



Community

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The Upasaka & Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 17



Art work in Amaravati Woods produced on the weekend creativity retreat Sept 2002 J.C.P.

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EDITORIAL

Buddhism and the Jedi Knights

Amaravati is a wonderful place to spend time in. It is also a rich Dhamma resource. As well as providing a precious opportunity to train as a *samana*, Amaravati hosts a wide variety of monastic and lay-led retreats, workshops and days of practice.

I wonder how we managed before Amaravati (and the other Thai Forest Sangha Tradition monasteries) existed? In my memory this appears to me as a rather bleak and barren time when reading books by Christmas Humphries was about as good as it got!

Looking backwards also raises questions about the future. How is Buddhism doing in the UK?

Overall in the West, Buddhism is gaining an increasing number of adherents. According to the recent UK census in 2001, around 151,000 felt confident enough to indicate that they were Buddhist. However, the number who gave their religious persuasion as Jedi Knights was around 400,000 and the number who gave no religion was nearly 8m! So not only is the position of UK Buddhism new (and quite complicated), but this is set within a pluralistic society which also contains a strong religious antipathy.

We could label the UK as an increasingly secular society, and in many ways it is, but the 'Jedi Knights' and the 8m giving no religion, hides strong strands of religious and philosophical activity in areas such as non-realist religious thought, radical secularism, humanism, paganism and new age ideologies. We would be mistaken to think that the majority of people are not interested in spiritual and philosophical questions. Every bookshop seems to have a 'mind, body, and spirit' section (and to have at least one book by the Dalai Lama), as well as popular books on various types of philosophy.

Buddhism has always been a missionary faith although its approach has been to make the Dhamma known and available to those who are interested rather than adopting confrontational or coercive proselytising methods.

Given the continuing interest in spirituality in general and Buddhism in particular it is worthwhile to consider how we can make the Dhamma more available to others.

There are many ways to maintain the health of Buddhism **and** to provide opportunities for others to hear the Dhamma. The most fundamental one which we can all adopt is to simply practice with mindfulness and strive to develop virtue and insight. We can also try to learn more

about what we call 'Buddhism' through study.

There are also specific activities which we can support. A recent possibility is to support good internet web sites. A well-designed and informative web site can be accessed by thousands of people every day from almost anywhere on earth. This is an increasingly powerful way of disseminating the Dhamma and one which is unique in the history of religions, where scriptures have traditionally been hard to access.

We should also consider the possibility of establishing additional centres where interested people can meet and find out about Buddhist teachings. Physical meeting places fall into a number of categories.

Amaravati is an excellent example of a rural Dhamma centre and Monastery. Looking at other Buddhist traditions we find similar examples of centres in rural and sometimes remote places which support lay and (sometimes) monastic communities and host regular retreats and meetings for those who can attend. One issue with some of these meeting places is that they are not easy places to get to. This tends to favour the more mobile and committed sections of the community who have their own transport.

In addition to rural centres, we do have many local meditation groups which fulfil a vital role - but which do take some courage to join - and also growing numbers of centres associated with other Buddhist traditions. If judged purely on the success of establishing viable urban based Buddhist Centres (and ignoring the controversies linked with their founder and approach), the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) would have to be regarded as very successful.

There are similar urban centres associated with Tibetan traditions and, of course, Friends Meeting Houses which although obviously from a non-Buddhist tradition (The Quakers) - do provide congenial support for interested visitors.

Perhaps we should be considering creative ways of establishing 'drop in' centres where those with a basic interest can come and find a dhamma book, drink a cup of coffee, recycle some unwanted possessions and sign up for a meditation or study course?

Is this not right aspiration or *kusalachanda*?

Chris Ward

Thanks to www.pambytes.com for free images used in this publication



Dhaniya Sutta

A dialogue between the Buddha and the cowherd Dhaniya as they wait for the monsoon rains. This text forms part of the study material for the Devotion and Ritual weekend. Prepared by Martin Evans.

Dhaniya: 'I have boiled rice and drawn milk, I am
Dhaniya the cowherd,
Here on the bank of the Mahi living with
my people,
My hut is well roofed, I have fuel for my
fire,
So if you want, rain god, rain.'

Buddha: 'I have no cows, no calves, no heifers,
no bull'

Dhaniya: 'I have dug in stakes,
Made new ropes
Even the young calves won't break.'

Buddha: 'Free from anger, all obstructions gone,
I am called the Bhagava,
Here on the bank of the Mahi just one
night living,
My hut without roof, my fire extinguished,
So if you want, rain god, rain.'

Buddha: 'I have broken the fetters like a bull,
Broken the creeper like an elephant,
No more will I enter the womb of
rebirth.'

With flooding over the land
A great cloud rained down.
Having heard the rain god raining
Dhaniya spoke thus:

Dhaniya: 'Here are no gadflies or mosquitoes,
My cows roam in rich pasture,
They should endure the rain if it comes.
So if you want, rain god, rain.'

Dhaniya: 'It is a great gain for us,
To have seen the blessed one,
We go to you for our refuge
We take you as our teacher.'

Buddha: 'My raft was well bound,
Having crossed the flood and gone beyond
(to nibbana),
I have no need for it now,
So if you want, rain god, rain.'

May we live the holy life,
Under your dispensation,
Going beyond birth and death,
Making an end to suffering.'

Dhaniya: 'I have a good wife, obedient, modest,
For a long time living with me in harmony,
No bad do I hear of her,
So if you want, rain god, rain'

Mara*: 'Owning sons, he rejoices
Owning cows, he rejoices
Possessions are for man's delight
There is no rejoicing for a person who is
without possessions'

Buddha: 'My mind is obedient, liberated,
For a long time developed and tamed,
No bad do I find in me,
So if you want, rain god, rain.'

- this is the teaching of Mara.

Dhaniya: 'I am independent, I support myself,
My sons are healthy and living with me,
No bad do I hear of them,
So if you want, rain god, rain.'

Buddha: 'Owning sons, he grieves
Owning cows, he grieves
Possessions are a source of worry
There is no grief for a person who is
without attachment to possessions'

- this is the teaching of the Buddha.

Buddha: 'I am no-one's servant,
My task completed, I can walk anywhere in
the world,
I depend on nothing,
So if you want, rain god, rain.'

Sutta Nipata I.2

Dhaniya: 'I have cows, calves, heifers and a bull'

*Mara personifies evil and acts as a tempter of humans.



Is there a self ?



In a popular and very good book on Buddhism there is a chapter called 'the doctrine of no-soul'.*

It is not unusual to hear the Buddha's teaching of anatta being referred to as a doctrine, but in fact I would dispute that there are any doctrines in the Buddha's teaching. The Dhamma is *ehipassiko* – literally 'come and see' – we are invited to come and investigate, not come and believe.

But we want to believe. We want something to grasp. And we can grasp at this – that there isn't a self. Just like we can grasp the opposite and argue that there is a self, even that the Buddha didn't really mean it when he said there isn't. What a lot of confusion, views, opinions and arguments we can have, what wonderful fun – until we come to blows.

Letting go of views and opinions is what the Buddha taught. Letting go of the self view. This is what we have to do to let go of the conditioned world, to 'cross the stream', to experience the unconditioned.

So it's not about whether there is a self or not, only whether we are attached to a view about it, whether we are tricked by the mind to believe in it.

Whether there is a self or not is of no consequence. It is attachment to our self view that leads to suffering (*dukkha*). That is the only reason the Buddha taught anything – to free us from suffering. If you remember this at every turn, you will never go astray in your practice.

He also taught that there is nothing unchanging in the world. Why did he teach us this? Because holding on to things and wanting them to be permanent brings us suffering.

And he taught that there is suffering. Why? Because we waste our lives trying to find or hold onto happiness, as though permanent happiness were possible, and that brings us suffering.

In other words, whatever we cling to will one day let us down, like a deflated balloon, with a bump when we hit the ground.

And it doesn't help a bit holding onto a view of who

has or hasn't got hurt.

This teaching of non-attachment can be very frustrating to people. It turns everything upside down. After all, we've spent our whole lives holding onto things, ever since we first found our mother's nipple. But it is a great relief when we realise we can let go, that we don't have to hold onto our self view.

I'm not saying the Buddha taught there is a self. That would be quite wrong. But if I tell you that the idea of self is an empty hollow thing, has no substance, and it only arises dependent on conditions, it's no use grasping this as a belief, you have to discover this for yourself from experience,

It can be done. For example, we can fall over, hurt ourselves, change from being a mindful person to being an angry person, to being a stupid person, to being a failure, to being an even bigger failure because we think we're a failure, to being someone who'd better pull themselves together etc. etc. We can see that none of these 'selves' arise independently but only dependent on conditions. It's how we experience the conditioned world. And these conditions are constantly changing.

We are really simple souls. We can only be one thing at a time. We can't be a happy person and a sad person at the same time because we can only have one thought moment at a time. Is the happy person the same person as the sad person? Yes and no. What a muddle if we attach to 'yes' and try to prove that theory, or attach to 'no' and try to prove that. It can't be sorted out intellectually. It's just a burden to be put down.

But the sense of self can be very subtle. There is a sense of 'someone who experiences the world' and we can feel as though this 'experiencer' never leaves us. As much as we look at this feeling, it doesn't go away, there's always someone looking. This feeling of being an observer can become even stronger when we practice mindfulness. Seeing through this 'self' is not an easy thing to do, but it can be done, by learning how to stand back and see, rather than being bound to everything we experience.

Where do we start?

I used to be very dissatisfied with my 'self'. I was very happy with the idea of no self. It was the perfect answer.

Get rid of (kill off) the self. It seemed the answer to every problem.

But killing the self is a very destructive thing to do. It is bound up with self hatred. If I were going to Dublin I wouldn't start from here, as the saying goes. But unfortunately we all have to start from where we are right now. That's what I had to learn. Yet when my first teacher, Ven. Vajiragnana, who is now Head of the London Buddhist Vihara, instructed me in metta meditation I would think, 'why won't you tell me how to get rid of the self, why won't you teach me vipassana (insight meditation)?' I didn't want to practice loving kindness one bit, I wanted to get into the real meat of the Dhamma. But I respected him as a teacher and he seemed to have a kind of radiance, so I persevered with this boring metta meditation.

Some years later I did my first 10 day retreat at Amaravati. It was with Ajahn Anando. It turned out to be metta retreat! But wow, that was something. No drug could ever take me so high!

He taught me about forgiveness, and I forgave myself and all that blame and self hatred fell away. Under his guidance I picked up the broken pieces of my self and stuck them back together, healed myself, made myself whole.

Towards the end of the retreat, just when I thought this loving feeling would last forever, he told me to reflect on who was experiencing this feeling, and then my heaven world collapsed, like Humpty Dumpty falling off a wall, into emptiness, the silent mind. Just like a koan is meant to do.

That's when the reflection on not-self became meaningful, when it was in the silent mind, the open heart. I had discovered the tools to practice with. I'd found the start of the path. We have to put the self back together before we can take it apart.

The practice of mindfulness is a healing process. Whatever arises in the mind is an object of contemplation. When we open up to whatever arises we discover the festering sores in the mind. It's quite simple. Thoughts which don't trouble us just blow through our minds like the wind through a leafless tree. But thoughts which are unresolved hit some resistance. They actually present themselves for contemplation, and if we're too busy or too frightened to look at them they hang around and torment us until we do.

It takes a lot of patience. We have to learn to bear with our thoughts, not get rid of, get hold of or create

anything around them, just patiently let them wear themselves out until they just come and go, like the wind through a tree. Let the war lords come and go. Let the dancing girls come and go. Just like the Buddha, we have to be able to say, 'I know you Mara'. We have to open up to everything. All our 'goodness', all our 'badness'. All our 'success', all our 'failure'. Accept it all. Be free of it all.

Bearing with isn't quite the same as letting go. I know Ajahn Chah said we should let go and I used that as my meditation object for many years, but it seems to me now that I often used it like a weapon to try to kill the self. I misunderstood the teaching, it was a tool I sometimes used unwisely. I attached to the idea of letting go. I needed to be kinder to myself. More metta. Loving kindness has opened the door to the heart for me.

We have to be careful not to get stuck in an intellectual contemplation. Be careful not to get stuck in the head. We can't reason with the mind, because we reason with our delusion. I call it opening the heart because when I take my attention out of the head I find it naturally rests in the heart. Why is that? Because when there are no mental obstructions we discover our true nature, which is kindness and compassion, qualities of the heart. Then the truth is revealed, rather than reasoned out.

And what is revealed is nothing more than an understanding of the self. The 'answer' to the question, 'who am I?' Even if the answer is just a smile. Seeing through our delusion doesn't infer we will find an answer, rather that we will begin to understand the question.

To discover the path through our delusion we have to be able to walk off the edge, the edge of our conditioned world, without fear. Without the fear which makes us catch ourselves, hold ourselves back. We have to be able to let go and trust that the Dhamma will catch us, will always keep us safe. This only comes from taking small steps, one at a time. Like learning to walk. Being patient with ourselves, picking ourselves up and being prepared to start again and again.

Delusion is like a tangled ball of wool. It takes a lot of patience to sort it out, there's a lot of knots to undo. But first we have to find the end, I mean the start and that's right here, right now. This body, this mind.

Martin Evans

*(Walpola Rahula – What the Buddha taught)



The Mind and Body Weekend - April 2002 - A Personal Reflection

When I first saw that the Upasika weekend in April 2002 was on the subject of 'Mind and Body', I must confess to some initial doubts, possibly even a feeling of disappointment.

The Mind part seemed okay, but I have never been keen on physical exercise – which was my reaction the word Body. Double lessons of PE on Wednesday afternoons had been the cause behind this condition. (Perhaps I could introduce a new Zen Koan of 'why is the student with glasses asked to play in goal?').

Resisting the possibility of a Mind and Library weekend, I resolved to give things a go. The structure of the weekend was to choose one of the options (Yoga, Tai Chi, or Chi Kung) and attend all three sessions. This was a good move, as it would have been easy to drift from one to another.

I knew a bit about Yoga and Tai Chi, which was enough to direct me to Chi Kung; interestingly this had the highest number of participants.

The sessions were led by Judith and Alex, who introduced some moving and static exercises respectively. I actually enjoyed the first session. While at times I was probably introducing my own variations to the various exercises, I was pleased that I could do more than anticipated. For me it wasn't a case of getting things exactly right, rather than learning bit by bit and being at ease with the errors.

The second session was outside. This added an extra 'dimension' and was probably the most memorable part of the programme.

The last session ended with the feeling that I would like to try out some more, which is always a good sign. Judith had some tapes available, so the opportunity to do so presented itself and I decided to get one.

Being on a weekend workshop, along with others to encourage you is one thing. Keeping any practice going alone (be it meditation, or a physical discipline) is another. However I am pleased to say that I have used Judith's tape. I also bought a DVD which includes some simple exercises aimed at beginners like me.

In response to the question - do I feel the benefit of Chi Kung? The answer is a definite yes. So my thanks to both Judith and Alex and I will probably now be disappointed if there *isn't* another Mind and Body weekend.

Keith Hammond

A weekend retreat at Amaravati

On the theme of:

Devotion and Ritual

Is devotion and ritual a cultural (and unnecessary) accretion to 'pure Buddhism' or an essential facet of practice?

Friday 11th to 13th April

Come along to enjoy the space and peace of Amaravati and join in weekend of meditation, sutta study and practice, in the company of like-minded companions.

Prior booking is necessary, download a booking form from :

www.buddhacommunity.com.

Or

write for booking form to:

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

*For enquiries please contact - Chris Ward (01442 890034)
Martin Evans (01442 409844) or Nick Carroll (0208 740 9748)*

A Retreat

Why should I go? I asked.

*Be good for you, he said -
no talking, drink or smoking plus
you might lose weight.*

Why am I here? I thought.

*The hours and days creep by
until time seems irrelevant
and place and time dissolve:
almost a trance.
And then it ended.*

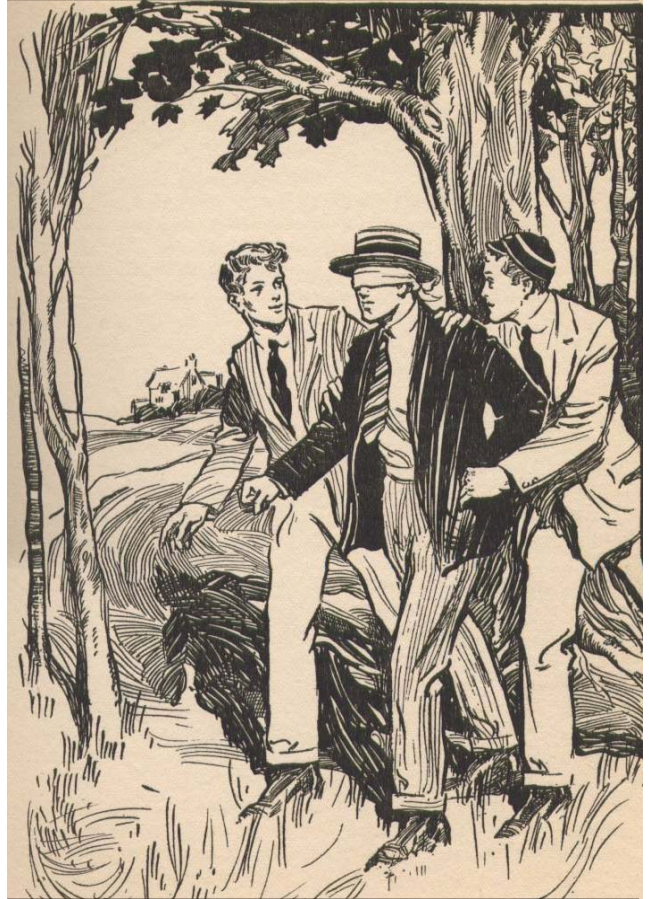
Why did I go? - I said.

*A hopeless love. A few
'bright shoots of everlastingness'.
A glimpse of Love ineffable
which now becomes a steadier view
a glad new landscape for the mind.*

*Yes, it was good for me.
That's why I went.*

Barbara

Helping With Advanced Practice Methods



'Keep going', Edwin encouraged, in deep admiration, 'blindfold walking practice develops incredible levels of concentration!'

Amaravati Lay Retreat

We are pleased to announce our first 3 day lay retreat

Friday 23rd to 26th May (including bank holiday).

On the theme of :

Meditation - Samatha and Vipassana

What is the difference and can only one lead to enlightenment?

Come along to enjoy the space and peace of
Amaravati and find the answer!

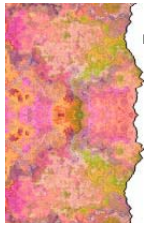
Prior booking **is** necessary,

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For enquiries please contact - Nick Carroll (0208 740 9748) or Chris Ward (01442 890034)

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika Association (AUA)



The Path Re-viewed

from a lay perspective

Part 3

Right Effort

Samma-vayana or Right Effort, as described in the eight-fold path, is the effort of avoiding or overcoming unwholesome things and the effort of developing and maintaining wholesome things. Traditionally, Right Effort is primarily related to the practice of meditation, but in Part 3 of this series we will look at Right Effort as applied in a broader context.

Everyday we are faced with choices and decisions. Especially so in western lay life which is generally relatively healthy with more than enough resources to provide food, shelter, clothing and a surplus of other 'goodies' including free time after work. And yet with all this, towards the end of a day one can feel one has had quite enough. "If only life were a little simpler" I sometimes hear myself saying after all the days' conversations, phone calls, journeys and the like.

It is good fortune to be born as a human being, better good fortune to have many choices and even better fortune to have the choice to hear Dhamma and be able to practice. Now if there were any permanent happiness in conditions, it would be really simple. "Where's the problem, just live and enjoy". No need to practice. And if one measures happiness in terms of all the worldly choices one can have, there is no real answer to that. The problem is that what happiness we find in the world is pretty temporary and uncertain, especially when one considers the daily suffering that so many of our fellow human beings in the world experience, with aching hunger as a constant companion, shortages of clean drinking water, illnesses with little relief, political oppression, random acts of warfare, terror and general exploitation of the strong over the weak.

So what is our suffering all about when we are well fed, with most survival needs met and have so many choices. More subtle perhaps, but still pretty obvious. We still suffer birth, illness, old age and death. We also suffer all the difficulties of ordinary life including disappointments in relationships and problems at work. Even with all the luxuries and pleasures of a comfortable material exist-

tence, many of us, some knowingly, some less so, suffer an existential angst that we try and smother or forget with the help of an endlessly variable and repetitive diet of distractions, attractions, activities and pastimes. This is done with the assistance of whole industries employing vast numbers of people dedicating their lives to creating more wealth, more consumer goods and catering for insatiable needs in a variety of industries. When the Buddha described the world as being 'on fire' it may have been an apt description when he was alive, how much more so is it now. It can be sobering to think that most of us are playing some part in it all, both inwardly and in the world.

So the big question is, can we be happy, and if so,

**'Can we be
happy, and if so
how?'**

how so? The Buddha's answer to this question is equally big, if not bigger. Yes, we can be happy. How? By not being attached to anything. "What! ANYTHING?" Shock – Horror. "Impossible" is the instinctive reply. Is it? Well, no, not according to the Buddha. So, if it isn't impossible then the 'how' becomes really important, and quite rightly so,

because what is being proposed goes so much against the grain of our instincts and basic assumptions about life and ourselves. But before we can fully address the how, it helps to have some working understanding of what this real happiness might be about, so that we can consciously begin the process of realising it.

Ajahn Buddhadasa once described the happiness that the Buddha was pointing to 'as the happiness that knows that there is no happiness in this world'. This description, perplexing as it may sound, is something we can intuit or perhaps have a vague sense of what it might mean. Being presented as a happiness is helpful because it is easy to equate relinquishment with even more and perhaps even worse suffering, as a complete denial of life. But the Buddha was clear that it was not, which is why he spoke of the 'middle way'. Since suffering is inherent in all existence one might as well suffer on the path to freedom from suf-

fering, as opposed to simply perpetuating the endless cycle of suffering in samsara*. It is helpful to understanding the eight fold path as a natural development which leads to peace and well being, to a happiness realised on a knowing, both in the head and heart as it were, of how things are, impermanent and no fixed self experiencing it all, and therefore not worth being attached to. So if knowing is the key, how does one make it real and not just an idea.

One could say that there are different aspects to this knowing. There is the knowing and acceptance of just *how* things are. There is also the knowing also of *why* they are the way they are. So knowing **how** is directly connected with **why**. By knowing the conditionality of all existence, that everything, including ourselves, is dependant on conditions and causes, we can begin to see that if we change the causes of our own lives we also change the results of those causes. Quite simply, if we do good we will reap the fruits of goodness just as when we do evil, we will reap the fruits of evil. This is where the element of choice and individual responsibility comes in.

So although we can't change the present results of what we have done, we can change what we do in the present to affect future results. Out of this understanding comes the emphasis on a moral and ethical lifestyle of thought, word and deed. This is where the importance of the five and eight precepts becomes relevant. As we purify our thoughts, words and deeds, our defilements gradually abate and finally die as we become less bound by our attachments, and happier as a result. This is the path towards cessation.

Given that we all have a mix of potential qualities, it might be good to know what they are. On the 'bad' side are the kilesa's, or the defilements of greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, speculative views, sceptical doubt, laziness, shamelessness and lack of conscience. On the 'good' side are the parami's, or the perfections, that lead to Buddha-hood such as generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness and equanimity. In recognising that we have all these potentialities, the Buddha simply encouraged the development of the parami's as opposed to the kilesa's.

In expanded form, right effort is referred to as sammapadhana, or the Four Right Efforts. The effort to **avoid**, the effort to **overcome**, the effort to **develop** and the

effort to **maintain**. The first two refers to how we deal with the kilesa's, and the second two to the parami's.

So the starting point is to *avoid* unskilful, unwholesome states of mind, words and actions, or the kilesa's. This is the simplest and most direct. In reality though, we find that inevitably we do miss the mark and do get caught up in desires, or anger or just simply lose the plot. The moment we recognise this, and for this some mindfulness and reflection is essential, we can then make an effort not to act out our negative state, in other words *overcome*, or abandon it. We can do that by trying to create a break, creating some space for ourselves and at least not continue with what we are doing, and even better, perhaps do the opposite. This can be quite a challenge.

Right Effort is therefore a key factor on the path

By consciously cultivating positive, non-harmful states of mind, by the choice of the words we use as well as by being more empathetic and understanding of others in our actions, we *develop* our parami's. Through repetition we reinforce our habits. So given the choice and the resultant fruits between good and evil, by repeating skilful

and wholesome states of mind, words and actions, it becomes easier to *maintain* them until it becomes natural for us to do so.

All the parami's are expressions of a non-self centered experience of life and as such they reflect a movement towards non-attachment to life as well as skilful way of living it.

Right Effort is therefore a key factor on the path through which we can come to realise our natural perfection and purity. We have the opportunity to put this into practice at almost every moment, whether it be at home, at work or on the cushion. With repetition, Right Effort will eventually become so natural that it becomes effortless at which point we may even be enlightened. Who knows.

Nick Carroll

In subsequent issues of Community we will look at Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration where the core transformative parts of the path will be examined.

** Samsara. lit. 'perpetual wandering' or the endless round of re-birth and suffering*



Pause for thought

There was a moving and powerful series on the Islamic Hajj - the pilgrimage to Mecca - one of the Five Pillars of Islam on UK television a few weeks back.

Each year as part of the event, the pre-Hajj sacrifices take place. The event is known as - Eid ul Azha. As a result, over 1 million animals were slaughtered in Mecca at the last Hajj.

The festival of Eid ul Azha is celebrated in all Islamic communities. A resident in Bangladesh writes - 'In Bangladesh, *every* family who can afford it buys an animal for ritual slaughter on the day of the Eid. The size of the animal will determine the number of people who are "blessed" by the sacrificial giving. Some of the meat is always given to the needy. Even the very poor might sacrifice a goat, the wealthy large and splendid bulls or even camels. For days before, you see animals tethered outside people's homes, with garlands around their necks.'

I found this sacrificial aspect of the Hajj disturbing, particularly from the Buddhist perspective of avoiding harm to living beings. What do others think? Would any Moslems like to comment? I welcome reflections.

The Editor

Amaravati Lay Weekend 12th –14th September 2003

Creativity and Buddhist Practice

This weekend we hope to explore the meaning of creativity in our lives in the context of Buddhist teachings.

In living, we use our senses consciously or unconsciously all the time. The creative arts are an expression of how we react, process and express these sensory experiences whether it be in language, movement, art or music. When the mind is focused and open, these sensory experiences can provide a fleeting or even a transformative glimpse of life which can radically change and deepen our ordinary experience of phenomena. In Buddhist practice and investigation, the act of creation can be approached as a form of mental training in right effort, mindfulness and concentration which can amplify our ability to be fully present in the moment.

Much of the weekend will be in silence highlighting our concentration and awareness, an ideal backcloth on which to contemplate our individual process. We can experience the environment and produce words, sounds and pictures. The grounds of the monastery can be used as inspiration for creating natural sculptures in groups. In contemplating the process of drawing an object, for example, we can concentrate our attention on seeing rather than drawing. In communication between each other we may notice the natural improvement in listening and speaking that accompanies deeper mindfulness, which in turn leads to more harmonious living.

The weekend can be an opportunity to explore our personal creativity and share our experiences in the context of the teachings of the Dhamma with like-minded people.

Contact: Jane Carrington-Porter - 01564 772166 (jane@carrington-porter.fsnet.co.uk) for details and a booking form, or you can copy a booking form directly from the web site : www.buddhacommunity.org or write to : Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika Association (AUA), Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 3BZ

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Good Friends

In this edition, a rather special book is reflected upon – a book which is fondly remembered as helping to mark the beginning of a journey. If you would care to write about such a book or even perhaps a sutta or a poem which has particular meaning for you or that you simply love to return to, then please send it to the Editor. Thank you.

‘Modern Buddhism’ [by Jacqui and Alan James, Aukana Press, 1987].

At times when I need to reestablish myself in the practice, I often find it helpful to go back some 12 years to recall how and why I came onto the Path in the first place.



It was at my sister’s house where, feeling a bit bored, I picked a book from her shelves entitled, ‘Modern Buddhism’.

I knew nothing of Buddhism and from being a Catholic I then followed no recognized religion or spiritual path. I did however believe strongly that kindness, compassion and non-harming and respect for all living things was so important. That’s what I thought religion should be about but I looked and could not find ‘just that’. There were always judgments, discrimination and rules. In just the first few pages of ‘Modern Buddhism’ I read that loving kindness compassion and the Precepts were the roots of the Practice. I’ll always remember my elation and the feeling of discovering a desert oasis. I have read many good Buddhist books in the meantime but ‘Modern Buddhism’ remains my favorite – how could it not?

Although it has years ago passed from my bookshelves, I mentally return to it again and again.

Ulara

The Buddha And The Sahibs; The men who discovered India’s lost religion

By Charles Allen, John Murray, 2002

This book is likely to come out in paperback soon and represents one of the most significant narratives on the history of Buddhism for a lay audience. Charles Allen’s last book, ‘Soldier Sahibs’ was on war and adventure by British soldiers in India and this new book has not earned the most original of titles. Allen is however, more qualified than most to have written this dramatic portrayal of how the secrets of the history of Buddhism were eventually revealed, largely by British Orientalists starting from around two hundred years ago.

The book begins by describing Europe’s first contacts with Buddhism and how brutal this contact often became in the light of Christian missionary activity which sought to replace Buddhism, particularly in Sri Lanka. It describes the derision with which imperialists treated the heathen religions they encountered with their ‘abominable idolatry’. However, the following chapters seek to reveal how this derision and ignorance gave way to enlightened speculation about the darkest chapters of Indian history, and how some of these chapters were finally revealed by the use of ancient texts in S.E. Asia and Sri Lanka matched against archaeological finds. We learn how the identity of Emperor Asoka was pieced together along with gripping material on the discovery of relics of the Buddha and sites of ancient Buddhism. This book is both an account of the history of Buddhism as well as the history of the discovery of Buddhism and the Buddha in the West.

Rajith Dissanayake

AUA NEWS

SOME REFLECTIONS ON BEGINNING

Looking around at the many young people meditating, I sometimes feel some regret that it took me over 50 years to discover Buddhism, in spite of various opportunities including visiting Bodh Gaya and other Buddhist sites and monasteries when travelling in northern India and Nepal. However it wasn't until I returned to England after living abroad for many years that I was ready to begin Buddhist practice. Perhaps to make up for this long delay, I now find myself in ideal

circumstances: I am retired and live alone, quite near to Amaravati, so I have no excuses for not practising!

I feel particularly lucky to have Amaravati so near. Buddhism opened a whole new world to me and, with a tendency to restlessness and wandering, it was tempting to begin an exploration into the many different traditions and centres that are available to us in this country. At the same time, from the first moment I entered the temple and met the monks and nuns at Amaravati I felt it was the right place for me. Rather than investigating the fascinating cultural and intellectual sides of Buddhism, probably in a discursive way, Amaravati helped me to begin my practice in a more focused and grounded way.

Now, four years later, I am very grateful for the opportunities I enjoy. I began by attending the Saturday afternoon meditation workshops, going on to weekend and longer retreats, run by both monastic and lay groups. One of the most encouraging factors for me has been the example of experienced practitioners, both monastics and lay people - to be able to see with my own eyes the positive results of practice in the people I have met. I have found the Buddha's teaching that friendship with admirable people is the most helpful external factor for a learner to be very true. I

sometimes wonder how beginners meditating alone without Buddhist friends or a monastery nearby manage to sustain their practice - I'm not sure that I would have had the determination and perseverance to do so.

I've always found the company of lay people on the AUA Days of Practice to be particularly helpful, so I was pleased to see that this year there would be an increased number of AUA retreats. When I read the request for volunteers in Community, I was happy to put my name forward to help in their organisation. As well as the opportunity to give a small return for the benefits I've received, I'm quite curious to see how the AUA Committee differs from committees I've been involved with in the past. I'm sure a committee run on "Buddhist lines" is going to be very different and much more enjoyable!

Vivian Miles

Buddhist Studies at the University of Sunderland

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For further details on the course:
<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/buddhist/>



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.

The Story ?

The Goat That Laughed and Wept

Matakabhatta Jataka (Jataka No. 18)

Ken & Visakha Kawasaki Buddhist Publication Society Bodhi Leaves BL 135

The Jataka Tales comprises a large body of over five hundred stories mostly about past incarnations of the Buddha and his disciples, and are meant to teach Buddhist values including self-sacrifice, honesty, and morality. These stories are a part of the Pali Canon, and they illustrate traditional Buddhist teachings. They have often been used to introduce children to Buddhism. Note that in Buddhist Cosmology, a 'deva' is a type of non-human being or god who inhabits the lower heavenly realms.

One day, while the Buddha was staying in Jetavana, some bhikkhus asked him if there was any benefit in sacrificing goats, sheep, and other animals as offerings for departed relatives.

"No, bhikkhus," replied the Buddha. "No good ever comes from taking life, not even when it is for the purpose of providing a Feast for the Dead." Then he told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Baranasi, a brahman decided to offer a Feast for the Dead and bought a goat to sacrifice. "My boys," he said to his students, "take this goat down to the river, bathe it, brush it, hang a garland around its neck, give it some grain to eat, and bring it back."

"Yes, sir," they replied and led the goat to the river. While they were grooming it, the goat started to laugh with a sound like a pot smashing. Then, just as strangely, it started to weep loudly. The young students were amazed at this behavior.

"Why did you suddenly laugh," they asked the goat, "and why do you now cry so loudly?"

"Repeat your question when we get back to your teacher," the goat answered. The students hurriedly took the goat back to their master and told him what had happened at the river. Hearing the story, the master himself asked the goat why it had laughed and why it had wept.

"In times past, brahman," the goat began, "I was a brahman who taught the Vedas like you. I, too, sacrificed a goat as an offering for a Feast for the Dead. Because of killing that single goat, I have had my head cut off 499 times. I laughed aloud when I realized that this is my last birth as an animal to be sacrificed. Today I will be freed from my misery. On the other hand, I cried when I realized that, because of killing me, you, too, may be doomed to lose your head five hundred times. It was out of pity for you that I cried."

"Well, goat," said the brahman, "in that case, I am not going to kill you."

"Brahman!" exclaimed the goat. "Whether or not you kill me, I cannot escape death today."

"Don't worry," the brahman assured the goat. "I will guard you."

"You don't understand," the goat told him. "Your protection is weak. The force of my evil deed is very strong."

The brahman untied the goat and said to his students, "Don't allow anyone to harm this goat." They obediently followed the animal to protect it.

After the goat was freed, it began to graze. It stretched out its neck to reach the leaves on a bush growing near the top of a large rock. At that very instant a lightning bolt hit the rock, break-

Continued Overleaf

The Goat That Laughed and Wept—continued

ing off a sharp piece of stone which flew through the air and neatly cut off the goat's head. A crowd of people gathered around the dead goat and began to talk excitedly about the amazing accident.

A tree deva had observed everything from the goat's purchase to its dramatic death, and drawing a lesson from the incident, admonished the crowd: "If people only knew that the penalty would be rebirth into sorrow, they would cease from taking life. A horrible doom awaits one who slays." With this explanation of the law of kamma the deva instilled in his listeners the fear of hell. The people were so frightened that they completely gave up the practice of animal sacrifices. The deva further instructed the people in the Precepts and urged them to do good. Eventually, that deva passed away to fare according to his deserts. For several generations after that, people remained faithful to the Precepts and spent their lives in charity and meritorious works, so that many were reborn in the heavens.

The Buddha ended his lesson and identified the Birth by saying, "In those days I was that deva."

**SUNYATA RETREAT CENTRE,
CO. CLARE, IRELAND**



...a Buddhist haven in the west of Ireland

Sunyata is a family-run retreat centre with a strong connection with the Thai Forest Sangha and with Gaia House.

We have charming self-catering accommodation for both long and short term rent. Visitors are welcome to use the beautiful meditation hall and to join in our weekly sitting group. A short stay could be combined with a retreat.

Our coming highlights are:

- Family weekend and Wesak celebration - Ajahn Khantiko May 30-June 2
- 5 day retreat with Ajahn Candasiri - June 20-25
- 9 day retreat with Ven. Bodhidhamma (Gaia House) August 22-31
- 3 day retreat with Catherine McGee (Gaia House) Oct 24-27

During the summer there are opportunities for budget short term accommodation in return for work in the gardens.

From September 2003 there will be a cottage (2 bedroom), suitable for couple or small family, and a studio apartment, suitable for a single person available for long term rent (6-12 months). Ideal for anybody who wanted to move to work in Shannon/Limerick area of Ireland or who can work from home and would like to live in an environment suitable for dhamma practice.

For more details please contact Stan or Clare de Freitas, Sunyata Retreat Centre, Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, Ireland. Tel (from UK) 00-353-61-367073, email:info@sunyatacentre.com and see our website www.sunyatacentre.com

The Next Nuns Pilgrimage

Once again, Jen Thomas and I are fund raising for two nuns to go on a Pilgrimage to India in December 2003. This time it will be Sister Metta and Sister Santacitta. Any contributions however small will be most welcome. Cheques should be sent to Amaravati and made payable to the English Sangha Trust and on the back write - 'Nun's Pilgrimage'.

Any Further information or enquiries please phone Jill Osler on 01179 631610

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 2003 meetings are:

Apr	- 30th	Making Merit?
May	- 7th	The Buddha's Chief Disciples
May	- 14th	What is Conditionality?
May	- 21st	Ten Good Paths of Action
May	- 28th	Is Buddhism a religion?
Jun	- 4th	Chanda - Right Attachment?
Jun	- 11th	The Metta Sutta
Jun	- 18th	Noble Persons.
Jun	- 25th	Is liberation our true nature?
Jul	- 2nd	The Undetermined Questions
Jul	- 9th	Wisdom versus Faith?
Jul	- 16th	Sutta Study - Parinibbana

For further details contact:

Chris Ward 01442 890034

Radmila Herrmann 01865 202462

'One strong in wisdom and weak in faith errs on the side of cunning and is as hard to cure as a disease caused by medicine.'
(Buddhagosa, Visudimagga, : IV.47)

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE:

31st Jun 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

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Bedford	David Stubbs	01234 720892
Berkshire	Penny Henrion	01189 662646
Belfast	Paddy Boyle	02890 427720
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Brighton	Nimmala	01273 723378
Bristol	Lynn Goswell (Nirodha)	0117 968 4089
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Canterbury	Charles Watters	01227 463342
Dublin	Eugene Kelly Rupert Westrup	Eire 285 4076 Eire 280 2832
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Community Newsletter by Email

We can 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

Internet Site

This Newsletter and other Upasika information (including late changes to the lay events programme) can be found on the internet at:-

<http://www.buddhacommunity.org>

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:

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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

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

April 11- 13
May 17 *
May 18
May 23-26

June 28
July 18-20
Sept. 12-14
Oct. 4
Nov.
Dec. 6

Weekend Retreat - Devotion and Ritual
Wesak Preparations
Wesak - all welcome
3 day Retreat - Samatha/Vipassana
(incl. Bank Holiday)
Day of Practice - Are you a Buddhist?
Weekend Retreat - Karma
Weekend Retreat - Creativity
Day of Practice - Buddhist Cosmology
to be confirmed
Day of Practice - Monastic and lay life

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

**PLEASE CHECK FOR LATE CHANGES TO THE PROGRAMME ON THE WEB SITE www.buddhacommunity.org

Or 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