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Living in Harmony

*From a talk given by Ajahn Kāruniko,
March 2000*

There are six things that the Buddha recommended for living in harmony; kindness in bodily action, kindness in verbal action and kindness in mental action towards each other in public and in private, sharing, keeping the same virtuous conduct, and harmony of view in what we're trying to do with our lives. When these six things are manifest in a group of people then there's a good possibility of them living in harmony. So three of these are concerned with the practice of *Mettā*, the practice of loving-kindness. There are a lot of teachings that the Buddha gave on the practice of loving-kindness because he saw the necessity of this attitude when we interact with people. If you find it challenging relating to other people then the practice of *Mettā* is seen as something that can very much help with that.

Mettā is also referred to as a protection for the mind. When it's well developed it protects the mind from being overwhelmed by greed, hatred and delusion. Just like in a forest, if the forest is wet, then when a fire comes near it the fire won't consume it. So if there's a basis of *Mettā* in the mind then there's less chance of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion overtaking the mind. Even though these sorts of things come into contact with it they don't overtake or consume it.

When we practise *Mettā* we start with ourselves, having a sense of *Mettā* for this being here. I'm always reminded of this when I go flying. When

you get on an aeroplane they give you many instructions. At one point they say, 'If there's a drop in oxygen, then an oxygen mask will drop from above.' But they then say, 'Put your own oxygen mask on before you put your children's on.' When we first hear that it can grate – 'put your own on before your children's.' But when we consider it, it's very sensible, isn't it? Because if getting the mask on your child becomes a struggle then you both might suffocate before it happens. This can be the same with relationships too. If we haven't developed this sense of *Mettā* in ourselves then relationships can be a struggle, and

sometimes the relationships can perish.

What do you think about that bloke or that lady, that you see when you look in the

mirror in the morning when you clean your teeth or wash your face? How do you respond to that image in the mirror, this thing called 'Me'? And as you look at your image, what sorts of perceptions come up? Does the self-critical mind come up or do you like that person in the mirror? To me it's a sign of a healthy relationship with this mind and body to like the person you see in the mirror. We can dwell on our faults, which just tends to drag us down, but it's more skilful to remember some of the good things about the person you see in the mirror, the good things that person has done. You might not be the bees' knees of Buddhism but everybody has their good points and we can bring them to mind. Now we might think to ourselves,

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‘Well really I haven’t done many good things.’ We could look at our past and think of all the unskilful things we’ve done but it’s more skilful to come to the present moment, to what we are doing now. If we can bring to mind the importance of trying to cultivate skilful things in the present, then this can very much help us find a sense of *Mettā* for ourself.

I find that if I bring to mind the good things that I’ve done and dwell on those it does have a different effect on the mind than just dwelling on the not-so-good things I’ve done and dwelling on my faults. I find when I consider like this I don’t get to thinking, ‘How wonderful I am.’ It just brings a sense of well-being into my mind. And that to me is the basis of skilful action; it’s the basis of meditation.

We have an interesting little situation in our bathroom. We have two sinks side by side and one big mirror, so when we stand at the sink and another person comes up, you see yourself and the person next to you. I find it an interesting exercise to look at myself and look at the other person and see my responses to that. And I contemplate that

a perfection of *Mettā* would be, that I could sit in front of that mirror all day and people could come and go and it would all be the same. My mind would respond the same to myself as to others, to others as to myself.

This is illustrated in a story about a group of monks that were practising together and then were captured by a group of robbers. The robbers said, ‘we’re sorry about this, Bhikkhus, but we’re afraid we’re going to have to bump one of you off to tell people we mean business.’ They went to the leader of the monks and asked him to select one. He looked at the small group of monks: there was one very old monk pretty much on his last legs, there was one monk who was quite sick, there was one monk who was very devoted to him, and there was one monk who he didn’t get on with. And they’d asked him to choose one. Who do you think he chose? You might think he’d choose himself, but actually he told the robbers ‘I can’t choose’. Because he had *Mettā* for the four and for himself, he couldn’t choose. That is seen as

the perfection of loving-kindness.

In the practice of meditation what I do find very useful as I’m sitting breathing is just bringing up the thought, ‘May I abide in well-being, may I be happy’. So as I breathe the breath into this inner world of body and mind, just bringing this thought to mind. And doing this, especially when there are states of greed, ill-will, delusion, anxiety, worry or fear, I do find a helpful practice. It brings a softening around these experiences so I’m not getting caught into the fight. It’s like giving something the space to follow its nature – which is to

cease. Because sometimes in meditation we can get into being very much in control and that then makes meditation a struggle. Somehow we’re somebody who’s controlling this thing called mind and going to get rid of all the unwanted bits of it. But this can be like being in this room, and when something unpleasant comes in you jump on it, you seize it by the throat and say, ‘Get out’. You keep it by the neck on the floor and keep on telling it to ‘get out, get out’. That doesn’t work, does it? So to me the practice of *Mettā* can be likened to opening all the doors,



Ajahn Jutindharo and Ajahn Kāruniko

creating some nice big spaces and eventually the thing finds its own way out.

Then also in meditation we can cultivate it towards other people – as to oneself, so to others. One way of doing this is to bring people to mind and wish them well. It’s recommended we start with people that tend to evoke a sense of kindness and develop it first with them, and as we get more skilled at it, then we can start bringing to mind those people that we find more difficult. This practice doesn’t mean that we just sit down and start thinking these thoughts and all of a sudden our heart starts oozing with *Mettā* – we might feel very tight or miserable on a level of the heart. Again it’s something we have to develop, we have to start somewhere, and we can always start on the level of intention. The experience of this is that we start with intention and as we sincerely keep those intentions going then, over time and with practice, things start getting down to the level of the heart. At first it might seem like there’s an

EDITORIAL

The shining darkness

As winter's quiet darkness grows around us it speaks of a special kind of fecundity. With the woodland creatures' withdrawal it appears that everything is saying, 'It's time to leave the world of activity and go into the heart.' Our life is rhythmic: as our breath comes in and out, so we have times of more and times of less engagement. This approaching Winter Retreat feels deeply in tune; we seem to be moving in step with the leafless rustling of the branches outside.

Within the monasteries our lives tend to be a flow between interaction with others, and times of solitude and introspection. And in this flow it seems essential, if not inevitable, that each informs the other: that these are not modes of being in opposition but aspects of cultivation that inform and enrich one another. When we dwell in the quiet of meditation the quality with which we have engaged with things is bound to be reflected in the way we attend to our meditation. If our heart has been cramped and constricted in our interactions with others, if this is how we are habitually relating to things, then what arises in our meditation is likely to be received in the same way.

This gives practice great possibilities. In the experience of meditation, through the blessing of calm and focus, we can see our deepest patterns. We can gain insight into how we hold meditation, ourselves, and all we hold as other than ourselves. And through the power of meditation take out some of the effects that our hearts carry, the bruising and tightness. In the same way, in the day-to-dayness of our lives, through the cultivation of kindness and friendliness, we can transform what we meet there, and these qualities will then be natural when we turn inwards for meditation. The apparent separation between 'inside' and 'outside', and the tension between engagement and solitude, these can fall away. We can transform the world; either by attending to its arising at the heart or through our response to what seems to be outside ourselves.

When the heart is cultivated, brightened, attended to with care, it yields rich wonders. This realm of meditation that we share, this realm of the intuitive – the *citta* – where things are experienced as resonance, is worthy of the time we dedicate to its cultivation. As we can experience, when we go into the heart's darkness daring to feel all that separates us – the anger, the grief, and the fear – something wondrous is discovered. Not only does the beauty of awareness, of presence, shine forth but the very darkness itself is transformed. What is fear like when it is opened to? Doesn't the very fact of

our not knowing what may happen, reveal a spaciousness in which the vast possibilities of life open up? We can trust into our anger with awareness and receive the things we need to hear – maybe our resentment was rooted in our not taking care of ourselves. All that arises in our awareness can be the ground for us to see the Noble Truths, and to understand what separates us from our intrinsic freedom – and each other. Our very commitment to waking-up, and the ability we have cultivated in meditation to hold steady with the flux of things, is transformative. And when we peel away all that obscures our hearts, do we not touch the pure and bestowing heart – the heart that 'wants to give you everything.'

Sister Thāniyā

Lay Events at Amaravati 2002

Day events: (10.00am – 5.00pm)

N.B. No need to book. Please bring some food to share on the day

26th January A Day of practice.

2nd March A Day of practice.

1st June Media and the Monkey Mind

20th July Meditation – Insight or Delusion?

19th October Walk your Talk – The Path in Practice

7th December Who Am I ?

Weekends: (Friday 5.30 pm – Sunday 4pm)

N.B. For weekends, advance booking is essential

12 -14th April Nama - Rupa, Mind and Body?

5 – 7th July Our world and Nature: *including local walks*

6 – 8th Sept Creative Arts Weekend

All events are held in the Retreat Centre. They are a valuable opportunity to meet and practise with others, both in silence and interaction. They include silent and guided meditation, discussion groups, sutta study groups, yoga groups, as well as opportunities for questions & answers, this allows you to participate in silence or more interactively, as you prefer on the day.

Newcomers are welcome, and so are you.

For further information, please contact either

Nick Carroll 020 8740 9748 or Chris Ward 01442 890034

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka / Upasika Association (AUA)

continued from page 2... incompatibility there, trying to think one thing but feeling another, but we have to start somewhere.

I like an analogy; it's like if our hand's cold and we hold something that's warm, our hand doesn't get warm as soon as we touch it. But the more we hold on to it then the heat from that object will permeate the hand. Now at first our hand's cold so we can't really grip the object very well, we lose it. Similarly the more we practise at it, the more we can hold these sort of thoughts in mind, then the greater the possibility of that intention working its way down to the level of the heart.

I used to find mornings were a time when either I felt dull and sleepy or niggly. I've found it's a very good time to bring up some thoughts of *Mettā* as a way of energising the mind that's just going to fall asleep if I don't do anything. If I try to watch my breath and I'm tired then it's.... I'm hearing it not watching it! But if I try to bring up some skilful thoughts then I find that can energise the mind in a good way. And it can help dispel that morning niggliness, that critical morning mind that, if we get caught in it, can ruin our whole day. So bringing to mind the people we have to interact with that day and wishing them well. And, of course, as we bring

people to mind there are different responses depending on our relationship to them, but if we can we maintain that intention, 'May they be well', because we have to start somewhere. This is a practice I've found has helped me very much with relating to people in a community situation.

One of the benefits of this is a mind that is more easily concentrated. An experience I've had on occasions is sitting down in meditation thinking, 'Right I'm going to concentrate the mind' but it's going here, going there and there's a sense of agitation. But rather than just struggling like that, to bring up a few thoughts of kindness towards people or remembering good things people have done, then sometimes what can occur is a mind shift. All of a sudden you find the mind stops struggling, the mind starts to stay with the breath. A subtle change of mind state can make such a difference.

It's also helpful to consider that life is a mixed bag. There are some things that are great about it and some things that aren't so great about it. There's always going to be times when there'll be misunderstandings and people won't be getting on, and this and that – that's the way life is. So at times when we do get agitated and the mind's getting too caught up into the complexities of life, just to bring a simple, skilful thought to mind and hold it there can have a very good effect. It can bring us back to something a bit more calm and skilful, and then it's amazing how different things look. We see the way things look from the anxiety mind, and then how they look when the anxiety mind's not there – it could be better, it could be improved, but it's not a problem. And if there's anything I can do to help with things, then such action will come from a mind that is more calm, which has more of a sense of kindness there, rather than a worried, anxious, fearful mind.

The benefits of the cultivation of *Mettā* are quite wonderful according to the teachings of the Buddha. When we develop it we can live more in harmony with people and, the Buddha says, we become dear to human beings and dear to non-human beings, animals, *devas* and deities. On the human level one can see how, at times when we're friendly towards people it does bring a more favourable response than at times when we act or speak on ill-will. If people come at you in an attacking way, then of course, the tendency is to get defensive or attack back. But we can acknowledge that initial response and then think in terms of kindness, 'Well what can I do to help to pacify the situation.' I've always found on the occasions when I've managed to respond in a friendly way, how nice things have come out of it.

One of the occasions I remember was when I was going to visit my parents at Christmas. I was going up on a train which got delayed and as I then missed my connection I ended up on Piccadilly Station at 8 o'clock in the evening, a couple of days before Christmas. Now it's not where I'd like to have been, seeing that I had to

GATHERING

Each year it takes me longer
during the months of leaf-fall
to stop arguing and get used to
rationed sunlight and hostile sky
and my skin burrowing down
under layer upon layer of synthetics.

Until, even at night, alone,
nothing can be naked and open.

In its inevitable season
there's entrenchment.
Endurance normalises wet socks,
colds, sniping draughts;
and the die-back of everything
which we share with green life.
Along with the survivor's strategy:
feign surrender but return to the roots.

Here we'll meet, sometime,
under the spluttering and the attitudes;
held in the diamond frosts
as a reflection of the clear sharp light.

Here nothing gets in the way
of whatever is past the horizon.
Nothing to trust but being here
and wanting to give you everything.

go to a remote platform to catch the train. As it was quite cold out and I wasn't very warmly dressed I huddled into the waiting room. I was just sitting there all by myself and then lo' and behold a group of teenage girls came in, all full of Christmas spirit in possibly more ways than one. They came in and went behind me and I could hear them whispering. 'Whoops! I've been spotted'. Then they started singing raunchy songs – I don't know if this was for my benefit or just what they usually sing when they go on to the platform of Piccadilly Station. And then there was a silence and again a whispering and they all came round to introduce themselves. Now actually I'm a sort of working class lad myself, and I used to sing such songs once, so I found I could respond to them quite well. I felt quite friendly towards them. They asked me a few questions and after a while they went back to their songs. When the train came in they seemed preoccupied with their songs so I went to the door, opened it and said, 'Hey! The train's come.' As I held the door they all charged out. Then I went and stood on the platform as the train came in. It stopped with the two sliding doors right in front of me. When the doors opened I stood back ready for the girls to charge; they did come running up, but all of a sudden they all stopped, composed themselves and invited me to get on to the train. And I thought that was really nice; that for a moment there was that stopping, composing and a gesture of kindness as though they reciprocated the friendliness I'd shown to them in the waiting room.

With our relationship to animals, we can see how when we have a sense of friendliness towards animals, that does bring out a better response from them. If you can actually manifest it when a dog comes up barking at you, it often stops barking. In Thailand, animals can prove very afraid of the village people, but a deer came into Ajahn Chah's monastery and would eat out of Ajahn Chah's hand. Maybe some of you have seen the photograph of Ajahn Chah feeding the deer. So this sense of being dear to animals and deities, you don't know how they help us in ways we can't see. In Buddhist stories it's those people who developed skilful things who the deities protect. You might be quite sceptical about this; which is understandable because what we can't see or we have no experience with we doubt.

But coming back to more tangible things, if we develop

Mettā then we tend to sleep better, wake up better, have less unpleasant dreams. And we are peaceful when it comes to our death. We have peace and confidence about what will happen to us. These are some of the benefits that the Buddha listed.

The Buddha recommended for us to develop it in all postures, walking, sitting, standing and lying down. In our life we queue up at supermarkets, we sit in traffic jams, we lie down before we go to sleep; here are opportunities to cultivate this. Rather than grumbling, 'Why isn't the traffic going,' we could use that situation differently. Here in the monastery often we have to wait for the meal, and we can sit and think, 'how inconsiderate,' but instead we could look at the people who are here, who cooked and brought the food, and send a few nice thoughts in their direction. If we have this inclination we can use many situations in our lives. Times when we're waiting and we're not doing anything in particular we can cultivate such attitudes. Life seems to be getting very full these days and maybe there doesn't seem much time for this but consider for yourself what's important. What is important at the end of the day?



The cultivation of *Mettā* is something important that if we do now will be a great help to us. But if we put it off, and get preoccupied with little niggly things, then it's going to be difficult to remember later. So, we need to consider how we use our time, the things we can do to help us live in harmony with people. If we can live in harmony with others as well as be on our own, if we can go between the two and keep a feeling of harmony, that's a good balance. If we cannot live with other people and find some sense of ease with that, I wonder how far we can go with our meditation. If we can learn how to live with other people and feel a sense of ease, then that shows that we have a good foundation for our meditation. Practice is not just being on our own and meditating, practice is also learning from our interactions with people; hopefully the two can complement and support each other. When things happen, when we interact, we can willingly learn from those situations to deepen our commitment towards skilful things and strengthen them.

When I think about the magic of life, of tuning in with the wonderful things in life, for me the access to that is through things like *Mettā* practice. It does, for many people, give a sense of the wonder, the mystery, the benevolence of the universe. ❖

Making One's Own Choice

A conversation between Ajahn Sucitto, and Ajahns Khemasiri and Akiñcano of Dhammapala Monastery.

Ajahn Sucitto: You've both done some culture hopping. A German and a Swiss, you both did your early (*navaka*) training in Britain, then spent a few years in Thailand and Burma, and now as senior bhikkhus you are living at Dhammapala in Switzerland. What shifts in yourselves as bhikkhus have these changes brought about?

Ajahn Khemasiri: After completing my early years of training in our British monasteries initially moving to Switzerland was merely going to a different monastery with similar routines and structures. Over time what became different for me was the way I experienced myself within the new community. I could express myself in a more independent way than during the years of formal *navaka* training, when I had to live under the close supervision of senior mentors of our community. Living in Switzerland at that time, within a small community, and without the dependence on a senior person, was the beginning of a phase where I had to rely more on my own skills. I had to find out for myself how to further nourish a sense of enthusiasm and meaningful direction within Sangha life. That time certainly wasn't without challenges; feelings of uncertainty and insecurity had to be allowed so that the reliance on the institutional part of the monks' life could abate somewhat and be replaced by a growing sense of trust in my inner resources. Then by moving on to Thailand almost three years later the opportunity arose to connect with the roots of our tradition. I was curious to find out how I could apply myself within a totally unfamiliar environment, even though the familiarity of the monks' lifestyle provided a helpful buffer against the cultural and climate shock.

So I stayed for almost four years in Thailand and Burma, and took advantage of the greater external freedom I experienced there by exploring different modes of meditation practices within various monasteries and secluded forest retreats. My original vision when going to Asia had been of seeking out situations which are very hard to come by in non-Buddhist countries. I was delighted and at times a little overwhelmed by the sheer multitude of choices which were on offer. My perspective on the Holy Life was expanded considerably by meeting such a variety of teachers, ordinary monks, nuns and layfolks who, despite the visible external conformity, all seemed to have a very personal angle on the theme of Dhamma practice. And the outstanding characters amongst them, the ones who obviously had reaped rich fruit from their efforts, all embodied the attitude of basing their knowledge on their own experience.

Ajahn Sucitto (*addressing Ajahn Akiñcano*): You were much more involved in one particular Thai situation than Ajahn Khemasiri.

Ajahn Akiñcano: My going to Thailand was because I felt I had to leave the situation I had grown up in and do some more growing up elsewhere. It was partly to find my own feet, and partly to appraise and acknowledge what I had actually found back here in the UK and its monasteries. And I had two specific aims: to give time to structured study of Pali and the Suttas, and to experience a living Buddhist culture. It was time to widen my horizon, pull up roots in the West and find out more about monastic life in Asia. At first, after being given a great introduction to Thailand by Ajahn Sumedho, I did not associate with Ajahn Chah's monasteries at all. Instead I found my own privileged little niche with Tan Jow Khun Dhammapitaka where I had my studies and practice more or less sketched out. I lived for months on end, often quite alone, on a tiny little hill half way between Bangkok and the Cambodian border in his hermitage. Later, after about a year, I made my first longer visit to the forest monasteries up in the North-East and spent some time with the Western communities at Nanachat and Pu Jorm Kom. For much of my next four years in Thailand I went back and forth between a forest monk's life and my studies.

The sense of helplessness and unfamiliarity that came for me being in the Thai culture highlighted many of the habits and attitudes that I had developed as an adult in Western Europe. Simply being in Thailand was both bewildering and freeing. I felt strangely useless yet very light and almost grotesquely happy. Initially, I couldn't read even a street sign in Thai. But within two years things changed. I had some language, connections and my cultural bearings – and with that, my old personality came back. While I began to 'function' better I found myself suddenly less happy. That was very revealing; in a good few parts amusing but also laced with pain – either way it proved insightful. I could see very clearly how the *sankhāra* around speech, thought and interaction tend to recreate one's personality, and this personality in turn constellates the world it then inhabits. I had changed just about everything in my life, and the new world I found myself in began to resemble the one I had left behind.

On coming back to Europe I found the communities in England had changed. As far as Switzerland was concerned I did not know what to expect. That was three years ago. After a moment of taking stock I felt that my new situation in Switzerland was both nourishing and

challenging and that I could relate to the change of role my settling there meant. It makes all the difference to say 'yes' rather than just having stayed on and grown into something. I made a choice to go away and reassess what I had grown up with. This led to finding a wealth of teaching in Thailand, enriching and different from what I was familiar with. Then on coming back, there was a re-appraisal of what my origins were and at some point a clear 'yes' to this new situation – a Western context, a small community, my country of origin – and to the challenges that occur in it.

Ajahn Sucitto: What would you say the challenges have been, in living at Dhammapala?

Ajahn Akiñcano: It is interesting to be back in a culture that I grew up in. I left Switzerland for a period of 16 years; my whole monastic training happened here in England, so I had inculturated myself in England, then also in Thailand. In both places some areas of my conditioning remained untouched. For example, I always felt awkward in situations where I was addressing people whose background and cultural experience I didn't really know first hand, say speaking to Thai school kids when I've never been to a Thai school myself. Returning to one's native land reverses the situation. It was like falling back into an earlier layer of life and identity. One is confronted by one's early conditioning: there is the comfort of an immense familiarity with what's going on, but as well as a few pet delights there are also some of the old pet grievances.

Ajahn Khemasiri: For me, of course, it's similar, but I think of it in terms of three main areas where challenges occur. The first one concerns individual practice. When I was in Thailand and Burma I was most of the time in an individual practice mode where I wasn't in relationship with other people. This was consciously chosen and only occasionally, when in need of meaningful contact, would I visit the community of Western monks. But it never developed to the kind of level which you find in a close-knit community like Dhammapala. There was an acknowledged sense of freedom within that fairly loose way of relating, even though for me periods of 'checking in' with the monks from my own cultural background have always been an important resource.

I was very conscious when I came back to Europe, that I couldn't and didn't want to attempt to continue this predominantly solitary lifestyle; it had been my conscious choice to come back to the West, back to the places where I had strong cultural roots and personal connections. In the beginning I felt again somewhat uncertain about my decision to return, about how long this would hold and if it was the right decision at all. So it needed some time to find out, and fortunately that's one of the luxuries which a monk's life provides: plenty of time and space to digest whatever experiences needed to

be digested and to find a new footing in what used to be an almost too familiar environment.

The second challenge was in community life itself, in living so close together. But amongst the monks at Dhammapala I came across an excellent sense of community, and I found myself being very willing to be a committed member within it. Also, the lay guests who visit Dhammapala have a much closer relationship with the monastic Sangha, this is in part due to our physical proximity, but also because there is no training of junior monks to be done so more energy is available for the lay community. I experienced myself in a new way after coming back, also partly because some restructuring of the community had to happen during that first year as

the senior monk (Ajahn Tiradhammo) had gone on a one-year sabbatical. I was actively involved in creating that structure which was based on the principle of shared leadership. That of course

meant in practice a lot more interacting and negotiating than you would have in a structure where one person makes all the major decisions. With this we got to know each other very well as sharing the responsibilities is not limited to the managerial side alone but also includes the human side with all its misunderstandings, joys, sorrows, uplifts and crises.

Ajahn Sucitto: So you can see that there is benefit for you in exploring the way that one feels or senses other people's presence. Yet I would imagine that some people assume that ideally a monk would be isolated.

Ajahn Khemasiri: I see these two aspects as not completely separate. In my experience they can, if used skilfully, very much enrich each other. If one is only focused on community, relationships and being close to others, very often this can come from a place of neediness in oneself rather than from a genuine need for communication and communion with other practitioners. So it's a helpful contrast and inwardly strengthening experience to live quietly by oneself, being able to take whatever that brings up, be it loneliness, abandonment, despair whatever.... It was helpful for me to hold things for investigation for an extended period of time, to live with them, accept and understand them through deeper contemplation; rather than forever bypassing the real issues by moving on to the next situation, or getting entertained or comforted by some external source.

The third area of challenge is: 'How do I communicate that which I know through my own experience to others?' After coming back, I was unsure of myself because I hadn't done any formal teaching for four years. At Dhammapala I have found there's a lot of personal conversation and interaction, and a lot of the visitors are regulars who appreciate that. I didn't have a set of fixed teachings that I wanted to present, instead I felt that I should call on my own experience. I had to pass

It makes all the difference to say 'Yes'. . .

through a phase of uncertainty and gradually find out what aspects of my understanding would fit the lives of meditators in this part of the world. Community life is helpful for developing this understanding. Eventually I found myself a little surprised to see that I could relax a lot more with people, whereas before my stay in Asia I had always felt very far away from the people I spoke to, I'd be taken in by an exaggerated sense of self-consciousness. Nowadays I seem to be much more 'here.'

Ajahn Sucitto: What sense do you have of relating your Dhamma practice to people in your own culture?

Ajahn Akiñcano: I experience great similarities with what Khemasiri described. For me, one of the points that is also important, is that I have recognised that I am a European. After living with Thais in practice-monasteries and in my study place I realised that a whole range of topics never got addressed in my life there. Thais give you a lot of space, which can feel very comfortable. I guess they often think:

I have deep respect for both parts, the communal and the individual, and refuse to see them as contradictory ways of cultivation.

'Well, he's a foreign monk – they are a bit funny, that's normal'. So there are loose ends interpersonally you're not asked to account for. At times, I felt uneasy about this apparent tolerance because I realised that if you're living in community the way that we relate to each other has to become part of what's called 'practice.'

I find it downright immoral to be living in a community and at the same time exclude this fact from my notion of practice by pretending it's not there. Living together in a community, I feel we have to consider, 'Well, there is a relationship, we are sharing the monastery, duties, responsibilities, and offerings.' While living in and depending on a community you can't then pretend that it is only a side-effect: 'Basically, I'm alone here. If only these people stopped being a problem round here, my practice would be fine.' I think we have to be accountable on this one. The notion that our real practice is individualised doesn't hold true for me. To attempt to live an individual life and consider practice solely an individual affair while staying in a community is a painful clash of mythologies. It means either that I continually appear to fail in my individual practice – because there are all these people walking around in my life (at Dhammapala this means they walk up and down the corridor in front of my door). Or, if practice really is such an individual thing, then I am not actually practising since I tolerate a condition that completely counters cultivation of mind. Living in community and insisting to see practice as an exclusively individual task is not just painful, it is also wasteful. It refuses to make use of the interpersonal realm to gain insight into the workings of our own personality and thus our suffering.

As far as my own monastic life goes I have to acknowledge community life as the actual strength – irrespective of how good or bad it may have felt – of the monasteries. Community is a specific context; and there are other very legitimate contexts. But if one finds oneself continually in community, then community life has to become a practice.

Like most of us I envisage neither a totally communal life, nor one completely on my own. I envisage something of both – so that we can be hermits for one month, three months, half a year at a time. I would wish that monastic folk have the opportunity to experience both a committed individual mode of living and an equally committed communal one.

In these last years I think the communities in the West have gained an understanding of their strengths as

communities; irrespective of whatever individuals have gained from their individual enquiry. I have deep respect for both parts of that work, the communal and the individual one and refuse

to see them as contradictory ways of cultivation. Both aspects validate and enhance each other.

Ajahn Sucitto: I'm wondering about the structure in the monastery between the monks, how are you developing that sense of community in your particular context?

Ajahn Akiñcano: We are all *theras* at Dhammapala and we have agreed to share duties, teaching, and decision-making by negotiating amongst ourselves. It's what you could call a 'flat hierarchy.' It seems to work – though it implies a culture of discussion, trust and some willingness on all sides to take the task of creating consensus seriously. There were areas where negotiation was called for – there remain areas where negotiation is needed. It isn't always easy. Sometimes it isn't even satisfactory, but it seems far more satisfactory than any other model could be. I think for this model to work it takes the explicit wish from everyone to live in that way, and an acknowledgement that, though rewarding, it may neither be an easy way nor the way that we had grown up in. We have to look at values such as responsibility, commitment, power and authority close-up. I am optimistic. People are committed to this process and keen on pursuing it.

Ajahn Khemasiri: One of the specific things about the situation at Dhammapala is that we are a community of only senior monks. So it seems quite a natural consequence that we incorporate that fact into the structure of our lives. I feel we have to go through a process of more communal transparency – of informing our fellow monastics what our intentions and plans are and so forth, rather than holding on to an idea of total

autonomy within a group context. One important question is: Where is the place of power in a group of people who consider themselves equal? Instead of coming from an idealistic point of view – there should be ‘no power for anybody’ – we went through the process of investigating who is holding power and how it is used. This kind of open investigation can touch on delicate places within individuals. But carefully and respectfully reviewing power issues in communal life regularly can certainly lead to a greater trust amongst the individuals involved. In Dhammapala there has been one person holding the position of ‘Abbot’ ever since it started in 1988. He represents continuity, steadiness and reliability. These are important qualities to be taken into account if one talks about power in the sense of how much weight a person’s say has in a communal set-up. He has carried something all this time and he is still carrying something and even though the two of us have made very strong gestures of commitment, we’re not carrying aspects of Dhammapala in the same way. The two of us feel a stronger cultural connection with most of the people coming here – quite naturally as a Swiss and a German – and so we seem to be holding most of the contacts and activities in relation to the German-speaking world. Of course we want the senior monk to stay here, not because we want him to carry burdens and responsibilities for us, but rather in full recognition of our individual roles here, so that we can assist each other to carry things more consciously and more lightly.

Another special aspect of life at Dhammapala is that the people who are at times in a teaching position are at other times in a serving position. One month you’ll be giving talks and retreats and the next month you are actively supporting someone else in the teaching role. There is a flexibility in that which helps me to not get caught up in the identity of ‘The Teacher’ too much, or vice versa in the identity of ‘The one doing the donkey’s work’. This way of operating means that a lot of people perceive us as ‘Sangha.’ Very often we get letters addressed to ‘Dear Sangha’, rather than to anyone in particular. I like that. Not that I don’t wish to be acknowledged as a person, I appreciate that too, but to be reminded that one is part of a real flesh and blood Sangha refuge for people holds special value for me.

Ajahn Sucitto: So you’re able to disconnect the teaching function from the person?

Ajahn Khemasiri: Yes, I find this important because I have observed, both in myself and in people who have been in a teaching role almost non-stop for years, that one gets to take on a persona, an image of oneself, which is limited to that role, and from which one tends to relate to the world at all times. And of course the world relates back to you as someone within that particular identity, which even further deepens that belief. I find it important to maintain a certain flexibility, to not get stuck in a particular role image of myself; more going in and out of roles, like changing hats, and checking where one wants

FAMILY EVENTS 2002

Rainbow Weekend: 3rd – 6th May, 2002

Family Weekend: 21st – 23rd June, 2002

Summer Camp: 16th – 25th August, 2002

Young People’s Retreat: 13th – 15th December, 2002

For Young People’s Retreat *please contact* Ray Glover, 36 Ottersfield, Greet, Glos. GL54 5PN Tel: 01242 604129
All other enquiries please contact Emily Tomalin, 147 Whytelady Lane, Cookham, Maidenhead SL6 9LF
 Tel: 01628 810083 e-mail: emilytomalin@ukonline.co.uk

to linger and invest into unreal and unreliable identities. When a monastery reaches a certain size people seem to get more defined according to their roles, simply because otherwise there would have to be a lot more negotiation necessary about who’s doing what. It’s often felt to be just too time- and energy-consuming; whereas when there’s only four or five of you it’s easier to be more flowing and flexible with it all.

Ajahn Akiñcano: Our model of stewarding the monastery as a ‘flat hierarchy’ tends to challenge a model of decision-making and authority that has come from Thailand. But it must be said that our model is perfectly valid in terms of the early Buddhist teachings. It says in the Vinaya that communal concord and direct democracy are to be held in balance with respect for elders. Interestingly enough, there’s no term for ‘abbot’ in the early Pali texts. I think that as a group of monasteries associated with Ajahn Chah we have inherited particular features that have a lot more to do with Thailand than with the Buddha’s India. Some of those features may go back a long time in Thailand and have proven themselves to be useful. And for some things we may need to look past Thailand, further back to India to understand our tradition better.

I have had the privilege of living in an Asian monastic context. But I cannot pretend to be a village lad from North-East Thailand. My psyche works differently; I have a few more kinks. I come from an urban Western European background so some things are not in place with me that are in place with someone who grows up in a reasonably OK extended family. My conditioning is very different. I think as a community of Westerners we have to find out what that does to us. I’m interested in making monastic life grow in Europe rather than trying to import a Forest model, however well-adapted to another cultural context. I think one tends to believe in the model one is familiar with. Monks and monasteries are no exception in this. In Thailand much of the thinking is still basically that, if there isn’t a strong ‘top dog’ nothing works. Personally, that’s not how I’ve grown up. Switzerland has a society that does not work in terms of ‘strong top dogs’; it actually mistrusts them. It is interesting for me to see the advantages and disadvantages of these models and how they inform our understanding of monastic living. ❖



SANGHA NOTICES

Winter Retreat 2002

From early January until the end of March, the monastic communities will be in retreat. During this time overnight accommodation will not be available for guests. Visitors may still come during the day to meditate or to help with meal time offerings; if you would like to offer dāna, it is helpful, if possible, to let the kitchen manager know beforehand. At both Cittaviveka and Amaravati for most of the retreat time, visitors may come for evening pūjā at 7.30pm, and at least on Observance nights, a Dhamma talk will be given. The Saturday afternoon meditation workshops will continue at Amaravati; they will be led by an experienced lay meditator. Telephone messages will be processed daily throughout this time, but in general, responses to written requests will not be attended to until after mid March.

Wesak 2002

The official Vesākha Pūjā – the day of commemoration of the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbāna of the Buddha – falls on Sunday 26th May (the full moon Uposatha day). Celebrations of this event will take place at each of the monasteries. More accurate information about this event will be available nearer to the time.

AMARAVATI NOTICES

Amaravati Library

The Librarian has noticed a considerable number of long overdue or missing books. Unfortunately these are often the more popular titles. Please, if you have any overdue books could you return them to the Librarian at Amaravati. Your cooperation is much appreciated.

CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

Lay forums

The venue of these discussions is the monastery's Reception Room, the time 2:00pm
April 14th – May 12th – June 23rd

HARTRIDGE NOTICES

Two monastics will be in residence on retreat over the Winter Retreat period. Offerings of dāna are welcome. Contact

Paul Walker (01404) 891 25. The monastery is available for individual practice on Saturday afternoons with prior notice. Please contact the monastery.

GENERAL NOTICES

2002 Calendars

These are available on request, while stocks last. Please send SAE to Amaravati (40p UK mailing, 67p for Europe).

Amaravati Website

Has been launched and can be found at, <http://www.amaravati.org>

April 19-21. Meister Eckhart – Silence & Awakening. A contemplative weekend reflecting on the texts of Eckhart, using the Benedictine practice of Lectio Divina. Led by George Wilson (Buddhist, winner of the Eckhart Society Essay prize on Meister Eckhart) and Sr. Lucy, Turvey Abbey.

June 14-15 Meditation and Mindfulness.

A Buddhist/Christian monastic weekend, learning from each other's traditions. Led by Sr. Lucy and Sr. Ānandabodhi. *For more information contact;* Turvey Abbey, Turvey, Bedford MK43 8DE.

Tel: 01234 881 432

Sunyata Retreat Centre, Co. Clare, Ireland

Help required in family-run Theravadan Buddhist retreat centre.

Builder's helper (with basic DIY skills) from January 2002 for 1 month or longer - to assist in finishing dormitory under meditation hall.

Assistant Retreat manager – from April 2002 for 6 months or longer – to help with organising retreats, office work, cleaning and gardening.

Accommodation and small wage offered. *Please contact* Stanley or Clare de Freitas, Sunyata Retreat Centre, Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, Ireland.

Tel: 00-353-61-367073

email:info@sunyatacentre.com

RETREATS OUTSIDE THE UK

Santacittarama (Italy) 25 -28 April Ajahn Chandapalo will be teaching a retreat for lay people in BARI (in Italian). Contact Ugo Milella, u.mile@tiscalinet.it
Tel: (0039) 080 55 62 825

NEWS FROM THE TRUSTS

The English Sangha Trust

There is steady progress in the building of the Dhamma Hall at Cittaviveka. It is now watertight, and was regularly used by the community in the summer even though there is still much to do to complete the Hall, such as installation of heating and windows which are needed for its use during the winter months. As funds come forward, these outstanding works can be tackled.

At Amaravati, the Chao Khun Suite is now finished, and it was a great honour and pleasure to be able to accommodate Chao Khun Paññananda there in October. Meanwhile, the Bodhi Guest House has been redecorated and re-carpeted. And before the Winter Retreat, some refurbishments to Lotus House (which is part of the nuns' vihara) should be completed.

Before the Winter Retreat, another change will take place when Diana Jones hands over to Christina Janoszka as the Trust Secretary. Diana has given invaluable support to the monastery and the Trust. Her pleasant and careful approach to her work has been much appreciated over the last two and a half years. Christina is an old friend of the monastery and its office, bringing a wealth of administrative experience with her, so we are delighted to welcome her back in this new capacity.

The trustees for Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery in Harnham,

Northumberland, extend a warm welcome to anyone able to commit themselves for a minimum of two to three months as manager of the monastery's kitchen. The position would entail cooking 4-5 vegetarian meals per week for 5-9 people. At this stage it would be best if the person filling the post was male and over 24 years old, ideally possessing a valid UK driver's license (but not essential). Private accommodation and food would be provided.

If you are interested in finding out more, please telephone Jody Higgs on 0131 3327987 or
Email trustees@ratanagiri.org.uk

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. Back issues of the newsletter are available on the internet from: <http://www.fsnews.cjb.net> We are working on improving the site and hope to be able to post latest issues in the near future.

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 – (020) 8427-5097

Teaching and Practice Venues

MEDITATION GROUPS	
These are visited regularly by Sangha members.	
BATH Catherine Hewitt, (01225) 405-235	HAMPSTEAD Caroline Randall, (020) 8348-0537
EDINBURGH Muriel Nevin, (0131) 337-0901	LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY 58 Eccleston Square, SW1 (Victoria) (020) 7834 5858 Meditation Sundays: led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday classes – 6.00pm
GLASGOW James Scott, (0141) 637-9731	
LEEDS AREA Daniela Loeb, (0113) 2791-375	SOUTHAMPTON Ros Dean (02380) 422430
Anne Erimshaw, (01274) 691-447	
MEDITATION GROUPS	
These meet regularly & receive occasional visits from Sangha.	
BEDFORD David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892	MAIDSTONE Tony Millett, (01634) 375-728
BELFAST Paddy Boyle, (02890) 427-720	MIDDLESBOROUGH Colin Walker, (01642) 643-071
BERKSHIRE Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646	MIDHURST Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479
BRIGHTON Nimmala, (01273) 723-378	NEWCASTLE ON TYNE Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726
CAMBRIDGE Gillian Wills, (01954) 780-551	NORWICH Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717
CANTERBURY Charles Watters, (01227) 463342	PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES Peter and Barbara (Subhdra) Jackson, (01239) 820-790
DUBLIN Rupert Westrup, (01) 280-2832 (Dial: 00441 - from the UK)	PORTSMOUTH Dave Beal, (02392) 732-280
ESSEX (Billericay) Rob Howell, (01702) 482-134 or (Harlow) Pamutto, (01279) 724-330	REDRUTH Daniel Davide (01736) 753-175
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD Bodhinyāna Group Chris Ward (01442) 890-034	SHEFFIELD Greg Bradshaw (0114) 262-0265
LIVERPOOL Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427 6668	SOUTH DORSET Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati), (01305) 786-821
LONDON/NOTTING HILL Jeffery Craig, (020) 7221 9330	STEYNING / SUSSEX Jayanti (01903) 812-130
LEIGH-ON-SEA Gool Deboo, (01702) 553-211	STROUD John Groves, 0796 7777-742
MACHYNLLETH/MID. WALES Angela Llewellyn, 01650-511350	SURREY/WOKING Rocanā, (01483) 761-398
	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 U.K.

Amaravati Retreats



2002 Retreats at Amaravati

April	5 – 7	Weekend	Ajahn Jutindriyā
April	19 – 21	Weekend	
May	10 – 19	10 day	Ajahn Ariyasilo
June	7 – 9	Weekend	
June	14 – 18	5 day	Ajahn Kāruniko
June	28 – 30	Weekend	
July	26 – 4 Aug	10 day	Ajahn Candasiri
Sept.	13 – 17	5 day	
Sept.	27 – 29	Weekend	
Oct.	4 – 6	Weekend	
Oct.	25 – 29	5 day	
Nov.15th – Nov 24th	10 day		Ajahn Sucitto
Dec.	27 – Jan. 1	5 day	

In 2002 Luang Por Sumedho will be taking a sabbatical and so is not committing himself to teaching engagements for this forthcoming year.

Retreat Centre Work Weekends 2002

April 26-29, 2002 • Aug 30-Sept 1, 2002
Oct 11-13, 2002

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing any of the 5 or 10 day retreats.

Please note that bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form and booking deposit. The deposit 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.

INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION—AMARAVATI Saturday Afternoon Classes 1.30 – 3.30 pm

During the winter retreat, January - March, meditation instruction for beginners will be given by experienced lay teachers.

Classes are in the Bodhinyāna 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.*

◆ Aruna Ratanagiri
Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland
NE20 0HF
Tel: (01661) 88-1612
Fax: (01661) 88-1019
web site: www.ratanagiri.org.uk
e-mail: community@ratanagiri.org.uk
Stewards: *Magga Bhavaka Trust.*

◆ 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,
Upton, Honiton,
Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (01404) 89-1251
Fax: (01404) 89-0023
Stewards: *Devon Vihara Trust.*

THAILAND

◆ Wat Pah Nanachat
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubun 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
Località Brulla,
02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)
Tel: (+39) 0765 872 186
Fax: (+39) 06 233 238 629
Website: www.santacittarama.org
(in Italian)

Stewards:
Santacittarama No 20163/38.

SWITZERLAND

◆ Dhammapala
Buddhistisches Kloster
Am Waldrand,
CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 675-2100
Fax: 033 / 675-2241
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.)
Web site: www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: *Sanghapala Foundation.*

◆ Boston Area:
Buddhaparisa, Boston,
Mass. Tel: (781) 861-6837
Mailing for E. Coast USA
& Thailand: to be placed on
the mailing list, please write
directly to Amaravati.

NEW ZEALAND

◆ Bodhinyanarama
17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Wellington 6008
Tel: (+ + 64) 4 563-7193
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

Be mindful and let things take their
natural course. Then your mind will
become still, like a clear forest pool.
All kinds of rare animals will come to
drink at the pool. You will see many
wonderful and strange things come
and go but you will be still.

Luang Por Chah

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	● NEW	☽ HALF	○ FULL
JANUARY	6 th (Sun)	13 th (Sat)	21 st (Mon)	28 th (Mon)
FEBRUARY	5 th (Tues)	11 th (Mon)	19 th (Tues)	☉26 (Tues)
MARCH	6 th (Wed)	13 th (Wed)	21 st (Thurs)	28 th (Thurs)
APRIL	5 th (Fri)	11 th (Thurs)	19 th (Fri)	26 th (Fri)

☽ Māgha Pūjā

If undelivered, please return to: AMARAVATI MONASTERY
Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ, England

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