun.

INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION—AMARAVATI

Saturday Afternoon Classes 1.30 – 3.30 pm

Meditation instruction for beginners; with an opportunity for questions to be answered. Classes are in the Bodhinyana Meditation Hall.

Feel free to come along – no booking is necessary.

V I H A R A S

BRITAIN

◆ Amaravati Monastery
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ
Tel: (01442) 84-2455 (Office)
84-3411 (Guest Info.)
84-3239 (Retreat Info.)
Fax: (01442) 84-3721
Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Amaravati.

◆ Cittaviveka: Chithurst
Buddhist Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield,
Hampshire GU31 5EU
Tel: (01730) 81-4986
Fax: (01730) 81-7334
Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Cittaviveka.

◆ Hartridge Buddhist
Monastery,
Upottery, Honiton,
Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (01404) 89-1251
Fax: (01404) 89-0023
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust.

◆ Aruna Ratanagiri
Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland
NE20 0HF
Tel: (01661) 88-1612
Fax: (01661) 88-1019
e-mail: harnham@mailcity.co
Stewards:
Magga Bhavaka Trust.

THAILAND

◆ Wat Pah Nanachat
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubon Rajathani 34310

AUSTRALIA

◆ Bodhinyana Monastery
Lot 1, Kingsbury Drive,
Serpentine 6125 WA
Tel: (08) 952-52420
Fax: (08) 952-53420

◆ Dhammaloka Buddhist
Centre (Perth)
18-20 Nanson Way,
Nollamara 6061 WA
Tel: (08) 934-51711
Fax: (08) 934-44220
Stewards: Buddhist Society of
Western Australia.

ITALY

◆ Santacittarama
Via Delle Prata 22
Località Brulla
02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)
Italy
Tel/Fax: (0765) 87 21 86
Stewards:
Santacittarama No 20163/38.

SWITZERLAND

◆ Dhammapala
Buddhistisches Kloster
Am Waldrand,
CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 675 21 00
Fax: 033 / 6752 241
Stewards:

Dhammapala 31921-201-5.

NORTH AMERICA

◆ Abhayagiri Monastery,
16201 Tomki Road,
Redwood Valley,
CA 95470
Tel: (707) 485-1630
Fax: (707) 485-7948
(Sangha literature and West
Coast newsletters are
distributed from here.)
Stewards:
Sanghapala Foundation.

◆ Boston Area:
Dorothea Bowen, Boston,
Mass. Tel.(617)332-2931
Mailing for E. Coast USA
& Thailand: to be placed on
the mailing list, please write
directly to Amaravati.

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◆ Bodhinyanarama
17 Rakau Grove,
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Wellington 6008
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Fax: (+ + 64) 4 563-5125
e-mail:
sangha@actrix.gen.nz

Stewards:
Wellington Theravada Buddhist
Association.

◆ Auckland Buddhist Vihara
29 Harris Road,
Mount Wellington,
Auckland
Tel: (+ + 64) 9 579-55443

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Closing date for submissions to the next issue is 20th November 1998.

MONASTIC WINTER RETREAT

Early January until the end of March

THE MONASTERY WILL BE CLOSED.

See Grapevine for details if you are able to help.

OBSERVANCE DAYS

On these days the community devotes itself to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome to join in the evening meditation vigils, and on the Full and New moon, there is an opportunity to determine the eight precepts for the night.

Moon Phase	☾ HALF	☉ FULL	☽ HALF	● NEW
OCTOBER	27 (Tues)	☽5 (Mon)	13 (Thurs)	19 (Mon)
NOVEMBER	26 (Thurs)	3 (Tues)	11 (Wed)	18 (Wed)
DECEMBER	25 (Fri)	3 (Thurs)	11 (Fri)	17 (Thurs)
JANUARY	24 (Sun)	1st & 31st	9 (Sat)	16 (Sat)

© Pavarana Day (vassa ends)
Buddhist New Year 2542 begins 4th November

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173