



Community

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The Upasaka & Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 15



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EDITORIAL

Uncertainty and the Mortgage

I am writing this editorial in a warm hotel room in Hong Kong. After working for many years for a large company in England I accepted a redundancy package in October 2001. There had been similar rounds of redundancy for many years and it became apparent that my time had come. I decided to accept the offer and enter the world of the self-employed Information Technology consultant.

Unfortunately, my timing was not very good, as during the latter part of 2001 (and 2002 so far), there has been a recession in the IT world. Numerous internet, telecoms and IT companies have been badly hit by a global recession and have been laying off staff. So, for several months I struggled to find suitable work, and found myself competing with many others in a similar position. Fortunately, the reasonably generous redundancy package from my previous employer augmented my wife's part-time salary and supported my family during the several months that I looked for work.

During this period of unemployment, I found my Buddhist practice invaluable. My anxiety about the steady reduction of my funds and how long this could continue proved a fruitful reflection. If I allowed myself to follow the anxiety and worry about what might happen, I entered a hell realm and suffered. If I accepted the current moment and the fact that I had enough to eat, a nice house, a loving family and good friends, and some time to tackle a number of things that I had not found time for in my previous fully employed existence, then I realised what an enjoyable and precious period this was. Fortunately, I always had a strong sense of faith - that this period was a temporary interlude between my old structured life and something else.

In actual fact, nothing had really changed. The sense of security we get from working in any enterprise is an illusion. The truth is that our lives are very uncertain. We can never be sure when misfortune or tragedy might strike or when unexpected changes might affect our livelihoods. There is also little doubt that our children are growing up in a world where having a job for life, and working up the company hierarchy have become quaint anachronisms from a strangely different time. In many ways this is a positive thing. How many creative

and talented individuals have stagnated in a large bureaucracy, trapped by the company pension scheme?

The new world of work challenges us to build up a portfolio of skills and to take risks. Buddhist practice is very helpful in this uncertain environment, since we are challenged to wake up to and be open to the way things really are, rather than imagining some 'golden age' or trying to hang on to a way of life that is over. Letting go of the familiar, letting go of a career and colleagues, is a bereavement which we can open to and allow to reach a natural ending. We are then sensitive and alive to the new possibilities and opportunities which invariably arise.

Many of us are reluctant to take risks and come to believe that we lack the courage or the ability to undertake a new challenge. However, growth often seems to take place when we deliberately challenge ourselves, when we take a risk and ignore the voice of timidity. The worst that can happen is that we fail, and failure is one of the worldly winds that is always blowing whether or not we take some informed risks.

As to how I came to be writing this in Hong Kong, my own situation changed after a chance meeting with a friend at Amaravati who needed some Information Technology support for a fashion company and offered me a chance to undertake this. I was very pleased to accept and have immediately plunged into a fascinating new business area with the challenge of automating production systems in Asia and Europe.

I am working with talented individuals both in England and Asia, and experiencing the uncertainty, confusion, fun, long hours, panic, and satisfaction which are often inextricably intertwined with new and worthwhile enterprises.

And, the mortgage is being paid!

Chris Ward



Can we obtain 'what is welcome' merely by wishing for it?

Then Anathapindika the householder went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there the Blessed One said to him: "These five things, householder, are welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world. Which five?"

"Long life is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

"Beauty is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

"Happiness is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

"Status is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

"Rebirth in heaven is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

"Now, I tell you, these five things are not to be obtained by reason of prayers or wishes. If they were to be obtained by reason of prayers or wishes, who here would lack them? It's not fitting for the noble disciple who desires long life to pray for it or to delight in doing so. Instead, the noble disciple who desires long life should follow the path of practice leading to long life. In so doing, he will attain long life, either human or divine.

"It's not fitting for the noble disciple who desires beauty to pray for it or to delight in doing so. Instead, the noble disciple who desires beauty should follow the path of practice leading to beauty. In so doing, he will attain beauty, either human or divine.

"It's not fitting for the noble disciple who desires happiness to pray for it or to delight in doing so. Instead, the noble disciple who desires happiness should follow the path of practice leading to happiness. In so doing, he will attain happiness, either human or divine.

"It's not fitting for the noble disciple who desires status to pray for it or to delight in doing so. Instead, the noble disciple who desires status should follow the path of practice leading to status. In so doing, he will attain status, either human or divine.

"It's not fitting for the noble disciple who desires rebirth in heaven to pray for it or to delight in doing so. Instead, the noble disciple who desires rebirth in heaven should follow the path of practice leading to rebirth in heaven. In so doing, he will attain rebirth in heaven."

Long life, beauty, status, honor,
heaven, high birth:
To those who delight
in aspiring for these things
in great measure, continuously,
the wise praise heedfulness
in making merit.

The wise person, heedful,
acquires a two-fold welfare:
welfare in this life &
welfare in the next.
By breaking through to his welfare
he's called prudent and
wise.

Anguttara Nikaya V.43

Disengaged Buddhism

Real Buddhists don't get involved?

I have noticed a tendency in myself and in other Buddhists - especially during the early to middle years of exposure to Buddhism - to equate practice with passivity and disengagement from the 'world'. This tendency could be characterised by the feeling that somehow if we are real practising Buddhists we should avoid 'life' as much as possible. The ideal would be to live in a cave in the Himalayas for the rest of our lives and any other existence is a grudging compromise from this idealised way of life.

We can come to believe that Buddhists 'should' avoid involvement and worldly responsibility, and use this as a way of not engaging fully within our own circumstances. This mistaken 'passive tendency' in Buddhism can arise for a number of reasons which I will try to describe.

Firstly there is much in the Pali Canon - the teachings of the Buddha and his disciples - that identifies the householder life as not so conducive to spiritual development as the homeless life of a samana. In many suttas we read of the delights of the solitary life and the importance of detaching oneself from distracting worldly situations in order to realise Nibbana.

We need to be aware that these particular Suttas came from within a monastic community and were primarily intended to inform and inspire the ordained Sangha rather than lay-people. They are also obviously true, in the sense that if we want to be accomplished in some way, we must practice and study appropriately and without undue distraction. (*See the Ittha Sutta in this issue of Community*)

There is nothing remarkable about this; it would be a little strange if a monastic community was constantly listening to discourses that focused upon the joys and complexities of household life - if this had been the case, the early Sangha would probably have dissipated as the monks left to raise a family and open a corner shop.

Another strand which can reinforce the 'passive tendency' is the emphasis on not holding opinions. This is a very valuable teaching to help us to be able to let go of strong opinions which blind us, and to be aware of just what our views are, and is especially necessary in developed countries where we are well-educated and expected to hold opinions on everything.

However, Buddhist antipathy towards views and opinions can be turned into the belief that all opinions and views are worthless and to be dropped. The fact is that whilst we can learn to avoid blind attachment to 'our opinions' we can also recognise that some of these opinions are wholesome and good to act upon.

The feeling that we should disengage from worldly involvement can be amplified when we are taught to meditate. We are told that the thoughts, feelings and insights which arise are not to be believed or acted upon, but just noticed as far as possible. All thoughts, feelings ideas and insights are empty, impermanent and to be let go of. This is a fine teaching, unless we make the error of moving beyond meditation guidelines and establish a belief 'that all thoughts, feelings and insights are empty *and thus worthless*'.

**'all thoughts,
feelings and
insights are empty
*and thus
worthless*'**

Meditation is not about convincing ourselves that all mental impressions are equally without value and to be despised, on the contrary, the clarity we obtain from mindfulness and concentration enable us to objectively see our mind contents and to recognise that although these are all insubstantial some are wholesome, some are unwholesome and some are neutral. This is the arising of wisdom.

What we are learning and practising in formal meditation is to be able to objectify our experience; to really notice what is going on. This enables us to truly appreciate a creative thought or insight and to really notice an unskilful or harmful idea or feeling.

(Cont overleaf)

Until we train our minds to develop some space we can never really appreciate the contents, whether this is joy, peace, anxiety, a harmful impulse or a creative insight.

We undertake this training, because many of us for much of the time are not aware of our mind contents. We operate at a semi-conscious habitual level where we act on unskilful impulses or on skilful ones, without appreciating the difference.

We must also distinguish what we are taught about meditation techniques and formal meditation sessions from what we do at other times. An analogy would be our attending a gym. For an hour or so we would use various machines to exercise our biceps, our heart and various other muscles. We would be told to focus upon the exercise and put effort in. At the end of the hour we would shower and go about the rest of the day.

No one would expect that because we had been told to focus upon doing push-ups during our fitness session that we would be expected to do push-ups for the rest of the day, or that if we were not doing push-ups we were compromising our training.

Physical exercise does, however, make us more aware of our bodies and more supple and energetic. When we have stopped exercising and are going about our usual activities, we can be more aware of how we are using our bodies and build some degree of exercise into our chores. We would, however, be foolish to imagine that a sensible ambition would be to spend all of our waking hours on a rowing machine or lifting heavy weights.

Similarly, when we have completed a formal meditation period and are undertaking our working activities, although we continue to put effort into maintaining mindfulness, and the fruits of our practice will be a calmer and more spacious mind, we will often need to act upon our ideas, views, and insights and not simply let them pass. Our views and opinions are often what our livelihood is concerned with. Many of us are employed purely on the basis that our judgement and views are respected and required.

My own experience of practice has been that the more clarity I have developed and the more comfortable I have become with staying in the moment, the more I have been able to fully engage with life and the world.

For me the most telling evidence in support of 'engagement' is the life of the Buddha himself. At the time immediately following his enlightenment a number of Suttas in the Pali Canon record that he

considered whether to try to teach the way to the realisation that he had experienced, but decided that such a teaching would go against the desires and understanding of most people. He realised that it would be vexatious and burdensome to attempt to teach others. We are told that the great god Brahma noticed this debate within the Buddha's mind and exhorted with him to teach for the good of the many and for those with 'but little dust in their eyes'.

The Buddha subsequently embarked upon a long teaching career until his passing. He clearly understood that engaging with the world would be difficult, but chose this path of engagement. He applied his great wisdom and practical skills through many difficult challenges.

The Pali Canon describes the many trials and tribulations that the Buddha subsequently experienced in establishing a community of monks and nuns. We read about the pragmatic and wise way in which the rules of the community were established, and how various strong and disruptive individuals were handled. The Buddha wrestled with a whole range of complex problems. He got fully involved in the difficulties that arise within any human community.

Reading the Suttas it seems that the Buddha did not plan to establish a 'world religion' that would last some 2500 years so far. This arose from the quality of his example and actions.

I find the example provided by the Buddha very inspiring and clear. I do not think we should all set out to found a new religious movement, but we should expect to be skilfully and passionately engaged with our families, our community and our work. Helping in whatever small ways we can, whether it be spending time with our elderly relatives, contributing our skills to Amaravati, contributing articles to this newsletter, preparing food for others, joining the AUA committee, or helping to establish an ethical and profitable business.

I would also suggest that those who are most qualified to make wise decisions in our world are those who put effort into purifying their minds. The very people who should be engaging with worldly activities and taking responsibility and risks are the meditators.

Rather than finding reasons or excuses not to be involved, we can skilfully participate in our communities by acting from courage, energy, kindness and wisdom.

Chris Ward

Parkinsons Syndrome and Meditation

Parkinson's Disease concentrates the mind wonderfully. The inexorable march of symptoms makes the sufferer aware of impermanence and change operating at the heart of things. This is a perception that is laced with apprehension.

Parkinson's Disease is experienced by the sufferer as a very physical illness without a strong psychosomatic factor, but there is always the need to make sense of what is happening. Thought processes in themselves do affect the progress of physical illness and there is the whole question of psychological survival through what threatens to be a long and enervating illness. In addition one may go on to explore lesser known paths of introspection.

An analogy that comes to mind is that of a torch casting its light. We may look at the area that is illuminated and thus explore a topography of fresh knowledge, or we may examine the torch itself. That is, we may concentrate on thought processes themselves. We can experiment by observing thought processes in an objective and structured way.

Visualise an empty pot. This would probably be a clay pot but its size, shape and characteristics will be determined by the person doing the visualisation. This is a very personal creation. In spite of a steady focus on the pot, the debris (of minor sensations and thoughts) collects in the bottom of the pot. This is in imagination scooped out and the pot is empty once more.

Strict concentration will place an emphasis on control which may encourage depressive tendencies. In contrast - this has the atmosphere of a gentle stroll in the countryside. It is an image that floats on the gentlest wind.

Suddenly one is engaged in thought. This is like

finding oneself seated on a bus with no awareness of having bought a ticket or even of having boarded the bus. Awareness of the presence of an overarching thought is not associated with a failure of concentration. Instead one welcomes its presence. The thought is treated with respect.

There will be situations when the issue has such practical importance that the thought may dominate the person's mind for the rest of the day and even beyond: but normally the thought will lose its inner energy—when watched—in a matter of minutes.

***'Parkinson's
Disease
concentrates the
mind wonderfully.'***

It is like some underground root that is averse to the light and fades away when exposed for any length of time. Awareness is given to the thought for as long as it takes—ultimately the thought fades away

and one returns to the original contemplation of the empty pot.

All thinking that replaces the pot for some time is positive and to be valued just as much as contemplation of the pot. This is a very gentle and non-rejecting meditation. Fifteen or twenty minutes once or twice a day will make a start in finding a way of feeling positive in the Parkinson sufferer's world which is increasingly restricted by symptoms.

Sometimes, unbidden, an experience of the interconnectedness of the world illuminates the mind. This has been described as an 'oceanic' feeling. But, even if one has been deeply affected by this experience of interconnectedness, the emotional experience is relived only rarely and then when it is not wilfully sought. However, we can be permanently conscious of a changed intellectual perception of the world. And, enduring the Parkinson's symptoms becomes more acceptable when set in the context of the dynamism of the universe.

Larry Gunward

Insights

Just over a year ago I started to keep a 'Book of Insights,' a place to briefly record interesting things that happened during meditation. It's turned out to be a useful reminder of things that are worth contemplating again, and things that the mind has suggested I do. While reading this 'Book of Insights' it occurred to me that there are quite a few different types of insight, and so I thought it might be interesting to classify them in some way. I experienced all the examples mentioned whilst on Ajahn Sumedho's ten-day retreat at Amaravati (September 2001.)

The first category of insights consists of answers that were given when I asked the mind questions. Some unpleasant visions of death had occurred during meditation, so I asked the mind, the one who knows: "What's good about death?" I asked a few times and waited patiently for a reply. No response. Nothing. So I asked again, "What's good about death?"

"No more chanting!" came the reply. I usually like chanting, so I wasn't sure what was meant by this. I waited for clarification. "You don't have to do anything you don't want to."

"What else is good about death?"

"If we didn't die, there would be far too many people, leading to chaos and fighting, so no-one would be happy. By dying we are giving the next generation a chance to live happily."

Later on, when anxiety arose, in order to understand it more clearly I asked, "What is the purpose of anxiety? What is the body and mind telling me when anxiety arises?"

"They are teaching you how you cause suffering. They can also show how having a different perception can reduce suffering, and which perceptions work best."

A few days later I returned to the good old subject of death: "Why don't I want to die?" Various answers arose, about the main things I would like to do in this life. This helped to clarify some of my priorities.

Sometimes the mind asks the questions. It then usually answers. One strange question it asked was, "What are all the ways you might die, and which would be most fun?" A whole variety of accidents and illnesses appeared from nowhere, all graphically portrayed in colour. This gave me some useful information about my fear of death. It showed that my strongest fears are physical pain and dying young, before I make some sort of contribution to the world. I also learnt that many ways we die are quite quick and painless, and then it's over.

'What are all the ways you might die?'

Another category consists of the mind offering useful questions to ask myself throughout the day: "Is this skilful? Is this kindness?" Sometimes there is a sequence of two or more questions, such as: 1. "What has the mind asked me to do?" 2. "How should I do it?" 3. "What are you waiting for?"

Some insights are observations, rather than a voice telling us something. One like this came when I noticed that it always takes me three full days of retreat to reach a deeper level of calm. Insights of all types are always accompanied by a feeling that shows that the message is really important, even profound. It doesn't sound really important and profound when I tell it to someone else. It often sounds rather obvious to them, yet to me it feels profound. Maybe this is why people rarely talk or write much about insights. The listener often thinks, "So what? What's the big deal?" or "I could have told you that!"

Insights are often suggestions to do something or to think about something in a different way. They need to be acted on to make full use of them. Let's say we get a message that tells us, "Be more compassionate to that man. Consider what it would be like to be him." We will only get a great deal of benefit from these words of wisdom if we actually do what we have been asked to. These words act as a guide, pointing us in the right direction at each junction. We need to find the courage and motivation to move in the direction pointed out to us.

This leads to progress down the road towards Nibbana. The question that the mind told me to ask repeatedly, "Is this skilful?" is a good example. By asking ourselves this question over and over again, we can improve our level of mindfulness and reflect on many actions and thoughts throughout the day. This can then lead us to find more skilful ways to behave.

The mind clearly told me what to do during one rather bizarre vision. Ajahn Sumedho and I were being attacked by crocodiles inside a large cage in Thailand. He didn't seem too bothered. I was terrified! I tried desperately to escape, but there was no way out. Then the Bee Gees started singing "Ah, ha, ha, ha, staying alive, staying alive," and I felt a strong craving to survive. And then the realisation came to me, loud and clear, "Let go of this desire to survive." Of course! So I threw myself to the crocodiles and felt a tremendous sense of relief as they ate me.

On September 11th Ajahn Sumedho told us about The World Trade Centre disaster a few hours after it had all happened. A message came to me: "Imagine the worst possible thing has happened and really accept it." So I visualised that enormous numbers of people had died, including several of my friends, and then there was a long and bitter war. Gradually the acceptance of all of this became greater and the feelings of fear and worry reduced. Another time the message was: "You must do plenty of both lovingkindness practice and vipassana practice. Don't allow yourself to get to the point of feeling overwhelmed by suffering. You should always be feeling quite loving before starting to practise vipassana, so that any painful emotions that arise are absorbed, without dragging you out of a peaceful state." Then Nat King Cole sang "Let There Be Love."

Sometimes there are suggestions to stop doing something: "Stop trying to achieve things that are a great effort. Let go of the feeling that you have to do something special. Only put effort into being mindful and meditating a lot, and then allow things to happen easily and naturally." Another example was: "Stop reading much, watching TV and doing anything else that takes you away from feeling peaceful. The only exceptions are things that are really necessary." A pair of questions the mind asked me were also about renunciation: "What do you want to achieve? How can you let go of these desires?"

Amongst the category of thinking about something in a different way there was the time I heard the song from the end of the film 'The Life Of Brian.' "Always look on the bright side of death" played in my head with great emphasis. Another insight that falls into this category, that felt very profound was: "In the external world, everything is

unsatisfactory. In the internal world, everything is satisfactory, we just need to realise this." This was reminding me that the way we think about something is the key to happiness, not the event itself, so find another way of looking at things that we use to create suffering. It was also telling me that meditation is much more important than meeting interesting people, seeing beautiful objects, or eating fabulous food, enjoyable as these are. The mind wasn't suggesting I stop doing these, just get the balance right and not think those other things are terribly important.

Other suggestions to change my way of thinking included: "Your nature is to do things slowly, and sometimes you'd prefer to be quick and get a lot done. When this happens, it's not being slow that causes you to feel upset, it's the craving to be quick. Let go of that craving." "Don't think in terms of 'healing.' Healing is thinking 'there's something wrong that needs to be fixed.' This isn't acceptance. You must accept things fully, send them love and let them be." A few times I just heard, "AMOURavati!" This was a reminder that Amaravati is a place of lovingkindness, and a suggestion that I do my bit to help keep it that way.

The song "It's Just An Illusion" kept playing and I wasn't sure what it was saying. Then it came, like a bolt out of the blue. "There's nothing wrong with anything, it's just your conditioning fooling you into believing that something isn't right. Don't be fooled."

Gabriel Hodes

"By and large, Kaccayana, this world is in bondage to dogmas and conventions. But one such as this does not believe in grasping conventions; nor with mental obstinacy and dogmatic views; nor does he affirm that these are 'my self.' He has no uncertainty or doubt that, whatever arises, only dukkha is arising; and that whatever passes away, only dukkha is passing away. Such knowledge is his own and independent of others. This, Kaccayana, is what constitutes right view."

Kindred Sayings XII. 15

Random Thoughts in Thailand

Comparing the excitement - the anticipation of a well-earned break from routine - to beautiful Thailand to the sometimes reality and discomfort of the not so perfect!

Thailand is hot - heat sapping – feelings of lethargy and slothfulness – the disappointment of not wanting to do much in the heat of the day – a sense of guilt over my lack of adventure – why did we buy that expensive Guide Book in London – wanting everything to be perfect – no resistance to aversion – aware of a background unhappiness as a result my rampant internal critic- an overall lack of appreciation – the interesting realisation of sometimes similar feelings and thoughts in England!?

All this in comparison to the Thai's seeming inner joy and infectious joie de vie despite their material and physical lot being seemingly being far worse than mine - they worked in the heat, had seemingly menial jobs - were waiters, touted for customers all day long - and in Bangkok worked in incredible pollution traffic – overall horrible congestion.

Bangkok is so busy - in your face, intense - crowded with traffic - lorries, taxis, tuk-tuks, cars, motor-bikes – people on the street, in shops, in alleyways – seemingly struggling to live and work in amazingly close juxtaposition - uncomfortably too close from my western point of view - except on the river – how wonderful to take a river bus up and down The Chao Chopraya -the river of kings, where there is always a magical breeze - and space - providing the ability to appreciate this extraordinary city – it's past as well as its headlong rush into the future.

How important physical space is – how it can nourish my sense of well-being.

Fascinated by the numbers of monks travelling on

the river - their orange robes – what were they thinking - where were they going – perhaps to evening puja in riverside wats, whose golden rooftops reflected the last rays of the setting sun - the river turning blue and bronze, wave tops burnished gold.

When did I remember to **be** - very rarely? – is it even a practical reality or possible in the world in which I live - or is it such a challenge because I do not practise enough or live my life enough in accordance with The Eightfold Path – do I need to be more ascetic – and not like virtually everybody else so attached to my egocentric world - basically so averse to anything which I perceive as not being perfect – especially myself – of not being able to let go or make friends with my ever present critic?

One of my most powerful impressions of the Thais is their seeming ability to be at ease with their lives – their incredible ability to give of themselves – such generosity - their smiles - all such a real and powerful reminder of the fruits of practice – encouraging compassion and generosity to myself and to the world.

And then back to London – the contrasts - Heathrow so smart and well ordered – the cases arriving so efficiently – everything so much cleaner – onto the M4 – everything so well ordered – back home to Notting Hill – it was a sunny morning, - it all looked so clean and beautiful. I was able to see my familiar landscape afresh. I was smiling.

Travel really does broaden the mind - the challenge is for my practice to do the same and to realise that the end of longing – because it's the same longing and aversion even on holiday in paradise – is enlightenment!

Jeffrey Craig

.Kathina Day 2002

Many thanks to all the volunteers who gave so generously of their time and energy to make last year's Kathina Day at Amaravati such a success. Please put this year's date in your diaries - Sunday, November 10th 2002 - when we look forward to working together again.

Anne Jameson

Mind and Body

tr. from the Chinese by Thich Nhat Tu

*Body is the bodhi tree
Mind is a bright mirror
Polish it from time to time
Don't let it be dusty!
(Zen Master Shen-Shu)*

*Body is not a tree
Mirror is not its stand
There is originally no single thing
Where could it get dusty?
(Zen Master Hui-Neng)*

Distance Learning Courses in Buddhist Studies

If you are interested in Buddhist Studies and in gaining a Diploma, Certificate or MA in this subject, then a new distance learning course is planned to start this September. The course is led by Dr Peter Harvey of the University of Sunderland and can be undertaken by suitably qualified people from a home computer. Applications for this year should be made before the 17th June.

For further details, visit the website:
<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/buddhist/>

Sunyata Retreat Centre

A Buddhist-inspired retreat centre providing a spacious haven outside the bustle of modern life with time for relaxation, contemplation and self-development. We offer a varied programme of meditation retreats, self-catering accommodation for holidays and personal retreats, and a unique workshop venue for groups of up to 20.

Sunyata is a beautiful, 10 acre property set in the rolling hills of East Clare with its own landscaped gardens, secluded waterfall and natural bathing pool. There are great country walks on our doorstep and nearby tourist attractions include Bunratty Castle and the Iron Age settlement of Craggaunowen.

For more information please contact:
Tel: (+353) 61-367073

Lay Week-end Retreat at Amaravati

on the subject of

Our World and Nature

from Friday 5th July at 5.30pm until
Sunday 7th July at 4pm

Make a note in your diaries!

All are welcome to join us in silence, on countryside walks, and in discussion, to reflect upon the relationship between nature and humanity.

Advance booking is essential. 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*

books books books books books books books books

Indian Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction by Sue Hamilton, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 153, £5.99

The Very Short Introductions published by O.U.P. are intended to provide stimulating ways into new subjects. I hoped that this book would demonstrate links between the teachings of the Buddha and the philosophy of the culture in which he lived. I was not disappointed, but I found that I had stumbled upon a vast and complicated subject. Every sentence in Dr. Hamilton's book is informative and the work as a whole would provide a very good starting point for further study.

The discussion starts from the beginning of the 5th century BCE, during which the Buddha lived, and ends at the 11th century CE. These fifteen centuries saw the rise and development of Buddhism, the construction of a

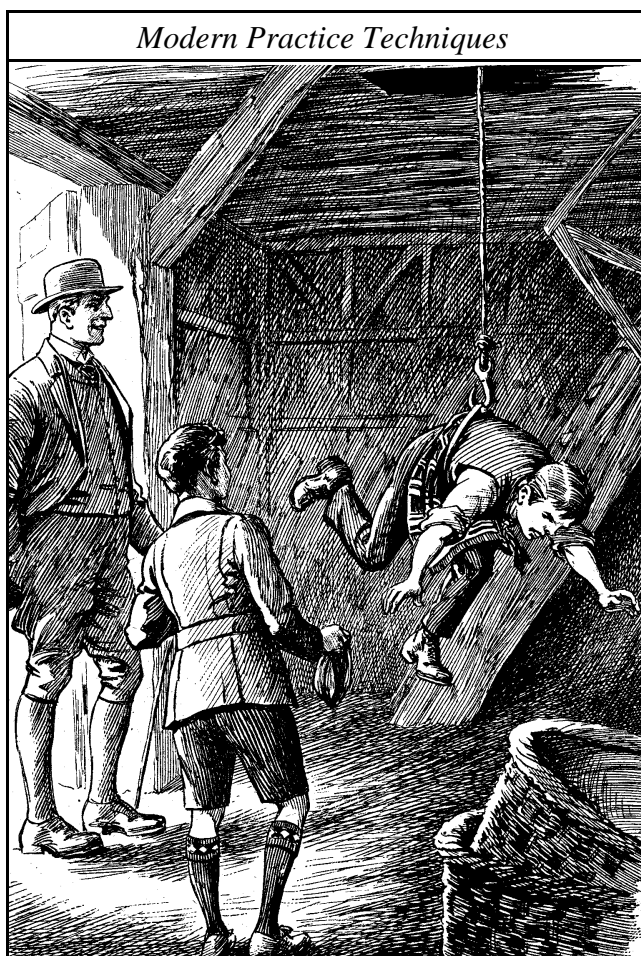
comprehensive Sanskrit grammar and the development of the six classical Hindu systems of thought. Two chapters of the book are devoted to the life of the Buddha, his teaching, the early schools of Buddhism, the Abhidharma and Mahayana Buddhism. Three further chapters deal with the Hindu systems of thought.

In Chapter One ("Reason and Belief: Richness and diversity in Indian thought"), Dr. Hamilton explains, interestingly, that the divide between philosophy and religion is comparatively recent. It has frequently been commented that Buddhism seems more like a philosophy than a religion. Here, Dr. Hamilton states that: "in India it is believed that the role of philosophising, in the sense of attempting to understand the nature of whatever it is one is focusing on, is directly associated with one's personal destiny." In the West, philosophers were particularly concerned with how God fitted into the structure of reality. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was the first to separate belief in God from what he thought could be learned about the nature of things by means of reasoning.

Important philosophical terms are defined in Chapter One and useful summaries and chronological tables are provided throughout the text. In addition to seven illustrations and two maps, the book contains recommended texts for further reading, grouped according to the chapters to which they relate. In the Postscript, Dr. Hamilton adds that there is much that we do not know and that there is still a vast amount of material to be studied properly.

I find this a very interesting book.

Elisabeth Keen



Chris Ward

The 'Introduction to Yogic Flying' course was proving very popular.

All thoughts are darkness

All thoughts are darkness
You die on your own
In darkness is lightness
In death there is life

Martin Evans

AUA News

Buddha Community - The New Web Site

A long last, after an eighteen months gestation, the new AUA web site is live. The task has been waiting for the right moment, and this was provided when I took redundancy from my previous job and found myself with some precious time. The web site can be found at www.buddhacommunity.org. My aim in relaunching the site has been to create something fresh which would attract the curious 'spiritual web surfer' and answer some basic questions about Buddhism as well as providing information on the AUA 'movement', its activities and events.

Perhaps the most important feature of the site is that it hosts the Community Newsletter, in colour, and in an easily copied form, so that individuals can download the newsletter to their PC and print locally. Like most worldly involvements, the new site is not finished. The very early copies of Community need to be scanned and loaded onto the site, and there are numerous detailed improvements I would like to make. I also want to add more information, some images, and perhaps some humorous material. However, some of this may have to wait for another opportune time as the need for 'right livelihood' becomes uppermost. Any feedback or suggestions for the site are gratefully received (check the site for the email address). Please use it to find out about lay retreats and days of practice as well as details of Forest Sangha related groups and events, and please pass the site details to friends who are interested.

Chris Ward

Two Lay Study Days

At Amaravati Monastery in the Retreat Centre

From 10am to 5pm

1st June 2002 - Media and the Monkey Mind

20th July 2002 - Meditation - Insight or Delusion?

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

No booking is necessary, but please bring some food to the Retreat Centre kitchen to share on the day.

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



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

Connections

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

HARTRIDGE

In the first few months of the New Year, Hartridge Buddhist Monastery has been well used as a retreat centre for monastics. Ajahn Candasiri was here until the 20th January, followed by Ajahn Gandhasilo, who arrived in early February and Ajahn Khantiko in late February, both of whom were here for most of March.

Since our resident Sangha left in August 2000, material support and donations for the upkeep of the monastery dropped considerably and the English Sangha Trust have now decided that they will be providing financial support to Hartridge for its continued use as a retreat centre for monastics.

The Monthly Sangha teaching weekends over the winter have been well attended and much appreciated by the lay community with guidance offered by Ajahns Candasiri and Khantiko. In early February, a group of lay supporters together with Ajahn Gandhasilo enjoyed a day of practice together, during which we watched a video by Marshall Rosenberg on 'non-violent communication', sharing our thoughts and feelings about it. With so much violent action being played out all over the world, it feels positive to look at practical ways to be more at peace in our own lives and in our personal relationships.

We are looking forward to welcoming Ajahn Sundara back to Hartridge for a teaching weekend at the end of March. She is now based in America and many will be pleased to see her again.

We will be celebrating Wesak again this year at Hartridge on Sunday May 26th with a member of the Sangha and look forward to meeting with friends old and new. We are also looking at the possibility of holding a lay meditation retreat here sometime this year subject to the availability of a teaching monastic.

Paul Walker our present lay manager will be leaving Hartridge at the end of April or early May, after a year at the monastery. We have all really enjoyed his cheerful presence and we wish him well with his pilgrimage across Europe. We are now seeking to

appoint a new lay manager. If you are interested in the position, please telephone Paul for more details and information.

Lay supporters meetings continue to be held monthly and include Sutta Study, meditation and chanting and the sharing of a meal, as well as discussion of current business. All are welcome.

For details of all events at the monastery

Contact : Sati sati 01305 786821 or

Paul Walker on 01404 891251

CHITHURST

At Savathi..

“Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of meditators. What four”? Here bhikkhus, a meditator is a persistent worker but not one who does what is suitable....one who does what is suitable but not a persistent worker...neither a persistent worker nor one who does what is suitable...both a persistent worker and one who does what is suitable regarding concentration is the chief, the best, the foremost, the highest, the most excellent of these four kinds of meditators” (S.N.34.55).

Surely we can draw a parallel between the dedication and effort of those meditators currently on retreat in the consummation of the Holy Life and the skills, application and enthusiasm of those presently dedicated to the completion of the Dhamma Hall?

Whether we speak of the Sangha, or the collected body of artisans, both reflect that inseparable union between the dynamic aspects of mentality, materiality and consciousness, - that practical blend of awareness, intention and wise consideration.

In the meantime, the monastic regime continues; moulded perhaps by the exigencies of the moment. Ajahn Sucitto will soon embark upon another tour of teaching abroad, and the Lay Forums will recommence another season in April and May.

For more details contact : Barry Durrant 01730 821479

The Story

Breaking the Buddha Statue

On a very cold winter night, a poor unemployed man came into a Buddhist Temple and knelt in front of the Buddha Rupa (statue). After paying respects to the Buddha, he burst into tears and started to cry. The Monk-in-charge of the Temple, Dharma Master Wing Xi (literally, Glorious West) approached him and asked what was wrong. "Venerable Sir" replied the poor man, "My wife and children have been hungry for several days. I have tried my best to support them, but I cannot find work anywhere in town. Now because of the weather, I am suffering from severe arthritis and other diseases. I think my family will not survive much longer. That's why I come here to pray to the Buddha and ask him to alleviate my sufferings." Master Wing Xi pondered, "As Buddhist monks, we do not have any money. How can we help him in such an emergency?" As he looked at the gold-plated Buddha Statue in the main hall, suddenly, he had an idea. He ordered his students to remove the arm from the Buddha Statue, peel the gold off the arm and gave it to the poor man. "Sell it to a goldsmith and use the proceeds for your emergency," he told the poor man. All the other monks were shocked at his decision and protested, "How can you break the arm of the Buddha Statue and give it away?"

Master Wing Xi said calmly, "You do not understand the Dharma. I do this to honour the Buddha himself."

The other monks were confused and angry, "You are breaking the Buddha Statue to pieces. How can this be considered to be an honour to Buddhism and to the Buddha himself?"

Master Wing Xi replied, "I honour our religion and the founder, the Buddha himself."

Under the order from the Master, the monks had no choice but to chip off the gold from the statue, but they did not like doing it. They started to murmur, "We are breaking up the Buddha Statue and giving it away - and our Master says this is an honour to Buddhism? What an anti-religious act."

Upon hearing this, Master Wing Xi could not stand it any longer. He said loudly, "Don't you study the Buddhist Scriptures? Before he became a Buddha, in his previous lives, Prince Siddhartha gave himself up to feed a hungry tiger, cut his own flesh to feed a hungry eagle, donated his own eye to cure someone's eyesight. He donated everything, including his own body parts for the well being of other sentient beings. Do you understand his teachings?"

Nuns Pilgrimage

Ajahn Jitindrya and Sr. Anandabodhi are planning to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Places in India in Dec. 2002. If you would like to support them in anyway, however small, please contact :

*Jill Osler, 9B Alpha Road, Southville, Bristol, BS31 0H,
or telephone: 01179631610.*

You may also send a cheque to Amaravati made out to the English Sangha Trust and marked on the back of the cheque that it is for the Nun's Pilgrimage.

Thank you

NOTICES

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 special opportunity for lay-practitioners to discuss and share reflections on the teachings and our own experience.

The Summer 2002 meetings are:

- 17 Apr** - Meditation Methods
- 24 Apr** - Intoxication
- 1 May** - Devotion - Surely not!
- 8 May** - Stress and Dukkha
- 15 May** - Capitalism versus Dhamma?
- 22 May** - Renunciation
- 29 May** - What is a human being?
- 5 Jun** - The Joy of Pali
- 12 Jun** - Engaged Buddhism?
- 19 Jun** - Body Practice
- 26 Jun** - What do Buddhists Believe?
- 3 Jul** - The Five Hindrances
- 10 Jul** - Do we have a self?

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 890034

Radmila Herrmann 01865 202462

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
Machynlleth	Angela Llewellyn	01650 511350
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 (Subhdra) Jackson	01239 820790
Portsmouth	David Beal	02392 732280
Redruth	Daniel Davide	01736 753175
Southampton	Ros Dean	02380 422430
Steyping / Sussex	Jayanti	01903 812130
Stroud	John Groves	0796 7777742
Taunton	Martin Sinclair	01823 321059
Watford	Ruth	01923 462902
Woking	Rocana	01483 761398

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE:

31st July 2002

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

E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com

Amaravati Lay Events - 2002

Day events (10.00am – 5.00pm)

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

- 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.

Please write to AUA for booking form (see address below)

- 12 -14th April** Mind and Body?
5 – 7th July Our world and Nature *incl local walks*
6 – 8th Sept Creative Arts Weekend

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

For further information, please contact either:

Nick Carroll 020 8740 9748 or Chris Ward 01442 890034

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

New Internet Site

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

<http://www.buddhacommunity.org>

This is a completely redesigned site. Feedback on the layout or content of the site are welcomed. Email to: info@buddhacommunity.org

Editorial & Production Team :

Chris Ward, Chris Blain,
 Tony Spinks, Nick Carroll, Colin Rae
 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.

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

Community Newsletter by Email

We are now able to send Community as an Acrobat file attached to an email. This is an economical way of reaching people anywhere around the globe. The Acrobat file looks virtually identical to the printed version except that it is in colour. It may be read using an Acrobat viewer (often installed on new PC's , but available for free from many sources). We are trying to keep the file size to around 1 to 1.5mb per issue so that a download takes just a few minutes. If you wish to receive Community in this way then email me at :

Upasika@btinternet.com

If undelivered please return to:

AUA Community Newsletter
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