



Community

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The Upasaka & Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 16



A review of art work in Amaravati Woods produced on the weekend creativity retreat Sept 2002

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EDITORIAL

Communal Effort

I would like to start by thanking Chris Ward who normally writes this page. When I put together, edited and distributed the first four issues with invaluable help from Frank Watkins, I felt a little burnt out by the effort and it was with gratitude and considerable relief that I accepted the offers from Chris Ward, Chris Blain, and Tony Spinks to take over the bulk of the work.

As subsequent issues appeared, the workload of the more recent issues increasingly fell to Chris. Under his guidance, 'Community' has evolved into a newsletter of quality. Calm, with a combination of seriousness of purpose and a balancing light touch, it reflects the qualities that we experience in our lay community gatherings and practice. Hopefully the workload of editing and producing 'Community' will be more equally shared in the future

As we meet for our days of practice and weekend events in the retreat centre at Amaravati, a parallel life continues in the monastery, as the monks, nuns and resident lay supporters go about their activities. The monks and nuns appear self contained and subdued. To many, their life is not well known, especially for newcomers. But all those who have travelled in the Far East and who have seen various forms of Buddhist monasticism, not all of them inspiring, can vouch for the very special qualities found in the communities encompassed by the English Sangha Trust.

These qualities become more apparent and appreciated as one gets to know the individuals behind the uniform robes. I would characterise these qualities as being open, truthful, very friendly and with a sense of tranquillity and integrity that often belies the struggles that can be taking place within. For it could be easy to think that these individual's problems have been resolved. In some instances, that may indeed be the case. But in most instances, they are in a crucible of practice, within a form that highlights and also curtails all the basic attachment patterns that we as lay people are free to escape to and indulge in. Thus they confront the basic drives that, through our attachments, help keep us all 'asleep' to Truth.

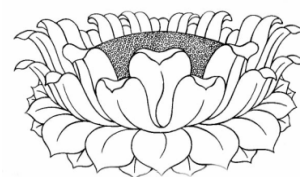
Inspired by the same teachings and by the integrity of

the lifestyle of the monastic community, each one of us tries to find his or her own form and practice as a lay person. This is a major challenge with all the responsibilities that come with work, relationships and families. Any restraints that we may practice are in a sense, more self imposed, in that we don't live within a supportive community that has the same aspirations as we do and we don't live within the structures and agreed rules that a monastic community does. But communal effort can be most supportive of individual practice. In recognition of this we have over the last seven years or so gradually built a loose but well connected lay community. Loose, in that we live our lives in the world, with our families, partners and work. Connected, in that we meet for our weekend and day events to practice together and explore issues and questions that arise in our daily lives and practice. These are very special opportunities to be silent within ourselves, even when in the company of others, and to re-connect with our deeper aspirations and practice.

As the number of our lay events at Amaravati increases, so the active participation of more individuals will become apparent, all offered in a spirit of generosity. This will bring more responsibilities in organising and facilitating our events. These, together with occasional issues of 'Community' and your contributions to it, will create yet more opportunities for us to keep in touch, and perhaps become more involved.

The blessings that flow from this to us all, are those that come from being part of a wholesome four-fold community.

Nick Carroll



Alexander Technique and Buddhist Practice

I have long been interested in body awareness practices and their relationship to Buddhist meditation. Indian yoga, external and internal martial arts, chi gung, breath work, Tibetan exercises, Reiki, Pilates, and others have all been interesting learning experiences, though I am far from being accomplished in any of them. But for me they have lacked a quality which I have, to some extent, been discovering, and *rediscovering*, while learning the Alexander Technique. Alexander work may not be the *summum bonum* of bodywork, nor is it a universal panacea, and it is doubtless not the sort of practice that is to everyone's taste. It can also take quite some time to learn. But it is a useful and interesting journey which seems well suited to certain aspects of the Buddhist path.

The Technique itself is deceptively simple. It seems to me that F.M. Alexander was aiming at getting himself and others to 'use' their psychophysical self in the optimum way. To this end one learns to 'direct' intentionally various parts of the body in order to stop misusing one's whole self when involved in activity. Primarily this means directing the neck to be free, the head to be freely poised (or be forward and up), and the back to lengthen and widen. These 'directions' are not to be 'done', but rather 'thought', as if one were 'thinking' them afresh each time. They are orders given to stop oneself pulling down instead of allowing oneself to be up in the world in a free and poised way. The technique is certainly NOT just about imposing some idea of a perfect posture on the body and just holding it there. On the contrary, the intentional 'directions' given very lightly to oneself are not meant to be a part of one's habitual doing: one is over and over reminded to think the 'directions' whilst absolutely not trying to do anything at all. To one not used to this sort of work, it probably sounds either very complicated or very heady. The thing is: it's not quite like the other body 'stuff' I've encountered elsewhere because the emphasis is very firmly on doing activity in a non-habitual way without actually trying to do anything at all. And this is fiendishly difficult, but also childishly easy and very interesting. It's rather like a Zen paradox.

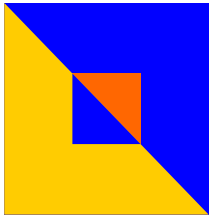
So why is this so interesting from a Buddhist viewpoint? Well, I personally have found this type of work excellent at getting my awareness to open to the experience of the whole body, rather than having it stuck in a cerebral way on one small part. I have at times been struck by the number of Buddhist practitioners who have real difficulty getting their awareness in meditation out of the head and

into the body. Doing this enables one to get a sense of one's whole being, as well as slow the mental chatter. Because Alexander work is done mainly with the eyes open and the mind aware of oneself and the outer world, it also creates a nice counterbalance to what can be intensely introspective Buddhist mindfulness, which in my own case had too often become trance-like, and which tended towards sleepy relaxation rather than lightly poised awareness of the given moment.

Furthermore it has been helpful to me as a way of seeing how much I try to 'do' the practice in a habitual way. It is not always so easy just to take a natural breath, each time aware and with a beginner's mind. It is not always so easy to sit or stand in a conscious way without, at some level, forcing it or interfering with the body's natural ability to be 'up'. I also suspect it has helped me stay just a little more open to experiences within meditation, allowing me to reflect upon the nature of this sense of being.

It doesn't always seem to work, and I really can't say I use it all the time or that I have great mastery of it. Some people swear by it as a remedy for certain physical ailments or specific problems they have had. I cannot vouch for this myself, and I suppose Alexander himself would have admonished people searching for specific results, saying they were, in his words, 'end-gaining' when they should be more concerned with the 'means whereby' they can effect some change in their relation to the world. He never mentions enlightenment or God in any of the four books he has bequeathed humanity. I suspect he was closer to the spiritual ideal of living as consciously as one can than many traditional religious sages. His technique does not appeal to everyone, but it is in many ways radically different from much other bodywork, which aims to get one to 'do' something without always enabling one to stop doing what one is doing wrong. It is not a therapy, or a religion, or a new-age fad. It is awareness training, however, and is to my mind worthy of consideration by those interested in the path of the Buddha.

Colin Rae



'A Complete Beginner'

Reflections from - Our World and Nature
A Lay Weekend at Amaravati

I started coming to Amaravati in May to attend the Introductory Meditation Workshop on Saturday afternoons. Previously I had spent two terms attending meditation classes at a local college without much success. Through a friend, I learned about Amaravati and felt that the environment may be more conducive.

I had been made to feel 'unsuccessful' at the evening classes when we were asked about our feelings at the end of each session. Everyone else in the group had 'amazing' visions and experiences. I had experience very little, if anything. However, I was determined to continue.

Each Saturday afternoon workshop at Amaravati is taken by a Buddhist monk or nun. Very early on a class was run by a nun who could not stress enough that no miracles were about to take place, and not to expect too much too soon and that being able to meditate successfully could take many months. She said not to become disheartened and she encouraged us to persevere and not to give up if 'it' didn't happen overnight. I could not have been more grateful to hear her words and this gave me hope and made me more determined to continue.

Whilst attending these classes I met a pleasant elderly gentleman called Larry. Larry has been involved with Amaravati for some years but still comes along to the introductory meditation classes. He kindly took me into the temple and showed me around and explained some of the traditions and history of the Monastery and religion.

Larry also gave me information about a retreat weekend, which was being held at the beginning of July entitled 'Our World and Nature'. I showed interest but expressed my concern that I was very new to Buddhism and meditation and felt that attending a retreat was a little too soon for me. He reassured me that this would be a very good start for me and gave me the information and reservation sheet to take home and consider. He said that he would be attending and that he would see me there.

Despite doubts, I completed the form and booked my weekend retreat.

As the weekend approached, I began to feel apprehensive and on the Friday I began to feel decidedly wobbly.

I arrived at 5:30 pm to be greeted by a very welcoming and smiling Gabriel, who booked me in and directed me to the women's dormitory, where I left my bags and bedding and returned to the dining room/kitchen area to meet other guests and eat supper.

The group comprised about 20 guests, mostly people on their own, two couples and a mother and daughter. Some had been to Amaravati before but for many it was their first visit. All had been meditating for some time and all, except for one young Australian man in this 20s, had been to a retreat before.

Nick Carroll, who ran the retreat, introduced himself to the group and discussed the timetable for the weekend. Nick is a charismatic, friendly, very approachable man, who made us all feel welcome and at ease. We would start with meditation and chanting in the shrine room after which (9 pm Friday) we would be silent until 5 pm on Saturday.

Having never stopped talking since I have been able (apart from when I am asleep .. but maybe then, too), I was horrified at the length of this silence!

We were in bed with the lights out at 10 pm (I never go to bed before midnight), awake at 6:30 am and in the shrine room for meditation at 7 am.

The beds, dormitory and washing facilities were all basic but very clean and everything worked perfectly.

My horror resurfaced when we met to discuss the day's activities. We were introduced to Nick Scott, a botanist from the Chithurst Buddhist Monastery in Hampshire.

Nick had planned for us an eight mile walk along Ashridge. Having never walked many more than eight steps, I had serious doubts, firstly about the distance but also about the silence.

However, the day went very well. We started at 9:30 am. The weather was perfect; not too hot and not too cold.

Silence was broken by just about everyone! We were constantly reminded by Nick Carroll's presence but lapsed continually. I think this may have been a little frustrating for Nick. (Sorry Nick!)

Along the way Nick Scott talked to us about the trees, plants, wildlife and terrain. He is a fascinating man with a generous heart and excellent sense of humour. He made the day.

We stopped for meditation twice, once on a hillside and once in a wood, both totally new and beautiful experiences for me.

We arrived back at the Monastery at 5 pm, exhausted but exhilarated. My legs didn't feel as if they belonged to me! But was I pleased I'd managed it?!!

That evening we had a very welcome light meal (available for those on 5 precepts) followed by meditation and chanting and bed again by 10pm.

All the food at the Monastery is vegetarian, and delicious meals were prepared by two lovely volunteers, who worked tirelessly and cheerfully.

Sunday started in a similar way with meditation followed by breakfast and a meeting to discuss the day's less structured plans and the recruitment of volunteers to help prepare lunch and clean the retreat before leaving at 4pm.

We met at midday for meditation and for a general discussion of 'How Was It For You?'. Without exception, everyone said that they had benefited from and enjoyed the weekend. The group had become very warm and friendly over the two days and many had expressed a wish to return and the hope that they would meet up again at another retreat.

In many ways I felt that I perhaps had not been quite ready for the weekend and that to have had a little more experience of the Introductory Meditation before embarking on a retreat would have been an advantage. As a 'beginner' I found the meditation a little too long and I had no experience of chanting. However, one member of the group asked if having been 'dropped in at the deep end' had ultimately been a problem. I had to admit that, no, despite my fears and decided wobbliness at the beginning, it had been a great experience.

I would like the opportunity to explore more about Buddhism and think that an 'Idiot's Guide' style

introductory day would certainly help me. I found many of the words, terminology and 'Who's Who and Why' a mystery. I am sure that there are many people out there who are fascinated but uncertain where to start.

A 'first timers' retreat would be perfect but I doubt that enough 'brave' beginners could be found to justify running a weekend.

However, if there is anyone out there reading this, who would like to chat I would be more than happy to allay any fears. I should like to encourage anyone to at least think about coming along. It is a different experience and one you may be pleased you explored.

I will certainly be back (if Nick will have me!), this time with an insight into what to expect, less concern and a lot less 'chat' and hopefully a little more mindfulness.

**'We arrived ...at
the Monastery...
exhausted but
exhilarated'**

I would like to thank with all my heart the people who ran the retreat; those 'up front' and those, who inevitably put a lot of work into the weekend but stayed in the shadows. Thank you to Larry for getting me there!

I would like to say 'hello' to any of the lovely people who were on the retreat with me and are reading this and hope that we do meet up again in the future. AND thank you to those who supported me as 'a complete beginner'!

Maggie, July 2002



So you call yourself a Buddhist - or do you?

I've been a Buddhist for over 20 years. At least, that's how it seems to me when I look back. But when was it I really felt inside I was a Buddhist, or that I could live up to my ideal of being a Buddhist? And how long have I been comfortable with the label?

I'm an accountant. I know how it feels to have a label. I wonder how many girlfriends I lost when I was young when they found out I was an Accountant. How boring!

Everyone thinks accountants are boring, but I remember some research I read about which said that Financial Directors were considered to be exciting. So when Accountants become Directors they suddenly transform. I remember when I was made a Director, the first thing I did was go out and buy some new shoes, some Directors' shoes. I wanted to feel that bit smarter, walk that bit taller, to fit my new label.

But when I lost that job I became an Accountant again and now I notice that sometimes people will say to me 'but you're not boring', as though it's a revelation, because I ought to be.

When I first became interested in Buddhism it was an intellectual interest. I wanted to study Buddhism, not become a Buddhist. I went to an evening class. But after a few weeks I became more and more impressed by the monk who was teaching. His joyfulness, his kindness and his wisdom. I started to reflect on how these teachings were relevant to my own life. I started to see how to put them into practice. To try them out.

It was still a couple of years before I really started to see some benefits from the practice. Gradually I started to feel a sense of gratitude – for the Buddha, for his teachings (the Dhamma) and for those who have put his teachings into practice (the Sangha), often called the triple gem or the three refuges.

I started to change from telling people 'I'm interested in Buddhism', to saying 'I'm a Buddhist' – and being comfortable with the reaction I got, whatever it was, from

being labelled 'a Buddhist'.

Being a Buddhist brings a responsibility. You have to be prepared to be an ambassador for Buddhism. It's most likely that you are the only Buddhist many of your friends or work colleagues know. The way you act and what you say is their only measure of what a Buddhist is. You represent all the Buddhists in the world to them. I think this reflection is good for our practice.

So how is a Buddhist supposed to act? We have what we call the precepts, which are ethical guidelines. They are not commandments but things we should aspire to. There are five: not harming life, not taking what is not freely given, not indulging in sex against another's will, not using dishonest or harmful speech and not confusing the mind with intoxicants.

In Buddhist countries, taking these five 'precepts' along with the three 'refuges' (Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha) is done by a formal request to a monk or a nun and may be requested every time they visit the monastery. It is a tradition we follow here when staying at the monastery for a retreat.

People often ask 'How do you become a Buddhist?' and this is all there is to it. No doctrine to believe in, no commandments to keep, just a respect for the triple gem (the refuges) and an aspiration to live a moral life (the precepts).

And that's good enough, but of course, we soon discover it's just a beginning. A respect for the triple gem suggests a commitment to investigate the Buddha's teaching, that is, the four noble truths and the eightfold path. This is the essence of what the Buddha taught. One, that there is suffering i.e. that the world's not perfect (dukkha), two, that there is an origin of suffering which is the grasping mind, three, that there is an end to suffering and four, that there is a path leading to an end to suffering, namely the eightfold path. The eightfold path is called the middle way as it is to be followed by avoiding the extremes of indulgence and austerity. It is right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

*So how is a
Buddhist supposed
to act?*

But all this can sound over complicated to some. There is a story my wife told me, a Zen story, which illustrates what I mean. A doctor comes to see a Zen monk and asks 'How do I become a Buddhist?' and the Monk replies 'Treat your patients with kindness'.

The point is, we don't need to make it complicated. We don't need to worry whether we're doing all of this right, like the precepts, right to the last detail. What really matters is, are we treating people with kindness? Even more, are we being kind to ourselves?

When I introduced the topic of 'how do you become a Buddhist' to the Bodhinyana group (a lay group who meet on Wednesday evenings at Amaravati) someone said, 'Perhaps all you need to do to be a Buddhist is be mindful'. That sounds simple enough. But we make a problem out of that too. Am I being mindful enough? Am I being mindful at all? If I can't be mindful how can I call myself a Buddhist?

Thinking I'm not good enough is a real obstacle to our practice. Being mindful is right here right now. It's not a judgmental thing. If you've got to make a qualitative judgment about whether you're being mindful enough, the moment's gone. If we cannot live our lives without thinking 'I can't do this, I'm not good enough.....' we can't do anything.

So I asked people in the group whether they called themselves Buddhists. Almost a unanimous 'no'. 'Interested in Buddhism' they felt comfortable with but not being a Buddhist. Yet, I have known most of these people as Buddhists, or so I thought, for years, and they have no lack of enthusiasm for the teaching or commitment in the practice. Indeed, they often talk about the fruits they have gained from the practice.

So does it matter? I think it does.

An acknowledgement of our debt to the Buddha. Dhamma and Sangha seems the least we can do. It's as though I were to write a book 'Martin's guide to meditation' and not mention that it is Buddhist meditation, or that I learnt it from a Buddhist monk. What sort of gratitude is that?

And the world needs Buddhists. We need to be signposts to the Dhamma. I don't mean we should be missionaries.

Buddhism is not about thrusting it down people's throats. And I do warn against putting it on job applications or telling people, 'I'm Jane and I'm a Buddhist' when asked to give your name and say something about yourself. But sometimes people are genuinely interested to know why you're as you are, why you do what you do. Don't be afraid when these opportunities arise to let people know you're a Buddhist.

I remember when I plucked up courage at work to explain I was going on a meditation retreat for my holidays. My boss was a very macho sort of guy. The sort of person who would rub his hands together with glee at the possibility of a war. 'Good for business', he would say. And it was good for business. The Ministry of Defence was one of our customers. The more 1,000 pound bombs they dropped, the more carbon we sold for the ignition systems. Carbon, such a harmless chemical, the essential ingredient of all life, being used to destroy life!

Our relationship improved when he knew I was a Buddhist. We had an understanding that seemed that much clearer and we became quite close over the years. He stopped trying to persuade me of his views and, without those views he was really a very

you're kind and generous person.

Being honest with people about what is important to us is more likely to gain their respect than if we build a wall of deceit around our clandestine activities.

But labels can be painful and it is very tempting to hide behind, 'I'm interested in Buddhism'.

Are we men or mice?

It's like saying 'I'm interested in parachute jumping'. How timid is that? Tell people you like jumping out of aeroplanes for goodness sake. Tell people you're a Buddhist.

Martin Evans

*I don't mean
we should
all be
missionaries*

The Path Re-viewed

from a lay perspective

Part 2

As we saw in part 1 of 'The path re-viewed' (see Community issue 13), no matter how wonderful we may consider monastic life to be from the outside, as lay people inspired by this tradition, we have to accept the full implications of the fact that we are *not* monastics.

Every role in life, be it monastic or lay, functions and expresses itself within a larger set of relationships and in a social context. The life and responsibilities of a monk or nun are clearly set out in the rules by which they live, their teaching role and their dependency on the lay community. The life they lead is referred to as the Holy Life.

This holy life was posited as the ideal one for realising enlightenment, in contrast to worldly or lay life. Over the centuries it has inspired and attracted countless numbers of individuals, thus maintaining a continuing living tradition. But an emphasis on the Holy Life as being the perfect mode of life for realisation, can lead to an idealisation of it and a corresponding de-valuing of what can be accomplished in lay life. The complexities and issues that arise in lay life can end up not being understood, or so simplified that it can leave sincere lay practitioners at sea as to how to translate the inspiring Triple Gem of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha into the context of their lay life.

If monks and nuns are living the Holy Life, are lay people living an un-holy life? This provocative question highlights the challenge of translating the ideals of Realisation, the Teachings and a Spiritual Community 'out there' into a lived Realisation right 'here' in lay life. One can make a general statement that certain relative supportive conditions and circumstances are better for practice for some than for others. But each of us has our unique set of circumstances. Just as new discoveries are often made in quite unpredictable circumstances, so we cannot predict in what circumstances an awakening can come about, as for instances in the case of the psychopathic murderer Angulimala on his meeting with the Buddha.

Not all of us have the good fortune to meet an enlightened being, but each one of us is the inheritor of our past *kamma* and the consequences are exactly those conditions that we find ourselves in. So at whatever

point we begin to question who and what we are, we do it in the conditions and circumstances we find ourselves in, exactly AS they ARE. The recognition of this is itself part of waking up to what IS. It makes no difference whether we are a monk or a nun, or Mr. Jones or Ms Smith. Each one of us is then faced with our own specific challenge. And this where the fun begins. The fun of embarking on a deeper journey of enquiry, one that is not concerned with making money, making happy families or making a big name for oneself. The fun of knowing suffering, fully, for oneself. We don't have to look for this suffering. It is here, right now, in yours and my existence. And in the knowing of it is the seed of freedom and eventual release. That insight formulated the Fourth Noble Truth, a universal template, the wonderful eight fold noble path.

Why do I call it wonderful? Because it is succinct, comprehensive, and most of all, practical. It recognizes basic givens about the human being and identifies key factors that bring one to realisation. But as with any template, no matter how universal, its relevance needs to be re-discovered and re-assessed anew by each one of us in the context of the life we find ourselves in.

In this article we will look at the first five parts of the Eight fold Noble path, followed by some comments. In subsequent editions of Community we will look at Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Firstly, *samma-ditthi*, or Right View. Knowing the Four Noble Truths of suffering, it's cause, it's extinction and the eight fold noble path leading to extinction.

The sequence starts with the recognition that we all hold certain views, opinions and beliefs about ourselves, others and the world, what could be described as our mental constructs. Right View is equated with wisdom, or insight. Views that are not in accord with the fruits of insight are simply views or explanations which may have a more limited functional use, or be simply plain wrong and mis-

leading (*micha-ditthi*, Wrong View).

Secondly, *samma-sankappa*, or Right Intention. Intentions free from desire, ill will and cruelty.

This is the recognition that we operate in the world with intentions and aspirations that are based on our views. A central Buddhist teaching stresses the importance of intention in everything that we do or say. Interestingly, this is also a central feature of much psychotherapeutic enquiry, both analytic and systemic, which can focus on an individual life and enquire into many of its causes and effects, or, to use Buddhist terms, into *kamma* (intentionality in words and actions) and their effects. But the Buddha's understanding of enlightened right view and right intention posits something way beyond the commonly accepted psychological or other points of view. It posits a penetrating insight into the nature of reality, which has the effect of transforming the basic motivational drives and intentions in an individual to ones that are paradoxically both quite impersonal and yet specifically empathetic and compassionate. A union of both the absolute and the relative. Or to put it another way, an embodied expression of Compassionate Wisdom.

Thirdly, *samma-vacca*, or Right speech. Speech free from falsehoods, divisiveness, harm or idle chatter.

This reflects the Buddha's recognition some 2500 years ago, of how our views and intentions express themselves in speech. Perhaps the term 'Freudian slip' should be more correctly described as the 'Buddhist slip'. There is often a discrepancy between what we say and what we think or feel. Being untruthful is to distort what is true, or how things are. If we want to know what is real, we have to be truthful both to ourselves and to others. Better to be silent than speak an untruth. Words have a great power to both hurt and heal. So if we are dedicating our life to realisation and compassion, making note of what we say, or are even about to say, can highlight what we are really feeling or thinking and prevent harm to others. Talking can be a great time waster, a way of keeping oneself busy. Both talking and silence can be golden, for knowing when and what to say also implies knowing when to be silent.

Fourthly, *samma-kammanta*, or Right Action. Refraining from harming living beings, from taking what is not given and from sexual misconduct.

Talk, often a substitute for action, is often followed

by action. The degree to which we recognise the interdependence of all things and beings quite naturally reflects itself in what we do. The more self-centred our perspective, the more harm we can cause to others, as well as ourselves. The bigger our perspective, the more responsible our actions can be, including respect for what belongs to others by not taking what is not given. Right action also includes avoiding sexual misconduct. Because of its pleasurable nature, it is easy to ignore or dismiss the effects of our sexual behaviour, much of it need driven, on others. Respecting oneself and others in our sexual behaviour is a recognition of our interdependence with others, as well as of the consequences that follow.

Fifthly, *samma-ajiva*, or Right Livelihood. Abstaining from a livelihood that brings harm to other beings.

One would have thought that Right speech and right action would have been sufficient, but Right Livelihood is given its own place in the eightfold path. For most human beings making a living takes up the best part of our lives. Because it is concerned with survival it is often tempting to rationalise and justify what we do. But the consequences of how we make a living is actually our responsibility. Because it touches on the whole question of income, power and self perception, this can be a challenging part of the path.

Right View and Right Intention are two aspects of wisdom, as Realisation and Intentionality which naturally express itself in moral behaviour as the wisdom of Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. But it also works the other way. Even when not enlightened, our behaviour, if restrained and contained by moral guidelines, creates conditions more likely to enable our realisation, which is a behavioural approach to change and transformation.

So where do Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration fit in, and how are they part of the eight-fold path? We will look at them in more depth in future editions of Community, for they are the pivotal aspects of the path, the keys to transformation, of morality and of realisation, and the perfection of realisation. Understanding their significance highlights the unique depths of Buddhist understanding and practice.

Nick Carroll

Bodhisattva

See how her eyes like gulls, gliding
 across the white mist of her face.
 Or whales swimming in the deep of it.
 So liquid is her skin, her hair hesitates
 to begin. Her nose studies the curled petals
 of her tiny lips and decides to name
 everything *lotus* and *flush* and *open*.

What can you do with a woman like that
 but lay your head in her lap and breathe
 the heat from her belly, the *in*, the *out* of it?
 Bring her the courage of your sadness
 because that's all you have left and let
 the calm weight of her hand soothe you,
 her total absence of drama and façade.

The map around your sternum you try to keep fixed
 she melts, matching you breathe for breath.
 You are molten gold, older than angel hair.
 You've lost all your edges. Which one
 of you lifts up her head? Borrow her crown,
 those flames. Your neck will be a column of air.
 Wish all the people wisdom, wish them well.

Linda France

From 'The Simultaneous Dress' published by Bloodaxe Books 2002

Anguttara Nikaya XI.16 - Metta Sutta

Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

"Monks, for one whose awareness through good will is cultivated, developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken, eleven benefits can be expected. Which eleven?"

"One sleeps easily, wakes easily, dreams no evil dreams. One is dear to human beings, dear to non-human beings. The devas protect one. Neither fire, poison, nor weapons can touch one. One's mind gains concentration quickly. One's complexion is bright. One dies unconfused and -- if penetrating no higher -- is headed for the Brahma worlds.

"These are the eleven benefits that can be expected for one whose awareness through good will is cultivated, developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken."

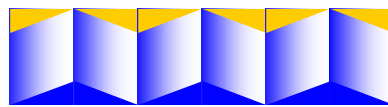
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Good Friends

I wonder if you, like me, have one or two Buddhist books to which you periodically return? Perhaps, like me, you pick them up when a little clarity or inspiration is needed?

When I first started coming to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery and explored the wonderful library there, I was pleased sometimes to flee those sections of weighty tomes and seek refuge in the cosy Good Friends section. Here were slimmer volumes which I felt were light and unconfusing for the beginner.

In this issue, I shall introduce you to one of my 'good friends' [Although I suspect many of you will know him already]. I hope if you have a favorite you might write a few words to the Editor about it. In fact, it doesn't have to be a book at all. Perhaps your helpful friend is a passage from Scripture or a poem.



The Buddha and His Path to Self-Enlightenment by Ronald Fussell 1955 reprinted 1985.

Unfortunately, this book is currently out of print and its publishers, The Buddhist Society, inform me that there are no plans at present to reprint.

The principle sections of this 182 page book are four chapters on the life of the Buddha, followed by single chapters on Karma and Reincarnation; the Three Signs of Being; The Four Noble Truths; The Five Precepts and The Noble Eightfold Path.

The chapters on the Truths and Precepts are interestingly and effectively presented in the form of Buddhist Stories making them particularly suitable, so the author tells us, for reading to children. It is not often, I find, that you get a formal treatment of the Eightfold Path. The lengthy chapter on The Path is my favorite.

The whole book is written with an attractive formality and economy of language. I lost track of the number of times I found myself saying, 'Oh, that's nicely put: I must remember that'. I'd like to quote lots of these bits but perhaps they would not sound so good removed from the gentle fabric of the book.

For me the book is so attractive because it so simply re-states the basic teachings. Many books claim to be for the beginner. In my view this one really is. It's also great for re-beginners.

Tony Spinks

AUA NEWS

Next Years Timetable

At our recent committee meetings, we have been discussing ways to encourage and support broader involvement from upasika and upasaka committee members and volunteers in organising AUA events. Instead of all the organizational and event roles being 'monopolised' by a limited number of highly skilled stalwarts (an outstanding example being Nick Carroll), the intent is that one (or two) from a wider number of committee members will take responsibility for the organization of an event. She or he, will then identify volunteers to manage food, cooking, leading certain parts of the day and any other roles which are needed. The end result of this gradual evolution should be broader participation, and more opportunity for individuals to become involved in the joy, excitement, - and frustrations - of running events. We may also perhaps experience more variety in the events themselves. One result of our deliberations can be seen in the greater numbers of events being planned for next year. We have ten scheduled of which six are single days of practice and four are retreats. One of these is our first three day retreat in May. I am confident that the days of practice and retreats in 2003 will continue to offer an inspiring mix of practical insight, seminal reflections on dhamma teachings and excellent opportunities for mindfulness practice. Please feel free to offer any support you are able to.

Chris Ward

Three Days of Winter Practice

During the Amaravati Winter Monastic Retreat

January 18
February 22
March 22

Arrival at 9.45 for 10am - 5pm

Come along to enjoy the space and peace of Amaravati and join in a day of silent meditation and practice, 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 UPDATE

Teaching weekends

Local supporters here have much appreciated the continuing monthly visits over the summer from the Sangha at Amaravati and Cittaviveka. In June we welcomed Ajahn Ariyasilo, in July Ajahn Karuniko, and in August Ajahn Nyanarato. We benefitted from the meditation workshops they led on the Saturday afternoons, and the talks they give at the Sunday evening puja.

Having welcomed Ajahn Sumangalo for the 21st/22nd September weekend we look forward to greeting Ajahn Vajiro for the 30th November/1st December weekend. There was no visit in October, and instead some of the lay supporters gathered on 19th October for an afternoon of study and practice of Ajahn Maha Boowa's teachings.

For teaching weekends there is limited accommodation for lay people available. Please apply in advance. Help with cleaning chores and preparing and clearing up after the meal would be appreciated.

Other activity

There will be a tree care weekend led by Ajahn Gandhasilo and Rob Whittle for the 16/17 November weekend. If you would like to help, limited accommodation is available. Please apply in advance.

*For details of all events at the monastery
Contact : Sati sati 01305 786821 or
Paul Walker on 01404 891251*

CITTAVIVEKA UPDATE

Dedication and application in abundance have brought their just rewards to a number of major projects completed or nearing completion at Cittaviveka over recent months.

Not only has the under-floor heating been installed in the Dhamma Hall, but the natural stone flooring itself has also been laid, only the final smoothing and polishing remaining to be done.

The Buddha Rupa especially sculptured for Cittaviveka on the monastery campus by world renowned Professor Nonti from Thailand, has now been installed on the Dhamma Hall Shrine, and will be formally dedicated in November at the Kathina.

Professor Nonti brought great joy to everyone who met him, and generously gave of his time, and expertise, to come to England especially for the purpose. Khun Mudita, with her customary enthusiasm and efficiency arranged a very successful fundraising to cover costs of the Rupa, any excess monies being donated to the Dhamma Hall fund.

After a lapse of some five years, an ordination was held at the monastery on July 21st. when samaneras Kassapo and Nanadassano were formally received into the bhikkhu Sangha.

It was a great occasion; the weather was fine and warm, and a great sense of happiness and harmony pervaded the ceremony conducted by Ajahn Sumedho as Upajjhaya.. Hammer pond has now been dredged of silt which had accumulated over many years and soon, (no doubt in company with many species of wildlife), we will once again be able to enjoy the return of clear running water. Work on the new conservatory has also been completed, making an excellent additional meeting room which has already been put to use.

Following his return for the Rains (having been abroad teaching), Ajahn Sucitto, on Sunday Aug. 11th, offered the lay supporters the opportunity to take the Three Refuges and Five Precepts. This is always a popular event which has become established as a yearly feature in the Cittaviveka calendar.

For more details contact : Barry Durrant 01730 821479

The Story

There was once a poor young philosopher who used to make a living by telling fortunes. However, he was an idealistic man and was unhappy with his position in life. One happy day he came by a fortune and decided to buy a large farm from an old farmer. The old farmer had made a good living and wanted to retire. He told the philosopher that his farm was perfect, part of the farm was marshy and contained a lake, whilst the more hilly part was a little rocky and needed irrigation. Fortunately the lake provided the water which could be moved by cart to irrigate the drier area. The philosopher felt that this was in principle unfair. Why should part of the land be dry whilst another part was wet? Also he resented the idea of having to transport water across the land, it would be laborious work. The old farmer explained that moving the water from one part of the farm to the other effectively ensured that the whole farm could be kept watered, but the philosopher felt that this was not reaching the root of the problem.

He hit upon a solution that matched his principles. He would level the whole farm by moving rocks and soil from the higher hilly part down to the marshy area and

Lake and Hill

filling in the lake. The end result would be a level farm upon which the rain fell fairly and which would be equally well watered. He carried out his plan at great expense and much toil.

But, unfortunately the rocky part was now even more arid as the little topsoil that had existed had been removed to fill in the lake. The marshy area was now drier with no lake and could indeed be cultivated, but because all the frogs and other beneficial wildlife had vanished, good crops were difficult to cultivate—they kept being eaten by plagues of insects. The philosopher had to buy water to irrigate his land and nets to try to protect his crops. So the farm produced less than it used to and the philosopher lost his wealth. He had to give up his farm and return to his former way of life.

Later, when back to telling fortunes he realized that success and failure, and gain and loss, were constant companions of life in the world and that simply attaching to his ideals was not enough.

Why should all things be equal?

Chris Ward

Problems in Practice

cw



“Ok, so Arnold has been reborn. Does this mean we have to give him back his old job in the office?”

Amaravati Lay Retreat

We are pleased to announce our first 3 day lay retreat from **Friday 23rd to 26th May** (including bank holiday).

On the theme of :

Meditation - Samatha and Vipassana

Come along to enjoy the space and peace of Amaravati and join in a time dedicated to meditation and practice in good company.

Prior booking is necessary,

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

Please write for booking form to:

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

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 Spring 2003 meetings are:

- Jan - 15th** Beginners Mind
- Jan - 22nd** Getting High - The Brahma Viharas
- Jan - 29th** Skilful Communication?
- Feb - 5th** A Good Living?
- Feb - 12th** Buddhist Cosmology
- Feb - 19th** Women and Buddhism?
- Feb - 26th** Samatha and Vipassana Practice
- Mar - 5th** 5, 8, 10 or 227 Precepts?
- Mar - 12th** Balancing Study and Practice?
- Mar - 19th** Buddhist Ritual and Devotion
- Mar - 26th** Sutta Study
- Apr - 2nd** Perfecting the Perfections
- Apr - 9th** Breaking the Fetters.

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
Steyning / Sussex	Jayanti	01903 812130
Stroud	John Groves	0796 7777742
Taunton	Martin Sinclair	01823 321059
Watford	Ruth	01923 462902
Woking	Rocana	01483 761398

There must be more to life than having everything." -
- Maurice Sendak

"Eternal nothingness is okay if you're dressed for it."
- Woody Allen

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE:

31st Mar 2003

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

E MAIL: upasika@btinternet.com

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

New Internet Site

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

<http://www.buddhacommunity.org>

This is a redesigned site. Feedback on the layout or content of the site are welcomed.

Email to:
info@buddhacommunity.org

Editorial & Production Team :

Chris Ward, Nick Carroll, Tony Spinks, 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.

If undelivered please return to:

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

**AMARAVATI
LAY EVENTS - 2003**

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

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

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

- January 18** Day of Winter Practice
- February 22** Day of Winter Practice
- March 15** Day of Winter Practice
- April 11- 13** **Weekend Retreat - Devotion and Ritual**
- May 17 *** **Wesak Preparations**
- May 18** *Wesak - all welcome*
- May 23-26** **3 day Retreat - Samatha/Vipassana**
(incl. Bank Holiday)
- June 28** Day of Practice - *Are you a Buddhist?*
- July 18-20** **Weekend Retreat - Karma**
- Sept. 12-14** **Weekend Retreat - Creativity**
- Oct. 4** Day of Practice - *Buddhist Cosmology*
- Nov. to be confirmed**
- Dec. 6** Day of Practice - *Monastic and lay life*

* Helping the community with Wesak (18th May) preparations

for more information please contact:

Nick Carroll, 020 8740 9748 or

Chris Ward, 01442 890034

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

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

**Amaravati Monastery
Contact Details**

*Amaravati Monastery,
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ*

Office Phone Number : 01442 842455
Guest Information: 01442 843411
Retreat Information: 01442 843239
Fax: 01442 843721

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