



Community

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The Upasaka & Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 19



The adoration of the Buddha's begging bowl. Drawn by Henry Hamilton of a carved limestone medallion unearthed at Amaravati in 1817. By permission. © The British Library [WD 1061, folio 65].

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EDITORIAL

Theory versus Practice?

One quite often finds a subtle disparaging attitude in Buddhist circles towards what might be called the ‘theory’ as opposed to the ‘practice’ of Buddhism. This is perhaps based upon a general assumption that most Western people think too much, and there may be some truth in this. But this attitude can also set up unnecessary barriers.

‘Practice’ in Buddhism tends to be contrasted with inertia, complacency or inactivity, rather than with study itself. In fact there does not seem to be a simple Pali equivalent to our Western idea of ‘theory’. As far as I can tell, even the *Abhidhamma* which quite exhaustively analyses the patterns of our subjective experience does not identify ‘theory’ as a special kind of concept distinct from other mental objects.

One can see that an obsessive attachment to the minutiae of scriptures may not be helpful towards liberation—but then it is the obsessive attachment (to anything) that is the problem rather than the scriptures. A knowledge of the *Suttas*—the discourses of the Buddha and his disciples—and a study of later commentaries and modern discourses is surely an indispensable part of a serious engagement with the Buddhist path.

In fact insight is said in the *Suttas* to arise from :

- a study of Dhamma teachings
- listening to Dhamma discourses
- cultivating calm and clear states of awareness

I can confirm this in my own practice. After many years of focusing mostly on the second and third of the above list, I have in the past few years started to put more effort into the first. As a lay-practitioner I have found structured study to be a good way of motivating me to engage with Buddhist teachings whilst also living a busy lay-life. I have also realised how important it is to genuinely explore what Buddhism is all about from an historical as well as a Dhamma perspective.

We owe it to ‘Buddhism’ to really investigate it with an inquiring and open mind. Not only can we then gain a new perspective on the teachings, but we can

really appreciate the implicit views and attachments in our own attitudes to Buddhism. We all carry around our own ‘personal Buddhism’, that we can get very attached to.

One can see that Western education tends to develop the intellect and that to balance this, it is a good idea to devote regular effort to awareness and mindfulness, supported by a variety of meditation practices. Buddhism does focus a great deal upon direct empirical experience in the current moment rather than encouraging absorption in the imagination. We must also be careful that we are not operating from an assumption that the purpose of the path is to arrive at a satisfying intellectual appreciation of Buddhism. This would be to ignore the Buddha’s observation that enlightenment is ‘subtle, to be appreciated by the wise and is not attained by mere reasoning’.

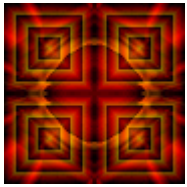
But it is possible and skilful to harness the intellectual capacity that we possess towards a reflective investigation of the teachings. In this practice one is taking a teaching (for example the first Noble Truth) as a hypothesis to be investigated. We may read teachings related to this hypothesis and listen to and consider Dhamma discourses. This is then combined with meditation and mindfulness in our daily lives. The net effect is that we are applying all of our faculties towards the realisation of insight into the given hypothesis. Without the teaching we would have no hypothesis to investigate; and without investigating our present reality we are unlikely to penetrate and gain insight into the teaching.

We do not need to have superhuman intelligence or great intellectual capacity to practice in this way. Neither do we have to get to the bottom of all the teachings - just enough will do.

As Ajahn Chah says in *Taste of Freedom*:

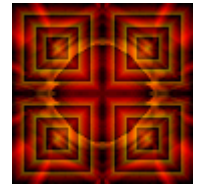
‘the Buddha wanted us to study the scriptures, and then give up evil actions through body, speech and thoughts. If we only talk, without acting accordingly, it’s not yet complete.....Defilements are born right here. If you know them, they die right here. So you should understand that the practice and the study both exist right here.’

Chris Ward



Holiday Reflections

The Via Ferrata



*(For those of you who don't know, the **Via Ferrata** (iron way) is a network of wire ropes, ladders and metal steps constructed by Italian soldiers during the 1914–18 war to enable them to get about on the summits and steep slopes of the Dolomites at the front line border with Austria).*

Last summer my partner and I spent a few days walking and scrambling in the Dolomites in Northern Italy. This involved carrying our luggage, walking from one alpine refugio to the next, using stretches of **Via Ferrata** to cross precipitous stretches of the route, at altitudes between 5 – 10,000 feet. We had been before, but this time we planned more ambitious 'D' routes based on our judgement that we fitted with the guidebook requirement of being 'surefooted, free from vertigo and experienced at mountain walking'.

From Fear to Trust

When my partner told me about the **Via Ferrata** several years ago and her wish for us to climb there together, I was doubtful. So I was expectant as well as apprehensive as we set off on our chosen route this year, knowing there was the possibility of getting stuck in awkward conditions if we didn't complete a day's journey between one shelter and the next. However, after the first trial climb on a stretch of 'grade D' I gained confidence in my feet, hands and head (the remnant of my vertigo dissolving). From then on I had the powerful experience of letting my fear go and developing trust in myself, in the guidebook and the mountain itself. Whatever lay ahead (and sometimes we wondered how the path could possibly go over, around or down what we could see in the distance) I began to trust all would be well. I realised with a new clarity how fear restricts and how blessed it is to live in the moment, trusting the way.



Focus on the Feet

Friends tell me (and I need no convincing) that I live in my head. So, as a rather over-active type I find walking a release from thinking, particularly when the terrain demands complete focus on the feet. Eight hours or so a day, focussed on sure-footedness along paths, over rocks, along ledges, across steep traverses gave me a wonderful sense of breathing and being.

Travelling Light

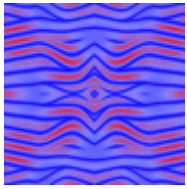
About four years ago I had a back operation and carrying even light loads was a problem. What joy now to be able to pack a rucksack and be free again to walk from place to place. What a lesson in travelling light, a lesson in sifting out whatever was not strictly necessary. I realised how little I needed beyond survival equipment for heat, cold and wet in the mountains, and that I could trust in finding food and water from the refuges en route.

Letting Go of Desire

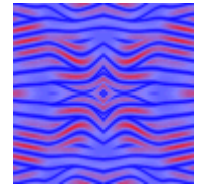
I have noticed how holidays tend to bring up in me, as well as in others, strong attachment to the 'right conditions'. An ideal opportunity to reflect on the suffering that comes with desire. I love sunshine and I like views. Choosing holidays in the mountains confronts this desire powerfully. When we had first arrived in Cortina by plane, train and bus, we missed the last funicular to our first refugio 3,000 feet above us. So we walked. Down came the rain, the lightning and the thunder, drenching us for the three hour struggle upwards. The next three wet days taught us to relax, to let go, to rethink our plans, to go with the flow - keeping to the low ground in the rain - allowing us to ease out initial stiffness, and to increase our stamina.

And then the sun returned, coming and going as it chose.

Suzie Reindorp



Buddhism and Meetings



When you ask people their opinion about meetings it is often negative, using adjectives such as, 'boring' or 'painful' to describe the experience. But I think meetings are important. An important part of our Buddhist practice.

In the Parinibbana sutta, the sutta which chronicles the last few months of the Buddha's life, the Buddha is consulted by the king of Maghada whether he should wage war on the Vajjis. The Buddha advises him that no harm can be done to the Vajjis in battle. Why? Because they observe the 7 conditions for a nation's welfare:

- They have frequent gatherings
- They attend to their affairs in concord
- They respect their constitution
- They listen to their elders
- They treat women well
- They honour their religious shrines
- They protect the 'Holy Ones'.

Do we follow these principles in the AUA?

We hold meetings regularly and anyone is welcome to join us. We attend to our affairs in concord (we seek understanding rather than conflict). We have a constitution which we respect. We listen to each other (as most of us are verging on elderly, it seems therefore that we must listen to elders). I understand from the women I have spoken to, that they consider themselves well treated. We honour our religious shrines and I'm sure we protect the 'Holy Ones'.

All of this bodes well for the welfare of our community.

However, that's not to say our meetings are never without their challenges. For example, this is an extract from the minutes of our AUA meeting held in October (our minute taker is Tony Spinks):

'There now followed a full and heartfelt discussion on whether or not we should offer a women's only retreat. Both sides of this discussion were put forward persuasively and eloquently, allowing all views to be heard. Our discussions revealed the feelings and reasons for such an event as well as the concerns and anxieties around the issue. Those supporting the idea mentioned the sensitivity and vulnerability of women and how such an event might be helpful in meeting their specific needs. Those with concerns mentioned the possible longer term implications of exclusion of men from what had been up till now, mixed gender lay community events – and how such a development might bring in an element of divisiveness into the community. The potential positive benefits that might come from this development were also considered. All this demonstrated our world of suffering.'

It is interesting to look a little at the background to this discussion. At our previous meeting we had discussed the suggestion of a separate retreat for women in next years schedule but we preferred initially an alternative weekend on the theme of "Gender and relationships in the context of practice", which would be open for both men and women to attend and which would allow us to assess the level and type of demand for a women only event. However Jenni, who had put the initial suggestion forward, hadn't been able to attend to express her views, so we agreed to discuss it again.

This time the discussion went this way;

'Those supporting the idea mentioned the sensitivity and vulnerability of women and how such an event might be helpful in meeting their specific needs. Those with concerns mentioned the possible longer term implications of exclusion of men'

This is how we found a way through these views;

'Eventually, all present at the meeting were invited to share their views and feelings on the matter in turn.....'

So in order to resolve the issue, everyone was given an opportunity to speak and be listened to in turn, not to be interrupted, in the spirit of an offering to the group.

Why? Because when people get caught up in a debate their views tend to strengthen, it's a natural tendency to want to win a debate. Then others join in, often tending to take sides, not out of wisdom but as an emotional reaction as 'tensions rise'. As the debate rolls on we become so concerned with what want to say, and how you are going to get a word in, we forget to listen.

When each person is given the opportunity to speak in turn as an offering to the group, without being interrupted or replied to or attacked for what they say, everyone listens, knowing that they in turn will be listened to.

Then the question was raised whether we intended to hold a vote to resolve the issue. We agreed not to hold a vote.

The issue of voting is an interesting one. I am familiar with a principle held by the Society of Friends that voting simply divides people on the basis of majority and minority, not on the basis of truth. If a majority vote carries a decision the issue clearly isn't resolved, and by definition, someone is alienated from the decision arrived at.

In my opinion voting on trivial issues is fine, but on important issues, it can lead to resignations – as I think it could have in this case. When consensus is required, both the majority and the minority have to move towards some common ground, to find a way of the heart through the net of views.

How do we find a way of the heart? So-called wisdom which provides us with fixed views about how things ought to be is the wisdom of the intellect. True wisdom is the wisdom of the heart. The wisdom of the heart doesn't let ideas get in the way of kindness and compassion.

That is why we start our AUA meeting with a

period of silence, to let go of busy-ness. Then early in the agenda we call to mind our 'community', those who can't be with us and those experiencing difficulty in their lives. This is the spirit in which we meet to discuss our 'business'. It is in this spirit we can hold the differing views which arise from the conditionality we bring, the place we come from. And the suffering that follows, that is something we can hold too. All in the confidence that we will find a way through, with love and friendship intact. That confidence which is the direct result of the strength of our practice in the Dhamma.

'It is a natural tendency to want to win a debate'

And what was the decision?

'With an acknowledgement of the reservations raised, the collective decision was to proceed with the event, initially as a 'one-off', and to see how things developed.'

The way we arrived at our decision was far more important than the decision itself.

And after the meeting, it was interesting to see how those present who had held differing views immediately went to talk to their apparent 'adversaries' to make sure that if there were any wounds, they were healed right there.

I value our meetings greatly. I think they are worthy of being called Buddhist meetings. Which isn't to say that they are perfect, that we always get it right, but that we try to make our meetings part of our practice.

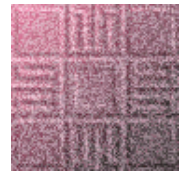
If you are interested to attend a meeting, whether as an observer or because you would like to become more involved in the organisation of the AUA and to support our activities, contact Nick Carroll or Chris Ward who can tell you when the next meeting will be and how to find us (their contact details are at end of Community).

Come along. You may find it changes your mind about meetings.

Martin Evans



'Doing a David Blaine' Buddhist and Jain aspects



By the time this is printed David Blaine will have ended his fast planned for 44 days in London in a Perspex box. He has been something of an inspiration to those who wish to contemplate fasting and the limits of the human body in this regard.

David Blaine fasted without food and apparently with just pure water for sustenance. This represents an extreme in fasting - many on hunger strike still permit themselves salts or fruit juices. Experts describe in detail the various stages of the fasting process concluding that after 60 days death will occur. Intermediate stages include irritation, swollen glands, hallucination and many other privations as the body begins to eat itself in order to find enough energy. In newspapers there have been descriptions by those who tried a Blaine style fast lasting up to 33 days. Based on insights from the East however, this sort of starvation is the tip of the iceberg and physiologists seem to severely underestimate the capacity of the human body to starve, particularly in a religious context.

Indian asceticism at the time of the Buddha included self mortification as a means of salvation. The Buddha is said to have tried this method for several years and he probably went beyond 44 days in a Blaine-style fast. There are some autobiographical details of this presented in at least two suttas and unlike

Blaine the Bodhisatva was reduced to a skeleton:

"Like dried reeds now became my arms and legs, like the footprint of a camel the mark of my seat, like a string of beads my backbone. As the beams of an old house stick out, so did my ribs stick out. But not by this severe mortification did I win to knowledge." (Sutta 26 Majjhima Nikaya) The Buddha started by confining himself to fruits, then leaves, and finally a few grains before abandoning food altogether. Traditionally he ended his fast with a bowl of rich milk rice offered by Sujata.

From the Pali canon it is clear that there was a pre-Buddhist practise of keeping the 15th of the month described as the "fast day" (the full moon day), which was continued by Buddhists. Whether this meant fasting for 24 hours is not clear, though it is likely that people did keep fast days in ancient India in the full sense of the term. The Buddha warned his disciples against self mortification in his very first discourse, he also laid down a rule on "eating at the proper time" for his order - effectively permitting one main meal per day.

Such rules were not laid down for lay people though they seemed to follow the "fast day" on the 15th of the month - which today translates as taking eight precepts on a full moon for some Buddhists. Many Buddhist monks



*Gandhara image of self mortifying Bodhisatta.
Lahore Museum, Pakistan.*

and nuns continue to keep full fast days as part of their practice today.

Fasting and even one meal a day appear draconian for those living with no shortages in developed countries, but a picture of austerities in ancient India and the endurance of Blaine are put into context when compared with Jainism which grew alongside Buddhism and is probably the religion most committed to preserving all forms of life.

The Jains regard Buddhists as a community which has lapsed from the austere path of salvation. They have a festival which includes fully fasting for eight days at a stretch. (Based on one story in the Dhammapada, being deprived of food for seven days was seen as the result of a misdeed in a previous life).

Whereas in other religions people engage in feasting when celebrating, the Jains fast. Based on a talk I attended there is a Jain practice of eating only on alternate days. One modern Jain woman has maintained this practice for nine years. One Jain has fasted for a staggering 411 days. Apparently, NASA are studying him to see if this can be applied to astronauts. Fasting Jains watch the sun during sunrise and sunset and have a theory that the eyes can extract energy from it rather like plants through leaves. I conclude that most physiologists are probably wrong in setting limits of 60 days for starvation, as in a religious context at least, fasting practised carefully is a triumph of mind over matter (some snakes can remain alive and well with no food or water for over 60 days).

In Buddhism, self mortification is not a path to salvation, but aspects of the eight precepts and the fast day of the 15th imply learning something about renunciation and not taking food for granted, for oneself or other beings. Of ten questions asked during the initiation ceremony from ordaining novices, the first is "What is the one?" to which the answer is "All beings are sustained by food."

Rajith Dissanayake

(Ed. The Jains were contemporaries of the early Buddhists and followed a strict regime of harmlessness. Many suttas describe the Buddha debating points of doctrine with the Jains. Interestingly, although Buddhism effectively ended in India around the 12th century following Moslem and Hindu persecution, the Jains maintained a continuing presence)

Buddhist Philosophers?

'What is the relationship between the doctrine of Sunyata (emptiness) and scientific determinism?'

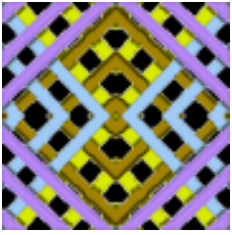
Bruno Bertotti, an Amaravati retreatant from Italy and professional physicist would be interested in exploring this theme with a practising Buddhist philosopher who is perhaps familiar with K.Nishitani's book "Religion and Nothingness".

You can contact Bruno on: bb.142857@pv.infn.it or write to him at Via Chiozzi, 11 27100 Pavia, Italy.

Amaravati Monastic Led Retreats

April 2-4	Ajahn Natthiko
April 16-18	Sr Anandabodhi & Sr Santacitta
April 30-May 9	Ajahn Amaro
May 21-23	Sister Anandhabodhi
June 5-12	Aj Jitindriya & Ajahn Thaniya
July 2-11	Ajahn Vimalo
July 23-25	Tahn Revato
August 6-15	Ajahn Vajiro
September 3-12	Lp Sumedho
September 24-26	Sr Metta
October 15-17	Ajahn Vimalo
Oct 29-Nov 2	Ajahn Natthiko
November 19-21	Ajahn Thaniya
November 26-30	
December 10-12	
Dec27- Jan 1	Ajahn Khantiko

Note that some of these events are full, or have waiting lists. For booking details go to: <http://www.amaravati.org/abm/english/announce/2004.html>

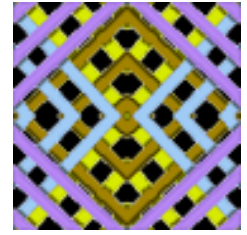


The Path Re-viewed

*The eight-fold noble path from
a lay perspective*

Part 5

“Samadhi”



The theme of this article is *Samma-Samadhi*, or ‘Right Concentration’ as it is usually translated, and it brings us to the heart of meditation practice, the eighth step of the Noble path. But like the heart in our physical bodies, it does not exist in isolation from the remainder of the body. *Samma-samadhi* is part of a practice based on a moral and ethical life style as described in Right Speech, Action and Livelihood. As we saw in the last two articles it is also inseparable from Right Effort and Right Mindfulness.

It is important to note at this point that the key word throughout the path is the word *samma* or ‘Right’. For concentration in itself is not necessarily based on a good intention. A killer can be fully concentrated on his potential victim, just as a chess player can be fully focused on his next move towards winning a game. The prefix *samma* or ‘Right’ indicates that the intention of ones practice is towards the ultimate noble goal, that of being enlightened.

Samadhi has proved a never-ending source of fascination for spiritual seekers. For many it is the ‘Holy Grail’ of practice, with its references to the *jhana*’s (meditative absorptions) and its associated altered states of consciousness, not to mention the spiritual powers that can follow. It beats hands down the enjoyments of retail therapy and is associated with the ideal of becoming an enlightened being. It can also all too easily result in getting lost in an increasingly subtle prison of ‘spiritual materialism’, where attainments become the object of practice.

Although some states of *samadhi* can be experienced in normal waking daily activity, the ‘deeper’ states are generally experienced in states of physical stillness which explains why there is so much ‘sitting’ meditation practice in virtually all Buddhist schools. As attention is directed inwards, much of the ‘stuff’ that lies below the threshold of our normal daily consciousness becomes more apparent. This includes states of inner disorientation such as free flowing contradictory and confusing thoughts, associations and fantasies along with feelings and sensations of desire, frustration, anger, self-hatred, fear, sleepiness, disorientation and depression, discomfort, as well as confusion and doubt. Even with regular practice these can re-occur for long periods of time. All these were identified in the Buddha’s teachings as hindrances to meditation, or the five *nivaranas*. They were described using the analogy of different states of water, which when still, can be a pure

reflective medium.

1. The experience of lust and sensual desires (such as sex or food), is described as ‘water mixed with manifold colours’
2. Anger or ill will (towards oneself or others) as ‘boiling water’
3. Sloth and torpor (dreamy half waking states on the borderline of sleep and often sleep itself) as ‘water covered with mosses’.
4. Restlessness and scruples, the former including physical discomfort, the latter including self-criticism, as ‘agitated water whipped by the wind’, and finally
5. Sceptical doubt (a sense of futility or failure, lack of trust in one’s teacher and oneself), as ‘turbid and muddy water’.

In effect, a summary of much of the human condition and an expression of the fetters that bind us to existence.

In good meditation practice, one’s ability to sustain attention, usually on an object such as one’s breath or one’s body, begins to predominate as a constant. This is correspondingly associated with a weakening or suppression of the *nivaranas*. Over a period of time, as one’s reactive emotions diminish we begin to feel lighter and better in ourselves. One of the texts quotes the Buddha as saying... “He has put aside these 5 hindrances, and come to know these paralysing defilements of the mind. And far from sensual impressions, from unwholesome things, he enters into the first absorption etc...” The absorptions that the Buddha refers to are what comprise *samadhi* and are part of *samatha*, or the calming aspect of practice.

The first four ‘absorptions’ or *jhanas* are classified as belonging to the fine-material sphere because they are experienced as pleasurable in terms of sensations. One can understand the absorptions in energetic terms, where less and less of one’s psychic energy is ‘wasted’

on the fuelling of self-referred mental and emotional phenomena. One's awareness is then free to encompass larger fields of arising phenomena at ever increasing levels of subtlety. The actual experience of these states, where there is less interaction or 'inner dialogue' and more of a just 'witnessing', when sustained for extended periods of time, suppresses and weakens our self centred perspective on experience. As one enters into yet deeper states of absorption, the emotional states such as pleasure (or rapture) and joy, gradually fade until eventually a state of equanimity and tranquillity predominates with emotional reactive patterns completely stilled. Because they are so tranquil and free of sensations, the deeper absorptions are referred to as the immaterial or formless *jhanas*.

It is the fourth absorption that includes the four 'formless' absorptions which are described in sequence as 'Sphere of Boundless Space', 'Sphere of Boundless Consciousness', 'Sphere of Nothingness' and finally 'Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception'. These are the states in which many experience so-called 'mystical' or 'peak' experiences. All religious traditions have various calming and focusing practices and as a result they all contain accounts of their results. Deep and subtle as these states may be, in Buddhism uniquely, they are considered and described as states and not the ultimate realisation of a Godhead or Truth. Only when the absorption/s are seen through and experienced with insight as states that are themselves impermanent and inherently unsatisfactory and impersonal, can final liberation be realised. Nibbana is the complete cessation of any desire or aversion and is the ultimate realisation of the path to Awakening.

Experience of all the *jhanas* is not considered a prerequisite to insight, but the general consensus is that there has to be some experience of them, for a deep level of tranquillity is essential to Insight. Whilst reflection or thinking is possible in the first absorption, it ceases in the second and subsequent absorptions. Although whilst in the deeper *jhanas* they are not accessible to analysis or interpretation, there does remain a memory of them, and as such they can be described, up to a point, and reflected and commented on. Nibbana is beyond description.

One emerges from these states deeply contented and energised. Their physical, emotional and mental effects can last for days, weeks and even longer. At a deeper structural level of our make up, they bring about considerable changes in perception and behaviour that are expressed and experienced in our relationship to 'others' and the world. They can often be de-

scribed as transformative. An experience of any of these states can give an intimation of subsequent deeper ones, which acts as an encouragement to further practice.

It is helpful to remember in one's own practice, that as one returns from deeper states of meditation to ordinary daily consciousness and functioning, many of one's old patterns of thought and feeling, including the *nivaranas*, do become apparent and active again, but without quite the same degree of 'hold' as before. It can also be helpful to know that with an increased awareness of the *nivaranas* and how they influence and affect us, it can make them feel stronger than before. This in itself can be a profound and sobering insight. Equally, one can get very attached to the memory of the blissful experiences and 'trip' on those. Ultimately, in the Buddhist scheme of things, with continuing good practice the *nivaranas* weaken and eventually fade away as our consciousness is filled with greater clarity and good will.

This brings us to the relationship between *samadhi* and *panna* (concentration and wisdom) which are synonymous with *samatha* and *vipassana* (calming and insight). In developed or integrated practice the two are inseparable. But few of us are at that level. Our deep-rooted capacity for attachment to states of existence and experience, including the most subtle meditative states, can only be weakened and ultimately abandoned through the penetrating power of Insight. And even with the realisation of insight, one's practice continues. Because our 'fathom long bodies contain the whole world' they contain all the embodied multiple and complex results of attachment and aversion generated and accumulated throughout endless millennia of collective and individual existence. Applying the power of insight in daily living continues the process of purification that frees us from the 'fetters' that imprison us and from the 'defilements' that cloud our inherent 'radiant mind/heart'.

The Buddha's remarkable achievement was that he embodied not only full realisation or Wisdom, but also perfected purity. That Wisdom, expressed through boundless Compassion gave rise to his teachings of which we are the inheritors. That is why we look to him as someone who points the way. The way that he pointed to begins right here and now for each one of us with the Four Noble Truths, that of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way out of suffering, which is the Eight-fold Noble Path to freedom.

In subsequent issues of 'Community' we will look at the implications of the eight fold path and how it relates to other Buddhist teachings as well as realisation and purification in the context of lay life.

Nick Carroll



CREATIVITY AND BUDDHIST PRACTICE
A Personal reflection on the Creativity Weekend at Amaravati

This was the first AUA creativity weekend that I had attended and I arrived at Amaravati with mixed feelings. Although I enjoy creative activities such as music and sculpture, to be faced with a blank sheet of paper and asked to draw or paint brings up old feelings of lack of confidence and inadequacy which are not easy to work with. However, I was looking forward to seeing how the “Buddhist Practice” side of the programme would unfold.

We followed the format of breaking into small groups to carry out our activities and then discuss our work, rather than choosing between different activities. The first activity gave confidence to sufferers of the “fear of the blank sheet of paper”, proposing ways of filling it while by-passing the self-critical mind. The emphasis on the parallels between art and meditation (being in the moment and allowing for the potential for change, rather than following a set formula) was very helpful and reassuring.

The afternoon workshop was described as “Reflecting on Nature: Responding to the Moment”. Each group was given a circle to work on, divided into segments for each participant. We started with a meditative walk in the woods, observing everything around us and eventually picking up an object - stone, leaf, or flower - that particularly attracted us. This object formed the beginning of an intuitive, illustrated journey from the edge of our circle to its centre. For me, starting the journey was the hardest part but once I overcame this and started drawing, I found myself engrossed in following my own path to the centre and even quite enjoying it!

The temptation to compare my segment negatively with some of the beautiful art work produced by others was still there, but I was happy to see that it was the overall effect of our circle, and of all the others that was truly striking. Each segment, irrespective of the skills of the various artists, really did play its part in the whole.

The following day’s session was devoted to Music and Creativity, with each group producing a piece of music with a wide variety of every-day instruments, such as gongs, bells, sticks, etc. The final piece of each group was quite different and I think everyone really enjoyed producing music in this way - it was great fun.

We also had sessions devoted to Chanting (not Buddhist chanting, just using our voices in harmony), as well as Yoga and “Creativity in Community”. Our newsletter needs our support with the submission of articles, reviews and letters and so we came up with different themes for this - all we need now is for someone to sit down and write them!

For me, the weekend was characterised by the spirit of harmony and cooperation underlying all our sessions. I’m very grateful to the organisers for their skill and hard work in preparing and carrying out such thoughtful and encouraging activities. I’m glad I decided to see what it felt like to go out of my “comfort zone”. My reward was an enriching experience with much to reflect upon.

Vivian Miles

Letters & News

News from Hartridge.—November 2003

Ajahn's Suriyo and Gandhasilo have settled into the friendly embrace of Hartridge and the Devon countryside. They seem to like it. Weekend workshops continue as do Weekend evening puja's to which all are welcome. Please phone first to check.

Here is a quote from Ajahn Suriyo from the recent Hartridge newsletter :-

"Slowly, many creatures are returning, including tits to the bird feeders and more importantly supportive lay-folk who have heard rumour that the monastery is occupied once more. Your kind support is most appreciated. I wish to extend the welcome for all to come and visit; by going through our unbeaten entrance track you can join us at the end of the road, where new paths begin."

Days of Winter Practice at Amaravati

Join us during the quiet winter retreat months
Come along to enjoy the space and peace of
Amaravati and join in day of meditation,
discussion and practice, in the company of
like-minded companions.

Jan 17 Day of Winter Practice
Feb 14 Day of Winter Practice
Mar 13 Day of Winter Practice

9.45 till 5.00 pm in the Retreat
Centre

No booking is necessary,
just bring a little food to share.

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika
Association (AUA)

Two Kinds of Peace

'There are two kinds of peace—the coarse and the refined. The peace which comes from *samadhi* is the coarse type. When the mind is peaceful there is happiness. The mind then takes this happiness to be peace. But happiness and unhappiness are becoming and birth. There is no escape from *samsara* here because we still cling to them. So happiness is not peace, peace is not happiness. The other type of peace is that which comes from wisdom. Here we don't confuse peace with happiness.....

Ajahn Chah (A Taste of Freedom, p16)

The Low Arts



Yet another £50 vanished from the old man's hand, as he displayed his extraordinary psychic powers.

The Factors of Enlightenment

A five day retreat at Amaravati

From April 8 – 12

All are welcome to attend our first five day retreat. The theme will be the seven factors of enlightenment and the retreat will include meditation, discussion, teachings and optional physical exercise.

Booking is necessary. Please download a booking form from our website. www.buddhacommunity.org

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika
Association (AUA)

AUA NEWS

Ten Years of the AUA

With some surprise we have realised that next year - 2004 - will be the tenth anniversary of the AUA. It seems right to recognise this and so we have earmarked a day of practice on the 15th May for our recollection of where we have come from, where we are now, and where we might go to as an organisation and community. We welcome all to this day of practice, including those who have travelled with the AUA for all or part of our journey, and those who wish to join us for the first time.

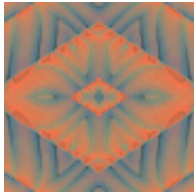
As part of a review of the AUA that we are currently undertaking we will be announcing changes to the constitution and membership processes once these have been fully considered. We are also considering putting some of our current bank balance towards one or more good causes. These will be announced in due course.

AUA Statement of Accounts

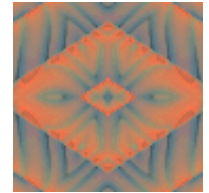
	Current year £	Previous year £
INCOME		
General donations	429	376
Upasika weekend income	2,811	3,502
Study day income	326	219
Total income	3,566	4,097
EXPENDITURE		
Retreat Centre weekends – food & accom.	1,821	2,013
Gifts and donations	55	330
Printing of Community	640	890
Postage and envelopes	190	76
Subscription to Network of Buddhist Organisations	208	-
Total expenditure	2,915	3,309
Net surplus	651	788
Reserves brought forward	2,103	1,315
Reserves carried forward	2,754	2,103
Bank balance at 30th June 2003	2,754	2,103



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.



One Life



One of the hopes for fruits of the Path is the realization that no matter how seemingly insurmountable an endeavour is or a problem may be, our own individual and sometimes puny efforts actually will make a difference. As we progress, a confidence grows in the law of kamma - every action has an effect. We no longer need to be hopeless victims of our pasts or of present difficulties. Even the huge world problems do not stun us into inactivity or obliviousness. There is always something of ourselves we can offer – something which is always acceptable and effective, as Elena's article below illustrates.

I lived in South Africa between 1964 and 1970 and it was at the end of that time that I met Sister Emmanuel, a Dominican nun. Sr. Emmanuel and I kept in touch by letter and then E-mail and I began to hear about the work she was doing to help the poor, needy, malnourished and orphaned children of N'seleni, Kwazulu, South Africa. In the year 2000, when I returned I got more involved with Sr. Emmanuel's work with the people and when visiting N'seleni I met Nancy – a wonderful African woman who was already involved, caring and concerned at the plight of her own people. She had, shortly before I arrived, discovered five children, four girls and one boy, living alone in a broken down shack, out of school and very hungry. She immediately took them into her own small home and contacted Sr. Emmanuel who with the help of donated money was able to have a small room built onto Nancy's existing one roomed property, big enough to sleep the children.

After the floods of 2000, Nancy had discovered people dying, their shacks flattened by the floods, lying in mud, too ill to move. The hospitals are overcrowded with Africans such as these, dying from Aids/TB and malnutrition. Since I came back from South Africa in April 2000, Jean Spinks and myself have become very enthusiastic and involved in helping the children and adults of N'seleni by hand making cards and selling them when the opportunity arises. As our present project of card making and selling grew, we also became and still are, fund raisers for Keech Cottage Chil-

dren's Hospice, in Bedfordshire.

On October 11th this year 2003, I returned again to Kwazulu, South Africa. I stayed for just over four weeks at the small Dominican Convent where Sr Emmanuel lives in Empangeni. I also met Sr. Josephine who is active in teaching some of Nancy's helpers how to crochet shoulder bags from coloured thin carrier bags, how to make raincoats for the children from donated pieces of parachute material and how to cook cheaply, by bringing vegetables to the boil, taking them off the cooking appliance, placing the cooking pot into a cardboard box and surrounding the pot with straw or old pieces of material, then closing the box, the pot of food continues cooking free of charge. She teaches these women once a week, then they in turn show the other African women how to economize and how to raise money from their own efforts.

'Water can be collected twice a week from a tap, but is heavy to carry....'

A big area of South Africa is suffering from drought, the animals are thin, the ground overgrazed and no rain falls to encourage new grazing. The rivers are dry and we saw animals turn away from dry river beds. At Ntambanana Township, across the land we visited Mrs. Thombela, her husband and five children who had been found living in a dilapidated broken down shack with nothing in it. With help and funding and donated reject brick blocks, a waterproof building has been built and the shack knocked down. Every 3 months Sr. Emmanuel visits with dried goods, peanut butter etc to help this family.

Water can be collected twice a week from a tap, but is heavy to carry and so very far to walk to reach the tap. There are thousands of Africans not getting help who need to be reached and assisted, like Mrs Thimble's family. We now send food and water to her for the animals in the hope that they survive.

Early on during my stay, Sr. Emmanuel and I got a lift to N'seleni, to see what was happening with Nancy and the growing amount of children she now had in her care. We took with us kilos of peanut butter, maize, rice and murvite, an essential com-

plete food which helps to build up these malnourished and sick children some of whom are HIV positive or dying of Aids. I also took a holdall containing some small soft toys bought from a local charity shop, at 20p each, some felt tip pens, pencils, second hand children's clothes and sweeties, a real treat for these children. These 20p toys are being given one each per small child for Christmas. The bigger girls are to be given one bar each of scented soap, which they love and at the time I was there, nothing had been donated for the boys.

When I arrived, what I found was Nancy and helpers with a room of children too young for school, all victims of poverty, illness, malnourished or orphaned through Aids or TB. Nancy also receives a vast number of children each day who she feeds before school and after school and she has inadequate space for all these children.

An empty, dilapidated leaking old run down clinic has been given to Nancy, it is totally empty, in quite a state, but big, having many rooms. Nancy's aim is to allow the children and orphans too ill to come for food each day to sleep there. She has already moved into this run-down building and has taken over to the clinic donated bright small plastic chairs and tables for the little ones. Four bright pink curtains are up at the windows of this one room, donated by Sr. Emmanuel and the nuns, and nothing else.

Sr. Emmanuel and the other people are quickly trying to get discarded or donated used carpet pieces so that the older children do not have to sit on cold dirty cement floors. For the clinic, carpeting and some bigger chairs are required, the toilets and the roof need repairing and many other jobs need urgently doing. It is hard to describe how people cope with so little. Also needed regularly are funds for EPAP which is the best complete food to build up the children and malnourished adults and funds are needed urgently for basic school fees, as little as £13 a year to £25 for older children and about £35 a year for a uniform. Many people who Sr. Emmanuel has contacted are helping but it is never enough, there are literally thousands of needy children and adults, a vast majority living in broken down shacks, struggling to survive.

I came home to England with a small list of children needing sponsoring through school. I was nervous about bringing a larger list as I know a lot of people here in the UK already support many and varied chari-

ties and I didn't know if I would get support for even one child but I've been back from South Africa for only one week and the response and offers of help I have received is wonderful. What I thought would be possibly a small help in addition to fund raising by making and selling our cards has made both Jean and I realize that here we have a project which has the possibility of growing and expanding into something much bigger that we had ever envisaged.

Jean and I have now got closely involved with the needs of the people of N'seleni and surrounding areas with the backing, wisdom and support of our husbands, my sister Linda, and many friends and neighbours. We have wholeheartedly given ourselves to this fundraising.

If you are interested in finding out more and if you see Jean selling cards (some of you already support us by buying them), we will be very happy to talk with you.

*all victims of
poverty, illness,
malnourished or
orphaned through
Aids or TB*

Our aim is to return to SA in October 2006, three years from now, to introduce Jean to all the people she helps but hasn't met. We will hopefully meet with Sr. Emmanuel who will be 80 next year as well as with Nancy, the children and all the other Africans we are trying to help – to see how they are and what has changed since my last visit.

Since I have returned, peoples' response to my story has been amazing. My neighbour, apart from sponsoring a child, has already donated a Mother Xmas outfit for an adult, 80 beautiful multicoloured pens and 60 pencils with rubbers. I have been able to buy 40 small light-weight balls in the £1 shop so we now have Xmas presents for the boys.

This all points towards what the Buddha said about the importance of giving, generosity, compassion and loving kindness to all beings. We might not be able to help all the millions of starving, dying Africans or people worldwide but if we can help save or improve the quality of life for even one child that opportunity to help is a great blessing to us who have so much more. If there is a chance that we might eventually register as a small charity, we would call the charity, 'One Life'.

Elena Utton

(Ed. If you wish to support this cause, you may send cheques (payable to Elena Utton) to 'One Life', AUA, Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP1 3BZ)

NOTICES

Amaravati Monastery Contact Details

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

Office Phone Number 01442 842455
Retreat Information: 01442 843239
Fax: 01442 843721
For Guest Information: please write to the
Guest monk / nun or visit the website at
www.amaravati.org

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.

Please send donations to
AUA, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great
Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ,
England

Mailing List Address Changes

If you change your address, please let us know either by emailing your changes to :
metta@petalmoore.net,
or posting to the AUA as above.

CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE: 30th Mar 2004

*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

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 Eccleston Sq, SW1	0207 834 5858
Hampstead	Caroline Randall	020 8348 0537
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

The Bodhinyana Group Programme - Spring 2004

We meet in the Bodhinyana Hall at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery – from 7.30 till 9.30pm on Wednesday evenings.

- Jan 7 Meditation and Reflection
- Jan 14 Sutta Study
- Jan 21 Kamma
- Jan 28 Meditation and Reflection
- Feb 4 Sutta Study
- Feb 11 5,8,10 and 227 precepts
- Feb 18 Meditation and Reflection
- Feb 25 Sutta Study
- Mar 3 Right Livelihood
- Mar 10 Conditionality and the Middle Way
- Mar 17 Meditation and Reflection
- Mar 24 Sutta Study
- Mar 31 Metta, Compassion and 'Engagement'

Contact c.ward @ btinternet.com or
evanses@lineone.net

www.buddhacommunity.org

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Community Newsletter by Email

We can send Community as an Acrobat file attached to an email. You can also simply read and download the newsletter from our web site:
www.buddhacommunity.org.

If undelivered please return to:

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



AMARAVATI LAY EVENTS - 2004

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
5.30pm – 4.00pm on last day

- Jan 17** Day of Winter Practice
- Feb 14** Day of Winter Practice
- Mar 13** Day of Winter Practice

April 8 – 12 5-day retreat - 'The Factors of Enlightenment'

May 15 Day of Practice -
'Generosity and Gratitude'
AUA 10th Anniversary

June 18 - 20 Weekend Retreat - 'Dukkha, Illness, Death and The Dhamma'

July 17 Day of Practice *

July 30 – August 1 Weekend Retreat *for women*

- Sept 18** Day of Practice *
- October 8 – 10** Weekend Retreat
- Nov 13 (prov)** Day of Practice * *date to be confirmed*
- December 4** Day of Practice *

* Themes to be confirmed—see website below

**PLEASE CHECK FOR LATE CHANGES TO THE PROGRAMME ON THE WEB SITE :

www.buddhacommunity.org

Please download a booking form from our web site or write to AUA (enclosing SAE) for booking form (see address below)

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

Editorial & Production Team :

Chris Ward, Nick Carroll, Tony Spinks, Martin Evans
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.