

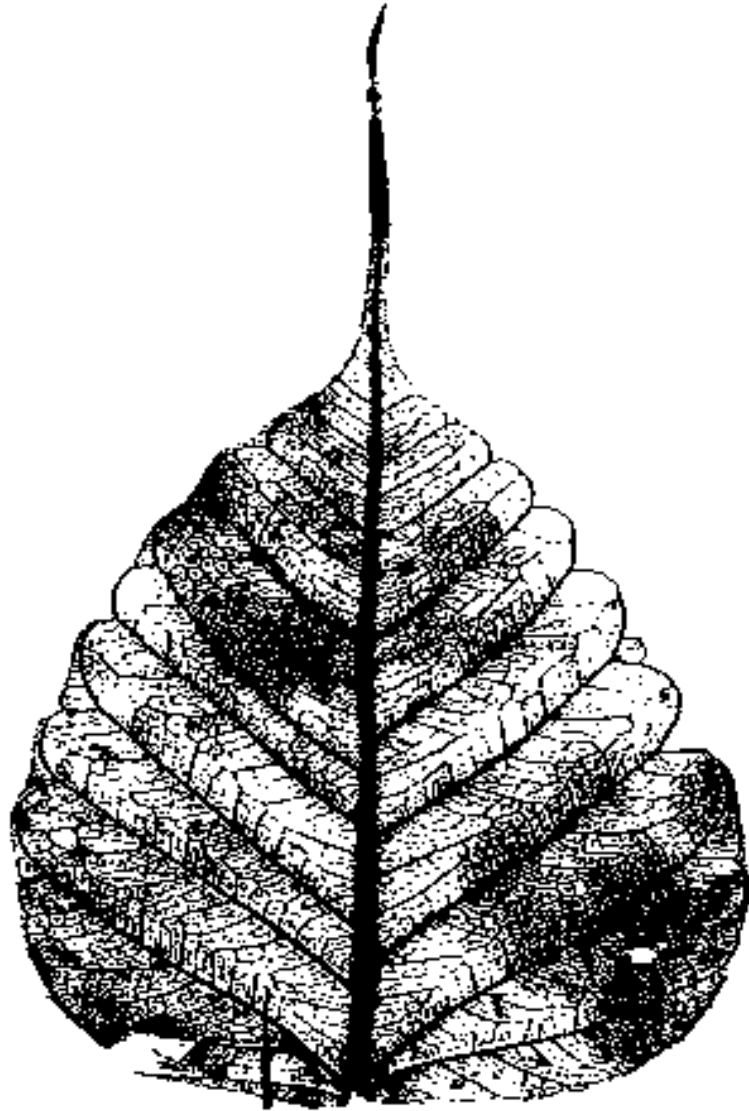


Community

Spring 2001 / 2544

The Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 12



In this issue.....

Green Buddhism

The Greening of Anicca

Zen Bones, Theravada Bones

Medicine—The Fourth Requisite

Weeds as Dhamma!

Sacred Spaces Pilgrimage

Hazards, Habits and Trips

Reviews & Readers Letters



EDITORIAL

Green Buddhism

This issue is mainly devoted to the theme of the natural world. Buddhism for me has always had a very easy relationship with the world of nature. The Buddha observed the suffering of animals and recognised that they had a similar reaction to pain and suffering as humankind. The Buddhist precept to avoid harming living beings does not simply mean to avoid harming other humans - it means that we have to be sensitive to the way we relate to all life. Buddhist cosmology places humanity within an intimate network of inter-related forces and realms.

This was an enlightened and profound realisation some 2,500 years ago and is one which still runs counter to the egocentric attitude which places 'me and mine' as of overwhelming importance and in contention with other beings and the natural world.

If we regard humanity as the only beings of value on planet earth and we see animals and plants as being entirely at our disposal then we notice how greed and hatred are unleashed.

There are many historical precedents which demonstrate how deluded attitudes that separate humanity from the rest of Nature lead to much harm.

Even refraining from hatred towards other groups of humans is difficult for many of us. The world still suffers from war, discrimination and the root causes of greed, hatred and delusion. The justifications given by 'civilised' western countries over the past several hundred years for often brutally exploiting and destroying other cultures make dismal study. And these tragic and destructive activities were usually aided and abetted by the religious authorities of the times.

Science has been one enterprise which has helped to

illustrate and convince us of our humble position on planet Earth. We have considerable evidence of the rise and fall of whole species. We are unravelling the complex interdependencies between plants and animals. Excursions outside of the Earth's atmosphere and protection has shown how difficult it is to maintain our health.

In space, without gravity, bones shrink and loose strength. Without an atmosphere we suffer from greater levels of radiation and have to build complicated recycling systems to remove carbon dioxide, methane and contaminants. Our bodies and their welfare are intimately connected with the complex ecosphere of the Earth. We have evolved together. We help ourselves by helping the Earth's biosphere.

However, even with a skilful attitude to the world and widespread 'ecological consciousness' we must still face the truth of anicca or impermanence. The Earth has had a tumultuous history. Ultimately, in several billion years time it will probably be baked and all life destroyed as our sun enters the final stages of its life as a red giant.

So why should we follow the Buddha's teaching?

Simply because it leads to peace and freedom from suffering here and now, regardless of the state of the world and future possibilities for change.

It is the best we can do.

This leaves the ultimate mystery of how and why the Earth's biosphere developed and its place within the universe as a deep, open, and awe-inspiring mystery.

Chris Ward

'The rate of deforestation in Thailand is higher than in any Asian country except Nepal and possibly Borneo. The official figures given by the Royal Forest Department indicate that in 1961 (when the current drive toward economic development seriously began), 53 per cent of the nation was covered in forest. By 1986, this figure dropped to between 25 and 29 per cent. Nongovernmental organization estimates place the current figure as low as 15 per cent. These figures represent a decrease from approximately 75 per cent forest cover in 1913.'

Cultivating the Cauliflower Heart

Weeds as Dhamma!

Recently, I have been looking at the dust that is in my eyes and learning from the land I work with. Digging, weeding and the soil teach me much. How different each plant is! I start to look at them individually, not just as weeds. Some have roots that are difficult to pull out and have spread their roots wide. Others are easier to remove. Sometimes it is impossible to get all the root out - for now - and some will always remain. Sometimes the root can be pulled out with a big struggle that nearly breaks my back.

Surprisingly some of the biggest weeds have shallow roots and are easy to deal with. In fact I realise that impressive weeds such as giant thistles are beautiful and I even leave a couple in the corner of my garden. Some of the smaller and more innocuous looking weeds have deep roots that are impossible to clear at first attempt.

Some weeds I know I have got out fully and they will not recur. But others will re-grow time and time again and will try to strangle the tender new plants or take all the nourishment away from my carefully sown seeds and so take over my garden. I realise other weeds have already sown seeds that I am not aware of, so I must always be vigilant.

Be aware of what is growing. Nurture the tender new plants and watch out for the weeds. Then every now and again, when the season is right, dig deeply. Then the soil will truly improve and out of the mud a lotus will grow.

Modgala Duguid

The Greening of Anicca

I have been busy devising a new “Basic Buddhism” course - with a difference. The main body of the course is not yet well defined. I seem to have got a bit stuck on the preliminary (but obligatory) part which would be the introduction, and which would facilitate the understanding of what is to follow.

In short, this preliminary Part One would be nothing else but “*Down to Earth Gardening*”. Not some grand form of landscaping nor the “garden makeover” sort of gardening so popular in the media. It would be a very basic “touching the earth” and “looking after plants” pursuit. After a short spell of active involvement in weeding, feeding, watering and observing the world of plants, one would be half way to becoming a Buddhist, perhaps even without knowing it. One of the Three Signs of Existence would have been experienced and accepted as a fact.

Anicca lurks in every corner of the garden. My big, beautiful Mountain Ash, which was going to outlive me, is on its way out, due to some mysterious illness. The flowers eagerly anticipated for the last eleven months, only manage to last for a few days. One, with the appropriate name of “Day Lilly”, lasts less than 24 hours.

Attachment does not seem to be something a dedicated gardener can be “attached” to. It would not make sense. In fact, the beauty of it all, in a way, is just this impermanence and the continuous change and the sense of uncertainty of never knowing which way things are going to go. Everything depends on something else. Sun, nurture, weather, soil, slugs, birds, badgers, surrounding plants, one’s children’s or grandchildren’s activities. We could even start introducing the concept of Dependent Origination at this point.

I could go on like this, but will wait until someone takes me seriously, when we could settle down and devise a proper “Introduction to Buddhism” course, based on horticulture. Meanwhile, I will continue planning.....

Radmila Herrmann

Sacred Spaces Pilgrimage

On the 1st September 2000, Ruth Gaston set off on a pilgrimage by bicycle from the North of Scotland down to Chithurst in Sussex. Ruth's marathon tour included sacred sites in Ireland as well as the length and breadth of the UK. Her purpose was both spiritual and practical. Sacred places often encourage the sacred spaces within us, and Ruth had also arranged sponsorship to be used to raise funds for the new Dhamma Hall at Chithurst. The following article describes some of Ruth's experiences and memories of her journey.

There was a knock on the door. Sister Jessica came into my room and sat down on a chair in between the two single beds which made up the bulk of my guest room. She looked at me with open, powerful eyes and asked "what do you hope to have achieved in this life when you die?" Being in a rather good mood I reeled off a clever answer. "Well it's not what I hope to achieve but what I hope to get rid of! If I get rid of all my selfish tendencies then all that will be left will be love, joy, compassion and equanimity". I followed this statement with a big smug beaming smile; an - I know it all - kind of smile. What Sister Jessica said next was so direct, I felt instantly sobered and awake. She saw through my answer, coming from my intellect and therefore being superficial and meaningless, she was after a response from the heart (from God, or the still point).

Her second question was...."Where do we come from and where do we go to?". Now I was silent.....my heart was responding. She continued, "well we come from God and we go to God.....so what's our purpose in life? It's to respond to



Ruth, Buddha Rupa and Bike

God's love", she continued. After a pause.

Her third question....."how can you love if you've never been loved?" I thought about it and it seemed to resonate; in my heart the words translated into 'how can you love others if you've never truly loved yourself'. At this moment, a deep, profundity filled my being. I realised that all my life I've never felt good enough. I saw this clearly and absolutely. I saw that all my mental criticising and judging of others and lifes situations, that tyrannical voice that is always picking faults with others

and complaining 'oh that's not very good, oh look at that monk-monks shouldn't behave like that, I don't like that' and on and on and on, was just a mirror of my own not feeling good enough. I also saw that if I really loved myself, love being 100% acceptance of yourself just as you are (Ajahn Sumedho's language- seeing the way things really are - it's like this) my view of the world would also truly be one of love and acceptance of others and situations just as they are.

Tears rolled slowly down my cheeks at the feeling of gratitude arising. The Poor Clares Abbess left asking me to pray that God would bestow such grace as he had done to Mary - the symbol for purity in the Catholic Church. Later on along the pilgrimage,

‘Where do we come from and where do we go to?’

staying with long seasoned Buddhist friends and recounting my experience at the Poor Clares, my friend looked astonished, puzzled even and said; "but Ruth that's the whole point, that's why we are all practising, it's the es-

sential dilemma in our lives". Slightly bruised and defensive I replied, "well I listened to lots of dhamma talks before but I guess I just never really got it". For whatever the reason it was just the right time and the right place for me to understand a little more deeply.

This little mini awakening was perhaps the most penetrating, but all along past lochs, glens, hills, forests, mountains, beaches, inner cities and quiet village lanes there were many little moments of insight and reflection. The weather was challenging and I abandoned the stove at the beginning of November as the rain and hurricanes really were getting too much for my stoic spirit. Space is short and there were many beautiful scenes along the journey so I'll just leave you with a few vignettes to add some colour and depth.

Drenched to the bone, puffing up the hill towards the Wicklow Mts and Glendalough- an abandoned sixth century Christian monastery, just done an eight mile strip on Irish motor way out of Dublin- lorries splattering me with dirty water. Feeling hot and in a fuzzy state. Suddenly decide to stop. Awakening - breathed - felt the beat of blood in my brain - looked around - beautiful green and bracken brown hills, mountains in the background, soft mist, opened my mouth and drank from the sky. Aware and suddenly touched by the sheer beauty of being here, now.

In a raging storm on top of a pass in the Peak District. Cannot cy-



cle, too windy, hail and wind push me to a barrier. Somehow after sheltering behind a wall for fifteen minutes push on down into valley. Roll up to 'chipped mug, fried egg sandwich snack stall' in national park. "A big hot mug of tea please", I speak through numbed and frozen mouth and then burst out crying and shaking, hot and cold and dizzy and pain in my hands. Local lady sits me in her car- comforting words, two mugs of tea and an egg butty later, pain gone from my hands and feeling okay. People are good.

'I speak through numbed and frozen mouth and then burst out crying'

Camping by the side of Loch Oich in a deep and thick forest zone, sound of running stream, pebbly beach. Have a wash and bathe in the loch. Beautiful sky at dusk, almost cloud free, fells reflected in silvery surface of the still water. Dry crack-

ling fire, couscous and vegetables in the pot - contentment is present - feel clean, safe, warm and happy. Snug as a bug in my bag, gentle grass mattress under the tent - the sound of rain is absent tonight.

Climbing the tower of Durham cathedral - Bobby, my seventy six year old friend in front of me.....step after step after step - we move very slowly, Bobby is out of breath - he is teaching me to slow down, I feel so grateful to have a friend today, each stair is precious to me. At the top we both breathe in the air deeply and smile. The roofs of the cathedral are majestic, the bending curve of the river hugging the city. I feel near to God.

The pilgrimage took three and a half months (Aug 31st-Dec 15th 2000) and I cycled a total distance of 1,544miles. Total funds raised to date are one thousand, nine hundred and seventy-seven pounds fifty six pence.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, everyone for your wonderful support through well wishing and sponsorship for the Dhamma Hall, sharing your homes and providing meals and hot showers for me along the journey.

May the Dhamma Hall at Chithurst inspire many to go beyond the mundane and find that still resting place that is the unconditioned, eternal abiding sacred space.

Ruth Gaston

Zen Flesh, Theravada Bones

The natural cycle of life and death

People were starting to drift away in the afternoon sunshine, after the communal meal, the Harnham Kathina ceremony and a lovely dhamma talk from Ajahn Sumedho. We had a change to catch up with old sangha friends visiting from other monasteries. Calendars were distributed, greetings exchanged and we drove home to Hexham.

In the evening, chatting with our lay buddhist friends, there was a phone call to say that Jim Birch had been killed in a car accident. Jim had been a regular member of the Hexham Group in the last four years and was a dear spiritual friend. He said he came along to sort himself out, but without realising it, he gave us a great deal more than we gave him. His caring directness, his quiet humour, and his fund of Zen stories illuminated so many of our meetings.

Jim's wife Maggie invited his friends to their home on the next Wednesday evening, just to sit together for an hour or so and share our memories of this remarkable man. Each had a different tale to tell. His grown-up children heard for the first time how well he was respected by his colleagues in psychiatry and his elderly parents learned how thirty strangers felt about their only son.

Maggie took my arm as I was leaving. She thought Jim

would want a Buddhist funeral and could I offer some advice. So I consulted with Ajahn Munindo, discussed with Maggie and the children what kind of service they would like and liaised with the caretaker. Suddenly I am arranging a Buddhist funeral and I have no idea how to do this - and I can't let the family down - and what about *my* feelings?

Many people crammed into the chapel at the cemetery and many were left in the doorway or outside. Ajahn Munindo and Tan Revato were joined by Ajahn Sundara - it was lovely to have one of the senior nuns there as well. With the Buddha from our shrine room on the altar, linked with white string to the monastics and to Jim in his cardboard coffin, the Pali chanting began.

The speakers remembered Jim as a father, a friend, a colleague and a brother-in-law. In between there were readings - the Buddha's words on loyal friends from the Sigalaka Sutta and a couple of the Zen stories which Jim loved. Most of our study group members were there so we ended by chanting the Buddha's words on Loving Kindness.

Emerging from the chapel there were clear skies as Jim was lowered into a woodland grave. A birch tree was later planted over him - a living pun he would have enjoyed.

When Jim first came to the group, he started by not bowing or chanting - we always invite

newcomers to join in or observe, whichever feels most comfortable. Several months later we heard a new deep voice joining in and another forehead touched the floor to acknowledge the wisdom, truth and friendship of the Triple Gem.

Jim had started to attend Harnham just a few weeks before his death. He had come to enjoy the chanting and the bowing. He and Maggie had recently been to visit several old friends around the country. Two days before Kathina I met him by chance at Hexham station - where neither of us would expect to see each other - and we shared a coffee and brief, daft conversation while waiting for our connections.

Jim kept telling us that he couldn't concentrate in meditation. He used a Zen meditation stool, but he couldn't always get comfortable. Perhaps this is still his Koan as well as ours - how do you concentrate on not concentrating? A few months ago he borrowed one of the group's meditation cushions, the special ones sewn in Bodh Gaya by the wonderfully named Great Style Tailors. I haven't had the heart to ask for it back.

One of the Zen stories Jim never mentioned is that of a young physician in Tokyo named Kushuda (I like to think he became a psychiatrist later on) who met a college friend

who had been studying Zen. The doctor asked him what Zen was.

"I cannot tell you what Zen is," the friend replied. "But one thing is certain. If you understand Zen, you will not be afraid to die."

Kushada asked where he could find a teacher, and his friend directed him to the master Nan-in who told him: "Zen is not a difficult task. If you are a physician, treat your patients with kindness. That is Zen." Each time he visited Nan-in, the master said the same thing. "A physician should not waste time around here. Go home and take care of your patients."

But Kushada did not see how this teaching could remove the fear of death. So on his fourth visit he complained: "My friend told me when one learns Zen one loses the fear of death. Each time I come here all you tell me is to take care of my patients. I know that much. If that is your so-called Zen, I am not going to visit you any more."

Nan smiled and gave the physician a famous koan to work on. Kushada struggled with this riddle for years, pondering the problem from every angle. At the same time he continued to look after his patients skilfully. His mind became placid. Problems dissolved. He served his patients well and without even knowing it, he was free from concern over life or death.

Robert Bluck

With acknowledgement to Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones.*)

Habits, Hazards & Trips

Some time ago, it gave me great pleasure to walk before dawn with the dog in Hammer Wood. We both seemed to enjoy the fragile, sweet scent of wild honey-suckle, the soft, silent tread of dew-damp loam beneath the feet and the calls of waking owls in the branches overhead.

On just such an occasion, absorbed in my reflections, I tripped over and nearly fell into the lake. At the time I thought little of the incident, considering it to be a likely hazard under those conditions. However I tripped again on another day and it was only after some three or four of these stumbles that I came to associate the 'accidents' with a particular location. It took but a brief search to reveal a small but immovable tree-stump in the middle of the path, hidden under a carpet of fallen leaves.

All this reminded me just how frequently we trip up in daily life, by failing to recognise the hidden dangers in otherwise familiar situations. How often do we 'trip-up' in the darkness of ignorance, our vision obscured by the fallen leaves of impetuosity, bias and undiscerning habit?

It is all too easy to take appearances at face value (that path looked innocuous enough to me!). We make important decisions merely from a superficial, fleeting glance and draw conclusions based upon faulty data accumulated over many years.

Do we not see beauty in that which, given appropriate reflection, is plainly unpleasant? Are we not strongly convinced of a resident 'self' where no such lasting, unchanging moiety can possibly exist? It is these distorted

perceptions and long held unshakeable opinions which, in the guise of 'I', 'me' and 'mine', lurk beneath the surface of our consciousness, ready, at the drop of a hat, to plunge us time and time again into the lake of delusion and suffering.

In our daily interactions we can all too readily trip-up in body, speech and mind. However, with sufficient awareness as to who or what is 'pressing our button', we can adjust our response to a more appropriate form rather than hastily committing ourselves to some unskilful reaction. Indeed, without a sharp, critical awareness we repeatedly respond to many familiar situations in an inept, unskilful way, failing to recognise that our behaviour has been determined not by careful consideration and appraisal, but by the dictates of habit, social conditioning, and misunderstanding. Living on false assumptions and vain hopes, like the proverbial ostrich burying its head in the sand, we reckon the going will continue to be smooth and that tomorrow will continue to hold promise of unremitting joy and personal fulfilment. Without question, we shall still be around for another 30-40 years - in full health and mobility!

It is only when we stop to investigate the nature of our disease - to examine why we tripped-up and what combination of conditions might be responsible for our suffering, that we can brush aside the obscuring leaves of false security and penetrate to the hidden root of our unrest.

Barry Durrant

Medicine—The Fourth Requisite

The four requisites identified by the Buddha are food, shelter, clothing and medicine. These are quite a nice summary of the basic needs of our bodies. The fact that medicine is included shows that Buddhism recognises the value of our physical well-being. The natural world is a vast source of medicinal plants and materials and there is a growing interest at all levels in the properties and use of many traditional herbal remedies. Two popular remedies are Echinacea and St Johns Wort.

by Chris Ward

Echinacea

Echinacea Purpurea and Augustifolia originated in North America where the native Indians used them for the relief of snakebites and infections.



PURPLE CONEFLOWER
Echinacea purpurea (L.) Moench
ASTER FAMILY

Although snakebites are not an especially common problem in the British isles, Echinacea plants have been shown in trials to have general immune stimulant effects.

Many people (including myself) use Echinacea preparations at the first sign of a cold, influenza, or other infection. If taken at an early stage, preferably before the infection has taken hold, I find that symptoms are much re-

duced and recovery is quicker.

Although there is a some controversy over the most effective regimes for Echinacea, I find that taking it for up to 2 or 3 weeks and then having a break of several weeks (or until needed) is the best treatment. The consensus amongst herbalists is that it is probably not good to take Echinacea continuously.

Echinacea Purpurea is also an easy to grow and ornamental perennial which attracts beneficial insects to the garden

St Johns Wort

Over the past few years St Johns Wort (*Hypericum Perforatum*) has become a very popular remedy for a range of maladies including mild to moderate depression. Various studies have shown it to be as effective as prescribed medications such as Prozac, yet with fewer side-effects. St Johns Wort is also useful for emotional problems associated with premenstrual syndrome and the menopause.

St Johns Wort has sedative and anti-inflammatory properties as well as being an antiseptic when applied externally to wounds.

Prolonged or high-dosage use of St Johns Wort can increase photosensitivity of the skin and can also lower the effectiveness of some prescribed drugs. Check with your health – practitioner if you want to use St Johns Wort at the same time as other treatments.

Like many herbal remedies, the precise way St Johns Wort works is the subject of debate and study. It seems to work in a different way to current synthetic substances, neither being an MAO inhibitor nor working like Prozac.

(Should Buddhist's use anti-depressants or substances which improve or alter mood? I would be interested to hear any experiences on this. Ed)



COMMON ST. JOHN'S WORT
Hypericum perforatum L.
ST. JOHN'S WORT FAMILY

Story Page

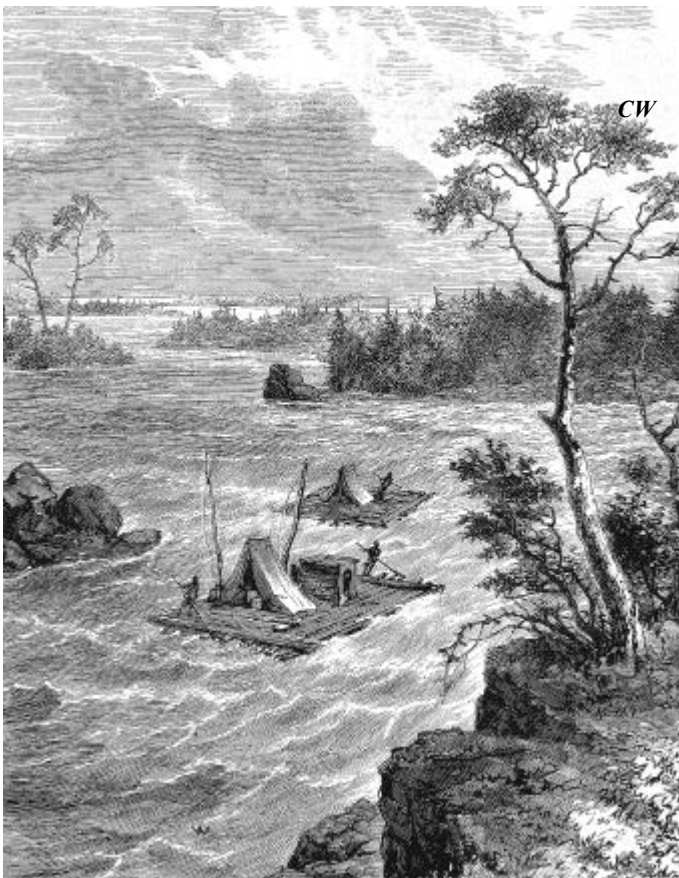
There is a story that senior Zen practitioners sometimes tell novices. It is about a monk in search of a teacher. Like many such tales it seems inscrutable at first, and finally inspiring. It has relevance because it suggests a manner of living which emphasizes Zen ecology.

'It was the custom in ancient China for Zen monks to refine and deepen their spiritual understanding by travelling throughout the country to study with respected teachers. One such monk had heard that a renowned Zen master lived in seclusion near a river, and he was determined to find him and train with him. After many weeks of travel he found the master's dwelling. Gazing at the river

before the master's hut, the monk was filled with joy at the thought of soon meeting his teacher.

The master was preparing a meal next to his hut. Just then a cabbage leaf slipped from his hands into the water and floated downstream. Disillusioned, the monk turned to leave.

As he did so, out of the corner of his eye he saw the venerable teacher running from his hut down to the river, his robe flapping wildly in the wind. The old man chased the cabbage leaf, fished it from the water, and brought it back to his hut. The monk smiled and turned back. He had found his teacher'.



The new public transport system in Hertfordshire

Is Global Warming Responsible for Floods in Britain?

Meteorologists refuse to agree on whether the recent long period of extremely wet weather in the UK is a direct effect of global warming. Some regard this as just part of the normal variability of weather experienced by the British Isles. A spokesperson commented that "People have always complained about British weather. The difference is that now they blame it on global warming".

However, there is a growing consensus amongst a broad spread of scientists that the climate is changing. A UN scientist stated recently that "There is growing evidence that human activities are noticeably affecting the atmosphere. The levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have been steadily climbing for the whole of the last century.

Global industrialisation and the destruction of natural habitat and rainforest will continue this trend. Temperature measurements in the atmosphere suggest that the earth is heating up. We already see signs that the ice caps at both the North and South poles are melting. Without a determined and long-term commitment to reduce pollution and to establish more balanced ways of living the climate may become increasingly unstable".

LETTERS



Zambia Update

Dear Friends

I have urgent news from the Tithandizane project in Zambia. Amrita has emailed me to say that due to the state of the Zambian economy, the bank the project has been using has collapsed. This means they have lost most of their money which was held there to finish the building as well as their money for food and running the vehicle.

After 3 years of working there, Amrita was hoping to get a much needed break back in the UK, but is now talking of postponing her return as the money for the

air fare was also lost. Despite all this and all the local difficulties, her spirit is not daunted and she is convinced the project will survive. If anyone can help, even in a small way, it would be very much appreciated as we want to make sure that Amrita and the others can feed themselves and run the truck so they can keep the work going.

Since money exchanges can be expensive it makes sense if people in the UK send donations to 'The Amida Trust' so we can forward them in one lot - address, 53 Grosvenor Place, Jesmond, Newcastle NE2 2RD.

Her work there now is as much with orphans as well as those dying of AIDS and has begun teaching training courses for Primary Health Care. Recent reports from Zambian authorities indicate that life expectancy is now down to 38, with the majority of the women dying in their late twenties.

We hope you can help, and will keep you updated .
Thank you, *Modgala*



CHEMISKO VALERIAN
FARMER'S WEEDS &
VALERIAN FAMILY

Lay Week-end Retreat at Amaravati on the subject of **The Countryside**

from Friday 29th June until
Sunday 1st July

Make a note in your diaries!

All are welcome to join us to
reflect upon our relationship
with the natural world.

Are we independent of the world; an integral part of the
world, or are **we** the world?

For booking forms and programmes please send SAE to -
AUA, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery,
Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ

*For specific enquiries, contact Nick Carroll on
0181 740 9748 or Chris Ward on 01442 890034*

Reflections On Retreat

*To question and watch at dusk.
The sun has moved across.
Snow has fallen,
Long shadows full of blue
Silver grey, lilac, amber.
Bottle green and viridian speckled
Footprints ploughed and trodden.
To liken walking meditation
To an in-breath
And an out-breath.
To be aware at the turning points.
Pause, just for a moment.
The potential for change,
A new beginning.
The sky now tinged with deepest
Ungraspable velvet blue.
A crescent moon hangs
With Venus sparking by his side.*

Anna Badar 30/12/00

**The Connected Discourses of the Buddha -
A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya**
by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Published by Wisdom Autumn 2000
(2 Volumes)

This large two-volume set provides a complete translation of the Samyutta Nikaya - The Connected Discourses of the Buddha. The Samyutta Nikaya is the third of the four great collections in the Sutta Nipata of the Pali Canon.

Once again Bhikkhu Bodhi has produced a new translation in readable English which avoids much of the sometimes archaic or convoluted text of earlier translations. His previous edition of the Majjhima Nikaya - Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha has proved a valuable resource for many Buddhists (including myself).

This edition of the Samyutta Nikaya includes introductions to each of the 'books' making up the whole collection.

These introductions together with extensive notes are very helpful in identifying the context, contents and 'problems' associated with each 'book'.

Clearly a major Nikaya from the Pali Canon is not something which can or should be read superficially or quickly. These translations will repay a life-time of reflection and are to be considered and returned to many times.

I am always struck by the range of issues covered by the Buddha and recorded in the Pali Canon. This and the timeless nature of the problems facing humanity become evident even after just starting to become familiar with these ancient teachings.

These are teachings to reflect upon, to investigate, to disagree with, and above all to use as skilful supports for awareness, intuition and mindfulness in daily life.

Chris Ward

Buddhist Meditation:

The Foundations

We would like to reprint Ajahn Sucitto's book - 'Buddhist Meditation: The Foundations'. This is a very helpful book which covers the basics of meditation practice in a very practical way

CAN YOU HELP?

If so please send donations to:

AUA Publications Appeal,
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great
Gaddesden, Hertfordshire. HP1 3BZ

Cheques made payable to: Amaravati Upasika Association -
indicating the cheque is to sponsor 'Buddhist Meditation: The
Foundations'



Amaravati Retreat Centre Manager - An Appeal -

Some of you may know that Jenna Ghouse is relinquishing her role as Retreat Centre Manager during early 2001. Jenna has been managing the Centre for several years. During this time many hundreds of retreatants have been privileged to experience the special Amaravati atmosphere and to learn from and practice with many accomplished teachers. It is the busy role of the Retreat Centre Manager which makes all this possible.

We are all very grateful for the care and effort that Jenna has made over the past several years and wish her well with her move.

To provide some practical assistance to Jenna as she moves to her new existence we invite contributions. Please send any donations to :

*Retreat Centre Manager Appeal, Amaravati
Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hertfordshire.
HP1 3BZ*

Cheques should be made payable to: Amaravati Upasika
Association

AUA NEWS

'Extra' Day of Practice

We were fortunate to be able to organise a Day of Practice on Saturday 24th February. This was not part of the previously publicised events for 2001. In previous years the Winter Retreat at Amaravati from January through



Participants enjoying the Day of Practice on 24th February

March has effectively meant that no substantial lay meetings have taken place. However, this year and with the Monastic Communities support we have been able to 'fill the gap' between December and April.

In spite of dire winter weather warnings, the day proved to be well-attended and much appreciated by all. We combined formal sitting and walking periods, together with teaching and discussion groups. Participants bought food which was made available in the Retreat Centre kitchen together with tea. Hopefully, we will be able to plan and run similar events in future winters.

Accounts for year ended 30th June 2000 – in brief

Last year our income was £3,084. We spent £1,738 on our weekend retreats and £1,001 on printing and posting 'Community'. This gave us a surplus of £345.

At the end of the year our bank balance stood at £492.

Thank you to our many supporters for your generosity.

Full accounts are available from the Treasurer: Martin Evans, e-mail: evanses@lineone.net



Lay Weekend Retreat

At Amaravati Monastery

From Friday April 20th to 22nd 2001 on the subject of

'Dana - Sila - Bhavana'

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

For booking forms and programmes please send SAE to -
AUA, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery,
Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ

For enquiries please contact- Nick (0208 740 9746) or Chris (01442 890034)



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

Connections

News from the branch Viharas and Monasteries of the Forest Sangha tradition in the UK

HARTRIDGE

Devon is now in a new phase of its existence. Hartridge Monastery has become a retreat centre for the monastic Sangha and with no resident community, there are no facilities for lay people to stay. A sad situation for many.

Some of the local lay people meet at Hartridge on Sunday evenings for Puja, and others have begun to spend a time of meditation there on Sunday afternoons. So far there has been a monastic Sangha visit about once a month, usually the last weekend of the month, when support is offered to the lay Sangha. In early January some 25 or so gathered for a Renewal and Precepts Ceremony. There is talk of a Wesak celebration but it is not yet clear whether, in view of the widely scattered nature of the lay community, there is sufficient active support to make this possible.

Throughout the winter months a resident caretaker has looked after the monastery. It has also fallen to him to support the first monks who have come for a personal retreat. He has done a wonderful job and we are grateful for that. It is hoped that a Retreat Manager will be appointed shortly, with a remit to liaise with both the monastic and lay Sangha.

We wait to see how things will develop and what the extent of support by and for lay people will be. It is, however, clear that many in the Southwest who are seeking general information about Buddhism, or guidance with meditation, will probably need to look elsewhere for sustained help, as few, if any, of us feel competent to offer support beyond pointing out books which might be of use.

It will be interesting to see what happens and whether the changes at Hartridge work for both the monastic Sangha and lay community. Watch this space.....

*For details of all events at the monastery
Contact : Mudita, 01395 568742*

CHITHURST

The well-established and much appreciated ceremony of Renewal and resolution ushered in once again the beginning of yet another round of seasons, that familiar succession of cyclical conditions which constitutes the essence of our sensory realm.

This ceremony begins with an introductory hour or rehearsal before the ceremony proper, in which newcomers can be introduced to the format of the meeting.

Ajahn Sucitto and several members of the Sangha arrive at 3.00pm and when all the participants have assembled, they each in turn carry a tray of incense, flowers and candles and bow three times before presenting them to the Ajahn, saying,

"My name is Joan/Henry, and I would like to take the Three Refuges and Five Precepts."

Having presented the tray to the Ajahn, they again bow three times before returning to their place. The whole assembly then collectively requests the Refuges and Precepts in the usual formal manner and Ajahn Sucitto offers a few reflections for us to ponder.

The ceremony is concluded by the monks and nuns chanting a blessing. Thread is tied around the wrists of all who so wish and water is sprinkled over the assembled company.

The afternoon is completed by everyone enjoying an informal chat over a cup of tea.

For more details contact : Barry Durrant 01730 821479

HARNHAM

The car park is surrounded by mounds of earth and rock. The contractors have started to transform the derelict cottage called Number Five into a Retreat House, with dormitory accommodation for up to twenty, kitchen and dining facilities to allow monastics and lay people to eat together, and a small self-contained flat for visitors. When completed it will provide much improved facilities for retreats and other lay activities.

Of course hindrances must be removed before progress can be made; and the Number Five hindrances include the accumulated storage of many years, the internal walls, much of the back external wall - and the roof. Only a stone shell remains in the February snow. But the walls are being underpinned and strengthened, new walls for the flat are being built, and by July or August a new roof should hopefully be in place, completing Phase One. This is dependent on both the weather and the finance, as there is a need for further donations if the work is to proceed.

Volunteers have worked hard to prepare the site, and will move in again to work on the interior of the existing building, as well as the future extension which will complete the structure. With Farmer Wake's birthplace open to the snow and the sun, and the car park surrounded by mud and rock, we need to remind ourselves of Ajahn Munindo's vision that 'a reflection of the Triple Gem can live in each of us, and in the stone and wood of a Harnham Retreat House'.

Robert Bluck

For information on Harnham events contact:

Marion Keay 01388 817974

Mike Downham 01697 748214

Monastery Walks

Fairly gentle walks starting from Amaravati at 10.00am and returning about 4.00pm

all are most welcome - just turn up!

Walks are planned on Sundays -
1st April, 20th May, 24th June.

Make a note in your diaries.

We meet at Amaravati car park at 10.00.
Please bring a packed lunch.

For further information contact :

*Tony on 01582 512669 or
tony.spinks1@ntlworld.com*

How I Came to Buddhism

It is said that one 'chooses' a path, a spiritual journey. When my life moved from a day-to-day existence of painful confusion to one of painful truth, I realised that I was a Buddhist. Once there, there is no other choice.

As I woke one morning at 4:00am, I felt restless. I walked into each room of my home and asked myself one simple question - "Is there anything here which I need?" Interestingly, amongst the paintings, antiques, expensive furniture, thousands of perfectly pressed and organised articles of clothing and neatly lined rows of shoes, there was but one item - a letter I had received from my daughter two years earlier.

In the course of the next five days, everything was either sold or donated to charity. I now 'owned' one box of personal photos and correspondence and a reasonable amount of clothing; perhaps the amount an average person would own. As I stood within the stark white walls and white marble floor of my home, I realised that I felt as empty on the inside as my eyes reflected around me.

This remarkable moment was in conjunction with a divorce, a separation from my two adopted daughters, a letting go of my home, business, affluent lifestyle - all the identities that I had carefully created and desired for a life-

time. I was beginning the deconstruction of my ego. I had become a Buddhist and I consciously had no idea what that meant. But - somehow - I knew.

I purchased an open plane ticket to London, had a very small black bag, and left my life - searching for answers. Arriving at Heathrow (delayed several hours by a rather intense interrogation by immigration and a lost bag), there stood a kind, gentle man whom I had never met. A recent friend had connected us by email and he had extended an offer of a nights lodging, plus assistance with my rather undefined travel plans.

What he was expecting was a typical exuberant, wealthy, American divorcee travelling though England for a year. What he encountered that fateful morning was an emotionally confused, mentally deluded, exhausted woman.

This gentleman brought me to his home and in the conducive, ambient atmosphere I listened to his words. He himself had spent several years searching and then studying the original teachings of the Buddha - the Nikayas. He calmly and gently explained the teachings - something I had been waiting a lifetime to hear.

Katherine Spencer

NOTICES

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE:

31st May

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

RING: Chris Ward 01442 890034

E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com

One Day Vipassana Retreats

With teachers from Gaia House

LONDON

April 22: Stephen Batchelor

Practice of Being

May 20: Christina Feldman

Acceptance

June 10: Christopher Titmuss

The Seeing that is Freeing

Details: Clare Brunt: 020 8755 0353

OXFORD

April 28: Martine Batchelor

June 2: Christopher Titmuss

Cost: £10 (£5 concessions) payable to Oxford Meditation Retreats, c/o Anne-Lise Clift, 43 Millway Close, Upper Wolvercote, Oxford, OX2 6DL.

Tel : 01865 316546

BRIGHTON

May 19: Christina Feldman

June 9: Christopher Titmuss

Cost: £10 plus dana send sae to Joty Barker, Brighton Interbeing Sangha, 55 Lowther Road, Brighton, BN1 6LF Tel: 01273 887695

Donations and Mailing list

If you do not wish to remain on the AUA mailing list please let us know. This enables us to reduce the size of mailings and to save money.

If you wish to continue on the mailing list then you need do nothing. However, any contributions you can make to cover the production of the newsletter and the three or four mailings each year would be greatly appreciated. Donations are essential to keep the presses rolling.

Please send donations to

AUA , Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ, England

Meditation & Study Groups

Bath	Catherine Hewitt	01225 405235
Bedford	David Stubbs	01234 720892
Berkshire	Penny Henrion	01189 662646
Belfast	Paddy Boyle	02890 427720
Billericay	Rob Howell	01702 482134
Brighton	Nimmala	01273 723378
Bristol	Lynn Goswell (Nirodha)	0117 968 4089
Cambridge	Gillian Wills Don Jones	01954 780551 01223 246257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	01227 463342
Dublin	Eugene Kelly Rupert Westrup	Eire 285 4076 Eire 280 2832
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen Walters (Sati Sati)	01305 786821
Edinburgh	Muriel Nevin	0131 337 0901
Glasgow	James Scott	0141 637 9731
Harlow	Palmutto	01279 724330
Hemel Hempstead	Chris Ward (Bodhinyana Group)	01442 890034
Hexham	Robert Bluck	01434 602759
Leeds	Daniella Loeb Anna Voist	0113 279 1375 01274 691447
Leigh-On-Sea	Gool Deboo	01702 553211
Liverpool	Ursula Haeckel	0151 427 6668
London Buddhist Society	58 Ecclestone Sq, SW1	0207 834 5858
Hampstead	Caroline Randall	0208 348 0527
Notting Hill	Jeffrey Craig	0207 221 9330
Maidstone	Tony Millett	01634 375728
Midhurst	Barry Durrant	01730 821479
Newcastle	Andy Hunt	0191 478 2726
Norwich	Elaine Tattersall	01603 260717
Pembrokeshire / S.Wales	Peter & Barbara (Subhudra) Jackson	01239 820790
Portsmouth	David Beal	02392 732280
Redruth	Daniel Davide	01736 753175
Southampton	Ros Dean	02380 422430
Steining / Sussex	Jayanti	01903 812130
Stroud	John Groves	0796 777742
Taunton	Martin Sinclair	01823 321059
Watford	Ruth	01923 462902
Woking	Rocana	01483 761398

AMARAVATI LAY EVENTS - 2001

One day or weekend retreats provide an opportunity to spend time together exploring themes relevant to practice and daily life. Whether you are just starting or are an experienced practitioner, you are very welcome to participate. No booking is required for one day events.

April 20th-22nd 'Dana Sila Bhavana'

June 2nd 'The Five Spiritual Faculties'

June 29th - July 1st 'The Countryside'

July 28th 'The Four Noble Truths'

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

October 7th 'The Noble Eightfold Path'

December 1st 'A Day of Practice'

Weekend Events (please send SAE to 'Lay Retreats' at Amaravati for booking form)

For further information please contact either:

Nick Carroll 0181 7409748 or

Chris Ward 01442 890034

Editorial & Production Team :

Chris Ward, Chris Blain,
Tony Spinks, Nick Carroll
Plus much help in copying, enveloping, and posting.

The Community Newsletter is put together and published as an offering to others. All views and comments are personal.

If undelivered please return to:

AUA Community Newsletter
C/O Amaravati Monastery
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Herts, HP1 3BZ, England

The Bodhinyana Group

Wednesdays 7.30 – 9.30 pm in the Bodhinyana Hall

We meet at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery to chant, meditate, and discuss the subject for the week. Meetings are open to both new and more experienced practitioners. We aim to cover basic Buddhist concepts and teachings and to relate these to our lives in the world with partners, families and work. These meetings provide a rare opportunity for lay-practitioners to discuss and share reflections on the teachings and our own experience.

The Summer 2001 meetings are:

2 May - Entertainment

9 May - Buddhist Practice - Generosity

16 May - Inspiration, Disillusionment & Despair

23 May - Long Life and Beauty

30 May - Buddhist Practice - Right Aspiration

6 Jun - Joy, Happiness and Bliss

13 Jun - Sutta Study

20 Jun - Virtue. Is it enough?

27 Jun - A Countryside Walk

4 Jul - Awakening by Numbers

11 Jul - How do we make important decisions?

18 Jul - Are Retreats an Escape?

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 890034

Radmila Herrmann 01494 864905

COMMUNITY ON THE INTERNET

This Newsletter and other Upasika information can be found on the internet at:-

<http://www.triplegem.com>

or <http://www.btinternet.com/~upasika/>

Please note that the current site is a little out of date and being redesigned. Hopefully the new site will be accessible within a few months.

Beginners Meditation Retreats at the Samatha Centre Wales

Samatha meditation is a traditional form of Theravada practice largely based on attention to the breath in a group setting with some one-to-one guidance. The present form developed for lay meditators in the West has its roots in the Thai monastic tradition. Formally established in England since 1973 as The Samatha Trust, we have a centre in Wales - a converted hill farm in Llangunllo, Powys. There will be a Beginners' Weekend held there on 8-10 June 2001. This is open to all irrespective of experience. For more information please visit our web site at www.samatha.demon.co.uk or contact Graham Murphy on 0151 722 0893.