



Community

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The Upāsaka & Upāsikā Newsletter

Issue No. 20

Upāsikā Newsletter

FOREST SANGHA TRADITION

MARCH 1995 NO1

UPĀSAKA (masc.) / UPĀSIKĀ (fem.) lit. 'sitting close by', i.e. 'Lay Adherent'; is any follower who is filled with faith and has taken refuge in the Buddha, his doctrine and his community of disciples. (A.VIII, 25) His/her virtue is regarded as pure if s/he observes the 5 precepts (*panca sila: s. sikkhapada*). S/he should avoid the following wrong ways of livelihood: trading in arms, in living beings, meat, alcohol and poison. (A.V. 177)

Buddhist Aerobics

THE UPĀSIKĀ STUDY DAY at Amaravati on 21st January proved a memorable occasion. Not only for the session of 'Buddhist aerobics' in the middle of the afternoon to alleviate stiff knees and backs, but principally for the rare opportunity to share experience of the five hindrances with other lay-Buddhists.

For about an hour seven small groups discussed their practice and the five hindrances. This had been preceded by a stimulating Dhamma discourse by Sister Sundara which provided much food for reflection as well as some light-hearted observations.

The texts which Ajahn Viradhammo had kindly selected, copied and distributed at the previous Upāsikā meeting in November had provided a focus for practice and reflection prior to the day and also served to focus discussion in the groups.

At the end of the small group sessions, the seven facilitators presented a summary of the main themes back to the full assembly. Some of these are described below.

The biological ancestry of the five hindrances was identified - they must have survival value otherwise we would not be experiencing them now. The hindrances are primitive, biological mechanisms without a self. All of the hindrances have a positive usefulness - doubt was mentioned as part of the inquiring and reflective mind - whereas sceptical doubt could lead to loss of energy and motivation.

Buddhist practice is to understand the hindrances as basic biological drives with no-self, part of the conditioned world, and to avoid making them a problem by indulging or repressing them. Both of these approaches arise from (and reinforce) a sense of self. Knowing the hindrances as they really are, allows us to use their energy wisely.

Since there are many institutions in modern western consumer culture which depend upon the encouragement of desire, anger, restlessness, torpor and doubt, Buddhist

practice was considered to run against the stream and for some, to give rise to difficulties in presenting a 'normal' face to colleagues and friends.

The bitter taste of anger, and the hollow sensation of doubt were some of the descriptions given by the assembly. Sloth and torpor seemed to affect people at different times of the day - clearly in some cases this was simply physical tiredness and if so, it was appropriate to sleep. At other times

sleepiness may be experienced after eating - especially a large meal - or from loss of inspiration or energy. Metta, loving-kindness - towards oneself and others was recommended as a good antidote to aversion.

The interrelated nature of the hindrances was discussed - they are all closely connected and it is easy for the mind to move between them. Nourishing the hindrances by giving 'frequent unwise attention' to them was highlighted in discussion. Does giving nourishment to one hindrance nourish them all?

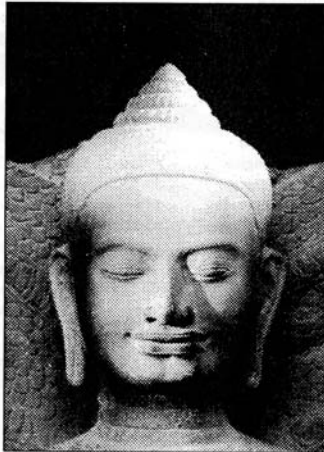
The importance of knowing when the hindrances have not arisen - when we are free from them - is emphasised in the texts and is closely linked with gaining a perspective on them.

The value of bodily awareness was also a common theme. We often

spend much of our waking existence in our thoughts and ignore the various feelings and sensations from our bodies. Sister Sundara suggested that although the conditioned mind is totally untrustworthy, the body could be relied upon to let us know our current state. 'Being intimate with all that lives' - was a memorable description offered by one of the Upāsikās.

There was some discussion around the differing constraints provided by monastic and lay life and the suggestion that although the constraints are clearly different, the process of skilfully using the situation we find ourselves within to support practice was the same for all.

Chris Ward



The front cover of our first newsletter edited by Nick Carroll in 1995

In this issue.....

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Dhamma Companions



EDITORIAL

Ten Years of the AUA

This edition marks the tenth anniversary of the AUA. Compared to the more than 2400 years that the Buddha Dhamma has been in existence, this is not very long. Nevertheless, Buddhism is still very new to the UK and so it feels right to recognise our continuing existence as a distinctive organisation.

Our existence owes a great deal (everything?) to the Forest Sangha. The inspiring teachings of Luang Por Sumedho and many monks and nuns over the past 30 years has been directly responsible for the growing confidence of the lay-communities associated with Amaravati and sister monasteries.

The non-dogmatic and supportive attitude of the monastic Sangha has allowed lay-practitioners to gradually experiment with supportive processes and activities, including day and weekend events. These events have often included a Monastic Sangha member, but have also given lay-people an opportunity to lead in various ways.

What we have been witnessing is the establishment of the four-fold assembly of monks, nuns, lay-women and lay-men. This is a positive reflection on the qualities of the Sangha and is what we should anticipate when the Dhamma puts down healthy roots.

I remember some ten years ago being invited by Nick Carroll to meet with a small group to discuss what we might do as lay-people to complement the monastic Sangha and to support other lay-Buddhists like ourselves. I was impressed with Nick's commitment and wide knowledge, and inspired to explore what a Upasika framework might look like. Nick has continued to play a pivotal role in the AUA and without his enormous energy, intelligence and devotion, I suspect that the Upasika movement would have foundered many years ago.

When I could barely find any energy to spare from work and family life, Nick managed (from his own busy life) to give his own time generously and often single-handedly to organise meetings and resolve problems, to give insightful Dhamma teachings and to write articles for Community. His understanding and generosity continue to be an inspiration..

I think that for many of us the difficulty has been in trying to keep up with Nick's vision and *viriyā* and to organise a more equitable sharing of workload. Fortunately, the AUA now has more volunteer organisers and helpers, so the load no longer falls on a small number of broad shoulders. We have skilled cooks, retreat managers, group leaders, Yoga and Tai Chi teachers, meditation and Dhamma teachers and retreat administrators.

We also have a skilled Treasurer —Martin Evans— who has not only steered us successfully through potential financial minefields but has also developed into a skilful retreat leader and proved invaluable in roles ranging from cook, food purchaser, walks organiser and Pali scholar, through to writing several articles for Community.

However, we are not complacent. Organisations can founder overnight, and we are facing some thorny issues, many of which have arisen from our increasing level of activity.

Just four years ago we ran two weekend retreats and four days of practice a year. We now run twelve events a year including a five day retreat. We are also running a Women only retreat and reflecting on the questions that this raises. We have a representative on the NBO (The Network of Buddhist Organisations) and we are also in the midst of a constitutional review! (Read the details later in this issue).

However, with a continued focus on practice and a willingness to seek consensus and take decisions when needed, I think that the AUA will continue to be a fruitful source of activity and a good and safe place to be.

As our 'advertising' states:

The Amaravati Upasika - Upasaka Association (AUA) was formed to foster and encourage good Buddhist lay practice ... 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 a while, we offer the opportunity to develop all aspects of the Buddhist path in a supportive lay context.

Chris Ward

The Editorial from our first Newsletter—March 1995

E D I T O R I A L

SNOWFLAKES - *a declaration of intent*

OUR LIVES ARE an individual experience. Like snowflakes, each with its unique crystalline structure, we come into being with our personal history, volitional tendencies, habits and attachments.

In our human complexity with its capacity for reflective thought, the experience of life can be perplexing. It is especially so when we suffer. We then search for an escape, a solution or, perhaps as a last resort, some meaning. This desire to make sense of our experience, to be at peace with the world and our ourselves is what, in one way or another, has attracted us to the Buddha Dhamma. In our case it has brought us, with varying degrees of commitment to the Forest Sangha tradition and its network of monastic communities.

The Monastic Sangha lifestyle has a structure, a framework of discipline and practice that has a powerful transforming effect, not only on its practitioners, but also on those it comes into contact with. The dynamics of this practice and the resulting interactions with lay supporters are a frequent source of wonder and inspiration, often to all parties. They always have some effect - if only to make one pause and consider.

Lay supporters live in a different social framework and with differing responsibilities to that of the Monastic Sangha, often struggling to survive in a society whose value systems are primarily concerned with accumulation of possessions and indulgence in sense pleasures. They also find themselves involved in a variety of relationships with employers, employees, colleagues, friends, partners or children. Rarely is it an environment that is conducive to regular opportunities for quiet reflection or simply being mindful.

The Upāsikā training* is in the process of evolving. Some prefer to call it practice, others like the word 'training'. Each word has different connotations for different people. There are differing ideas about the level of commitment required of individuals. Whatever ones views may be, to have any significance or even effect, the practice will impinge in some way on ones life. Any commitment that goes beyond satisfying immediate needs always does. It will be up to each one of us to reflect and resolve any dilemmas this may give rise to. Quite what its final form will be is not known.

Requesting the Refuges and Precepts formally can have a powerful effect on one, especially if done in the supportive

company of fellow practitioners on a special occasion. Going on retreat, making a commitment to daily practice and attending a weekly meditation group, helps break the repetitive patterns of unmindful living that are so easy to slip into.

The Upāsikā training can be seen as a way of providing a reminder, a support to ones personal practice whatever ones individual circumstances.

The intention of the Upāsikā Newsletter is that it becomes another support for our practice. Here are some of the themes we hope to cover in future issues.

1. News of other Upāsikā groups and support groups.
2. Existing local meditation groups - how they started, how often they meet, their format and personal experiences of them. Guidelines on how to start one.
3. Retreats and their significance.
4. The relationship between monastic and lay sangha.
5. Personal practice and the workplace.
6. Personal practice within a family/relationship.
7. How individuals came across the Dhamma.

In summary - Dhamma, News and Views.

Embarking into the unknown as a publication and dependent on voluntary contributions, each issue will be something of a surprise. We trust our readers will be understanding as we find our way.

Hopefully, in the 'busyness' of our daily lives, the Upāsikā Newsletter will help remind us that we are not alone on the path. That there are others whose experiences, difficulties and achievements are not always that different from our own. That we can learn from and perhaps be inspired by others.

And just as snowflakes melt away, so may our fears and attachments dissolve in deeper practice, for the benefit of all.

Nick Carroll

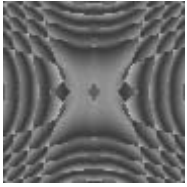
Contributions, letters, suggestions

Contributions preferably on disk (MS DOS or Mac)

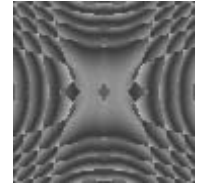
Otherwise typed if at all possible

To reach us by: 1st June for the next issue

* *Upāsikā training - see page 7 for purpose and suggested guidelines of commitment.*



Reflections on Insubstantiality



A while ago I was reading through the chapter on the life of Sariputa in the excellent book 'Great Disciples of the Buddha', by Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker. The chapter starts by recounting one of Sariputta's previous lives, when he and Moggallana were known as Upatissa and Kolita.

The story describes how the two young friends visited a three day festival. They enjoyed the shows and entertainment of the first two days. However on the third day

"... strange thoughts cast their shadows across their hearts and they could no longer laugh or share in the excitement....just for a moment the spectre of human mortality revealed itself to their inner vision."

The story then recounts how the two friends became ascetics and in later lives the Buddha's chief disciples.

When I read this description of how Upatissa and Kolita had reacted on the third festival day it seemed particularly significant. For me, the short passage so accurately evokes the feeling that arises when one pays close attention to the insubstantial and contingent nature of our lives. Interestingly it also took me back to a performance of a play that I went to over 20 years ago! This was *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare.

Towards the end of the play the central character Prospero, a magician, speaks the following lines

"And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep"

These words also point to the unreal nature of things, the sometimes dreamlike quality that can

pervade when we are less focused and less mindful.

I was reflecting on these ideas and thoughts while walking to the station, as part of my journey to work. It was a clear winter's morning. The sun had not yet risen, but from below the horizon it was reflected on the few clouds scattered across the sky. Against this pink and blue background flew a flock of birds in the familiar 'V' shape. It was one of those mundane yet precious moments that can often go unappreciated.

*'Strange
thoughts cast
their
shadows
across their
hearts'*

Minutes later the birds were long gone, the clouds had changed colour, the sky had brightened considerably. Once again I was reminded of something which I had read (and re-read many times). The words are from *The Diamond Sutra* of the Mahayana tradition

'Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world:

A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.'

If we look carefully there are, of course, so many reminders of the insubstantial nature of things; of the pageant in which we are all players; of the constant process of arising and ceasing. They are there to help us in our practice and to encourage us to make use of what little time we have.

To quote the Buddha's final words

"All things are of the nature to decay – strive on untiringly"

Keith Hammond

NEW YEAR THOUGHTS AT AMARAVATI

Breathing in
 Breathing out
 A host of memories and faces
 Distract me from the moment.
 Worlds from my past
 Haunting
 How?
 Why?
 Tiredness
 A jumble of absorbed stanzas
 That have no sense
 Other than to notice the absorbent
 Fabric of my mind.
 And then a jolt.
 Remember the moment
 Only the moment
 Now
 Only the now.
 And the dream vanishes
 As if by magic
 To be replaced by a wave
 Of deep and glorious compassion

Anna Badar

Nun's Pilgrimage

Once again we hope to sponsor a nun to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Places in India in November 2004. If you would like to support her in any way, however small, please contact:

Gobi Bechtle: Ramilies Road, Chiswick, London, W4 1JN. Tel. 0208 9946046. Mob: 0780 1931486

Jill Osler: 9B Alpha Road, Southville, Bristol, BS3 1DH. Tel. 1179 631610

Any cheques should be sent to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery and made payable to English Sangha Trust. On the back of the cheque clearly state that it is for the Nun's Pilgrimage.

Thank You.

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>

**Weekend for Women
 'The Heart of Spiritual Friendship'**

*A weekend retreat at Amaravati
 From July 30th - August 1st*

This is a weekend for women to relax, connect and reflect on the meaning of spiritual friendship in their lives. This is the first women's retreat organised by the AUA and we aim for a balance of silence and sharing, stillness and movement. 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

For more information contact Jenni Jepson on 077755 21 428

Organised by the Amaravati Upasaka/Upasika Association (AUA)

Book Review

Satipa.t.thaana The Direct Path to Realisation by Anâlayo, 2003,
Windhorse Publications. 319 pages.

This recently published book is devoted to a detailed study of the *Satipa.t.thaana Sutta*, a very highly regarded discourse on the development (or foundations) of mindfulness. There is no other comparable study of the *Satipa.t.thaana Sutta*, which is surprising given that this practice is described as the 'direct path to awakening'.

The cultivation of mindfulness is of central importance to Buddhist practice and is repeatedly emphasised in many traditions including the Forest Sangha tradition. The Venerable Anâlayo is both a scholar and an ordained monk who practises meditation and his book, which is based upon his Ph.D thesis, presents a very thorough exploration of all facets of this *Sutta*. The book starts with his own translation of the *Satipa.t.thaana Sutta*, a translation which I think is generally the best that I have read. He suggests that *Satipa.t.thaana* actually means 'presence of mindfulness' rather than 'foundations of mindfulness' and that the examples given in the *sutta* are not exhaustive since other applications of mindfulness are described in other *suttas*. He then looks at the structure of the *Sutta* and explores each part in detail.

He gives an explanation for the repeated phrase

' here monks.....a monk abides...diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world'

which occurs before each major application of mindfulness, as identifying that the hindrances should be subdued (by *samatha* practice) prior to the subsequent meditation practices described in the *sutta*. As is to be expected, he examines the various meanings and applications of *sati* (mindfulness) and compares this with concentration (*samâdhi*). Anâlayo thoroughly explores mindfulness of body, feelings, mind, and Dhamma and as part of the Dhamma contemplations he examines key teachings on the hindrances, the aggregates, the sense-spheres, awakening factors, the four Noble Truths and awakening itself.

The book has plenty of notes and references to other *sutta* material and alternative views on some of the key factors which he examines. Although this book is highly recommended, and is something I keep returning to, it is not a 'light read' and would perhaps appeal more to experienced practitioners than to newcomers to Buddhism.

Chris Ward

CONDITIONS , CONDITIONS , CONDITIONS

a firm mattress for a wounded back
delicious cooking prepared with love
friendly, supportive sangha
light, guiding touch of the teachers
daffodils and blossom everywhere
beautiful, beautiful
Amaravati in Springtime
tranquillity, reverential moments,
concentrated states of mind
body poised , alert, grounded, hovering
joyful , blissful , empty and free
Gratitude, Gratitude, Gratitude
a near-perfect "Easter" retreat...

and then ... and also ...

Home
Palestine and Israel
disharmony, death
Iraq
disharmony, death
violent conflict, swamping
greed and death
sitting in metta
karuna, mudita
striving for equanimity
how soon till the next retreat
the next refuge
within the deathless realm ?

Gregor

In memoriam

Kalyani - Catherine Hewitt

The news of the death of Catherine, [Kalyani] on 22nd April, was received with great sadness, a sadness mingled with gratitude for many joyful memories I have of Catherine.

Catherine leaves two beloved nieces, Jill and Cathy, and four great nieces and nephews, to whom she was very close, being more of a mother and grandmother to them than aunt.

Catherine was a staunch supporter of Amaravati, and unwavering in her devotion to the Buddha-Dhamma. She was unassuming, kind, and sociable; a great talker- who at the same time had a deep appreciation of the beauty of silence. She was full of interest in life; she loved music and literature and the wonders of Nature.

For many years she worked as a primary school teacher. After her retirement she went to live in Bath where she became a key member of the local Buddhist group, as well as being the Buddhist representative in the local Interfaith network and SACRE, which advises on religious matters for education.

She also found the time to write a book on Buddhism for children.

Catherine also wrote many poems; her reflections on the joys and tribulations of the Path, and it seems fitting to quote one here:

‘We must
Accept the music,
Join in the dance,
In the brief measure
Between entrance
And exit
Moving with time
We may realise
The timeless,
And surprise
Eternity
Now.

Kalyani, true Dhamma friend, may you find the Timeless and the Deathless.

Shirley McDonald

‘Dukkha, Illness, Death and The Dhamma’

A weekend retreat at Amaravati
From June 18 - 20

All are welcome to attend this two day retreat. The retreat will explore issues which effect us all and 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)**

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



Handling anger with kindness



I came across Buddhism at the same time as I met my wife. I was very enthusiastic about meditation. She was very enthusiastic about the Northumbrian bagpipes.

I have a photograph on our honeymoon of me sitting meditating with socks over my ears and a bobble hat on my head. While I meditated she used to practise her bagpipes. It was good training. My meditation has never depended on finding 'a forest, the foot of a tree, or a quiet place'.

I used to get up early to meditate. When I had a young family my children liked to get up early too and they used to come down stairs to see what I was doing. They would sit on my knee silently for a few minutes, then they would bring me a toy. I'd end up playing toys and telling stories for an hour. That was good training too. I learnt to accept the moment, to take the object that was presented to me for my meditation, rather than cling to an idea of how meditation ought to be.

This is satipatthana – touching the present moment with mindfulness. We studied the satipatthana sutta on the AUA Easter retreat. It is the Buddha's teaching on mindfulness and insight meditation.

You need some concentration to be able to apply the mind to the object, to have some clarity, but concentration is not your primary intention. If you want to develop concentration you need a quiet place, no distraction. This presents quite a problem in our modern day world. Even in a Buddhist monastery it can be hard to find somewhere where you won't be disturbed.

If we are practising mindfulness we don't need a quiet place. We can do it anywhere. In fact we should do it everywhere. We are cultivating a continuous practice of knowing. Knowing what we are doing right now. We can practise it in London on a tube train. We can practise knowing we are sitting on a tube train and knowing when it's time to get off. It's that simple. Just being with the way it is.

Our minds are often like living on a tube train. So many impressions and impingements all the time. Some people think this makes it difficult to meditate. That's true if we always depend on a quiet place. The place is never quiet enough. The mind is never silent enough. This is foolish. The mind is screaming out at you with objects for you to be mindful of. Don't make it so complicated. All you need is sufficient clarity to attend to the object in front. The right here, right now

We can practice meditation as an escape from the way it is. I remember I used to concentrate on the breath when my knees hurt but all I was doing was escaping from the pain. Mindfulness is knowing your knees hurt and just being with that. Why do you want to find an object over there when the mind is screaming at you to look here? You only have to sit through more and more pain, when you could look at it straight away and see it for what it is and be done with it. It's not worth escaping from. Let it go. Then pain or no pain is of equal value, you've let go of the fear of pain.

*'Our minds
are like
living on a
tube train'*

The theme of the Easter retreat was the 7 factors of enlightenment. I am assured I thought of it, but after the first day and a half I suspected we might have bitten off a bit too much. I could explain equanimity (the seventh factor) but I wasn't sure how many people were ready to go there. As I began talking to people individually I discovered a recurring theme; that of anger, aversion and self hatred. There was no joy in their practice. Just a stream of negativity or a recurring dull pain, and a great deal of fear.

I had mentioned in a talk how important metta, loving kindness, was in my practice, especially at the beginning, and I had described a meditation I had been taught at Amaravati by Ven. Anando who died many years ago. He wove the theme of forgiveness into the practice and I had found it very powerful. So someone asked me to teach this meditation, which I did, explaining how to develop that feeling of metta through first calling to mind someone who you naturally feel kindness towards, like a small child, and filling yourself with loving kindness. Then radiating kindness outwards to all living beings, then in turn, inwards towards yourself. I taught how you can call to mind someone who has hurt you, and forgive

them, and call to mind someone you have hurt, and forgive yourself.

We should develop this practice of metta until we have access to it like a useful tool we always carry with us. Like a hive tool is to a beekeeper.

A hive tool is a flat metal tool about 6 inches long and 1 inch wide. It fits easily into the hand. It is curved and slightly pointed at one end and straight edged at the other. It is a very simple tool, but it's all a beekeeper needs. He uses it to open the hive, take out frames, scrape off propolis (the sticky stuff that bees glue up gaps with). He would never go to the hive without it.

We need to cultivate metta until it becomes like a hive tool. We should always carry it with us. We can use it to open up the negative states of the mind. Holding up the anger and the dull pain of self hatred, with an attitude of kindness and forgiveness.

A beekeeper knows how to handle anger with kindness. He never knows how the bees will be, their emotional state, when he goes to the hive. Sometimes the bees are happy and compliant, sometimes they are angry and difficult. Perhaps they can sense there's a thunderstorm on the way, or they are about to swarm. Or perhaps some other bees or wasps have been attacking the hive.

There are times when it's best to just close up the hive and come back another day. But we can't just keep running away. A good beekeeper knows that bees need help. They don't survive in this country without help. They may be angry because the weather has been so bad they are starving, or they have a disease which needs treatment, or it may be their anger is just a short lived aversion to him opening the hive. He needs courage. The courage to act with kindness. If he is frightened, they will sense his fear and become more aggressive. He needs to develop the confidence that comes with practice.

We need to work at cultivating loving kindness. Try practising metta meditation every day for 5 minutes before you go to bed. You will sleep well and you will wake well and as you get to enjoy the benefits you will want to practise longer. Don't give up. Many beekeepers do. They need to persevere to the point where they let go of fear. So do you.

What we are moving towards is being able to be with

the open mind, completely relaxed. Being able to let thoughts come and go like the wind through a tree. But at first thoughts and feelings don't blow through the mind, they stick a lot. As we investigate them we let them go. Then they blow straight through, they don't stick anymore. Then every now and then something else will stick and present itself for contemplation. This is where we need to investigate. We don't need to find something to be mindful of, the mind will point to where we need to look. But often we don't want to look, we are frightened, we want to run away. Like pain, it hurts, we want to escape from it or like lust, it's dangerous to know, we're too frightened to look at it.

*'Letting go
isn't the
same as
getting rid
of'*

If you want to know whether you are practising insight or concentration look at how you handle the hindrances. These are lust or sensuous desire, anger or ill will, sceptical doubt, restlessness and the quaintly named sloth and torpor. They are an obstruction to concentration. They have to be suppressed. But if you are practising insight you are aware when they arise and cease and if they stick, you investigate them, giving yourself the chance to understand them and let them go. But to do this you need space in the mind, a mental clarity, which comes from distancing

yourself from the hindrances. Mental clarity is dependent on concentration.

So which comes first? I don't think this is the right question. I think it depends on where you are in the present moment. If you are in an environment where there are few distractions, concentration will easily arise, if you are on a tube train, there are many distractions and concentration will be difficult. I'm not recommending meditating on a tube train in preference to a quiet place, but wherever we are is the right place to be mindful.

The idea of getting rid of the hindrances is so easily associated with aversion. We're good at getting rid of things, especially if we are full of self hatred. Until we understand the hindrances they will keep coming back to haunt us. We should use the tool of kindness to open up the mind, and the courage to hold what we find gently. Treat your angry bees with kindness.

If you find it hard to meditate at home, don't give up, cultivate loving kindness for just 5 minutes before you go to bed. Bring some joy into your life, the joy of kindness. Joy is one of the factors of enlightenment. May you be happy.

Martin Evans



Feedback

A Personal reflection on Amaravati and Enlightenment

Hello everybody! My name is Bobby and I'm a kind of Buddhist. I've enjoyed coming to Amaravati since the summer. I feel at ease with people who are trying to be open and kind and leave their egos outside with their shoes.

I wonder if it is too soon to be writing into 'Community', bothering you with my "opinions"? Please be patient with me if it is and understand that I am responding to the request for contributions and not really being too "serious".

The question I would like to ask is, 'Is it okay to have "fun" being a Buddhist? Verse 146 of the Dhammapada wags its finger at us: 'The world is on fire! Why are you laughing?' As a fellow retreatant put it, "Have we got time to stop and pick the daisies?"

I often talk on the phone with an old friend who lives in Athens and is studying under a Tibetan school of Buddhism. His practice is very structured, all-consuming and intense. I find it interesting to compare and contrast his approach with what I see as the slower, gentler approach of Theravada.

One day he was paraphrasing his teacher, using a metaphor of climbing a mountain. He explained that, if you want to take the shortest route to the summit, you need to grow muscles and sprout claws. I enjoyed the drama of his delivery but, for myself, felt I'd rather take the slower, more scenic route.

Having been brought up a Catholic (any other ex-Catholics out there?) I'm distrustful of "extreme" positions. Whenever I have taken up an "absolute" position on anything in my life the

sand beneath my feet has shifted...

For me, one thing that makes it difficult to speak about the Dhamma and yet one of its great beauties, is that it becomes like peeling an onion. What sounds "true" turns out to be a half truth. We find, for example, that the opposite is also true. (Or is it just me having a mid-life crisis?)

I find Theravadan Buddhism very appealing. I like the encouragement to investigate for myself the truth of the Buddha's words through vipassana and I like that kind of "orangey-brown" colour. I know the monks and nuns practice a strict code of discipline but it seems we "householders" can do as much or as little as we choose, go as fast or slow as we want. In a world of toxic stress levels and "not enough time" I like it that I can dawdle, wander off and come back. I know I'm unlikely to achieve "enlightenment" in this lifetime doing that but, to be honest, I don't expect to anyway.

Please forgive me for being provocative but I'm not sure I even want to be "enlightened". I've got no idea what it means! I'd like to be "liberated".... From my anger, my judgements, my selfishness.... I'd like not to be a slave to desire and to feel calmer and more caring...

You may say that our greatest learning arises out of suffering, and certainly that's been true in my case. Walking life's highway can be grueling but it can be fun too... enjoying the scenery, drawing alongside a fellow traveler, learning to look, listen and love. For me, enlightenment can wait. I'll settle for the journey. What's more, I'll take Thich Nhat Hanh's advice and try to smile more!

Bobby Swallow

Letters & News

One Life

27/1/04

Dear All,

I received my copy of 'Community' plus some extra copies very kindly sent to me by Jean and Tony. I want to thank you all for the publication of my article 'one life' and particularly for the additional note at the end giving a contact address should anyone wish to support our cause. It would be wonderful if anyone did respond to the article.

I am hoping to return to Kwazulu later this year if all goes according to plan. Unfortunately Jean Spinks will not be able to join me this time but our joint plan is for a return journey together in 2006 (a first time for Jean) but I – ever the optimist – hope we can bring our joint return forward to next year 2005.

Because you have been so kind to have printed my article I thought it would be a good idea to send you a 'one life' leaflet so you can see a few photos as well.

Our application for Reg Charity status is in the pipeline, being processed by the charity Commission, so here's hoping for a positive result.

Thank you again for your kindness in publishing my article

With gratitude and metta,

Elena Uttan.

News from Hartridge.—April 2004

Ajahn Suriyo and Ajahn Gandhasilo welcome all those with an interest in the Dhamma. The kitchen refurbishment is the main event for the next couple of months. Hopefully we will be able to find the kettle for Wesak on 12th June.

Nick Ray

LOCAL SCHOOL IS RAISING MONEY FOR THE TIBET RELIEF FUND AND ROKPA

Donations needed, large and small, as prizes to raise money for Tibetan refugees. Many thanks for all offers of generosity on behalf of the Aid For Tibet charity at Merchant Taylors' School, Sandy Lodge, Northwood.

All enquiries to Anna Badar tel: 0208 386 1916 /
annabadar@hotmail.com

Latest developments at Cittaviveka, Chithurst Buddhist Monastery

Not long after the conclusion of this year's winter retreat came the first 'garden day' of the new season, itself bursting into bloom with so many unexpected willing helpers arriving to offer their services. This pleasant surprise aroused high hopes of a similar sized task force arriving to work on the forthcoming garden and forest days (for dates see grapevine in FSN)

Work has progressed on refurbishing the Nun's kuti in the grounds of Aloka cottage. Looking like a fairy cottage from a children's story book the kuti is largely made from natural materials from the adjacent Hammer Wood.

Work on paving the courtyard and roofing the cloisters has begun together with work on the entrance to the walled garden. Within the Dhamma Hall, work has begun on the installation of a hearing circuit and shelving and similar wood fittings.



Bhāvanā or ...Dhamma Companions Required



Meditation is the English word most often used to translate – *bhāvanā** – a Pali word which means to develop or cultivate the ‘mind’. For some reason, the whole idea of ‘meditation’ has captivated me since my late teens. I first practised yogic concentration techniques whilst still studying for my ‘A’ levels. I remember finding that my ability to concentrate improved.

Later, as a University student, I was initiated into Transcendental Meditation and practised this for some years. TM exerted a calming and stabilising effect which was very helpful during my first few stressful terms as a Teacher in Bradford.

It was then that I came into contact with the early Forest Sangha at Chithurst and started to practise mindfulness of breathing and insight meditation. Since that time my understanding of what *bhāvanā* means has broadened to the point where I think that the word ‘meditation’ is a little misleading. I am not sure what would make a better alternative, but ‘meditation’ excludes much that I now consider to be part of *bhāvanā*. For example, *bhāvanā* includes the development of mindfulness in all postures - walking, sitting, standing and lying down – it includes the development of powers of enthusiasm, discrimination and investigation – and it includes chanting, *metta* practice, studying and listening to discourses, as well as development of the ability to concentrate and to gain insight into the conditioned world.

My early idea that meditation is what you do in a quiet place on a mat – rather like attending a mental gym for 30 minutes before returning to the hurly-burly of the ‘real world’ – has gradually changed. Perhaps one reason that I tended to pigeon-hole meditation to mean just sitting on

a mat, is the widespread image of the cross-legged Buddha with eyes half closed and a slightly blissful expression. This nice image has come to be seen by many as a metaphor for Buddhist practice, but is perhaps best seen as illustrating just *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* (calmness and insight practice).

A useful overview of the range of qualities which are developed during *bhāvanā* is contained within the five faculties (*indriyas*). These ‘spiritual faculties’ are to be found in many Suttas and highlight factors which also occur in other Buddhist lists:

saddhā -- trustful confidence, faith, or conviction

virīya -- vigour, energy, strength, enthusiasm or persistence

sati -- mindfulness

samādhi -- concentration, collectedness

paññā -- wisdom, insight, or discernment.

*‘Trustful
confidence is
required even
to put forth
the initial
effort’*

Viewed as a sequential path, we can see that a degree of ‘trustful confidence’ is required even to put forth the initial effort. Perhaps we have read a convincing book about Buddhism and listened to someone speaking about the benefits of meditation. Perhaps we notice the headline that ‘Buddhists are happier people!’. This gives us the initial motivation—the minimum of trustful confidence—to start.

Having made a start, we then require persistence and energy to keep going. Sometimes enthusiasm carries us on, and sometimes we have to generate ‘sticking power’ through other means.

Mindfulness enables us to know objectively what is going on, what our intentions are, and what our current situation is. Mindfulness is seen as

comprising two qualities—‘recollection’ or memory, and bare attention to the current situation. Recollection reminds us of our intention and current situation whilst bare attention informs us of what we are experiencing.

Concentration establishes a calm and collected state of mind where the hindrances (sensual desire, aversion, sloth and torpor, restlessness, doubt) are temporarily subdued and cease to be a problem. I prefer ‘collectedness’ as a description of this state since I associate ‘concentration’ with too much strain and effort. Collectedness can progress from ‘access concentration’ - the basic level—through to the first and higher *jhānas*.

Wisdom enables us to understand at both an intellectual and, more importantly at a ‘gut’ level, the nature of impermanence, suffering and the impersonality of the phenomenon we are experiencing.

Although these five faculties do form a sensible sequence, they are also connected with and reinforce each other. They also form balancing pairs. Faith is balanced by wisdom, so that faith is not blind, and wisdom does not become ‘cunning’; and enthusiasm (energy) by calm and collected states, so that energy does not become restlessness, and calm does not become ‘sloth’. Mindfulness acts as the grounding for the other four factors and is seen to be always applicable.

A further very important component of *bhāvanā* is friendship. Associating with others on the same path is very helpful. Continuing with the practice of meditation for the ‘long haul’ inevitably takes the practitioner through periods of difficulty. Although the peaceful and bright mind-states which may arise during meditation are pleasant and can reinforce the desire to practise, there are other periods where meditation can feel a struggle. At times such as these, the company of other friends on the path is very welcome.

Entering into a Dhamma discussion with others or listening to a Dhamma discourse can switch one’s mind-state from one dominated by ‘sloth and torpor’ or doubt (or other hindrance) to one energised by optimism and joy and a wholesome ‘desire to do’. Mindfully listening to a discourse or engag-

ing in Dhamma discussion are themselves a part of *bhāvanā* – they are forms of wise attention which strengthen wholesome states.

The company of Dhamma friends does not need to be in the form of a ‘master - disciple’ relationship, although the counsel of a wiser person is invaluable. Much value is also to be found in simply mixing with and talking with others on the path. The Dhammasa’nga.ni states that it is skilful:

‘To follow after, to frequent the company of, and associate with, such persons as have *saddhā*, are virtuous, learned, generous and wise; to resort to and consort with them, to be devoted to them, enthusiastic about them, mixed up with them’.

Both the skilful desire to cultivate such companions and acting upon such a desire reinforce wise attention. One can also regard the idea of ‘seeking out Dhamma companions’ as part of taking refuge in the Sangha, the third refuge.

‘Seeking out Dhamma companions’ can also perhaps be broadened, so that ideas of renunciation, of seeking secluded natural spaces and of putting energy into meditation are all ‘good companions’ to attend to. As are such feelings, for example, of joy (*piiti*) and trustful confidence (*saddhā*). Attending to Dhamma companions must also include ourselves, so that we heed our own good advice.

When meditation is understood to be a part of *bhāvanā*, and the breadth of *bhāvanā* is realised, then the value of Dhamma centres such as Amaravati and the communities that are established in them can be more fully appreciated.

Our practice then evolves from perhaps a disconnected and solitary sitting meditation (as an add-on to a busy life) to a fuller development of our heart and mind (*citta*) as part of one or more Dhamma communities.

Chris Ward

* I have italicised Pali words and use diacriticals where practical.

AUA NEWS

Changes to the Constitution

For the third time in our ten year history we have revised our Constitution. We considered this to be necessary so that we could deal with the ambiguous nature of AUA Membership, the lack of detail in the way the AUA Committee is formed, and the question of whether the AUA Guidelines should form part of the Constitution. What is surprising when we have these detailed reviews, is to realise that subtle currents have moved us from our original starting point. We have also found that those involved with the AUA are working from different perceptions of what the AUA is. Part of the reviewing process is then to synchronise our understanding so that we are all once again singing from the same 'Chanting' book. For some of us, this is a painful process. When guidelines or processes change, it can feel as though part of our world has collapsed, which is quite an insight into how attachment operates. We can also become quite excited by the idea of getting things 'just right'. What can alleviate any discomfort in this process is to affirm our intention to act from metta, compassion, gladness, and equanimity. We are not going to end up with a perfect Constitution and processes, but perhaps the changes that we make will be 'good enough' for a few more years.

Another good question that arises is why we cannot just leave things alone—aren't these all empty conventions—why bother changing them? However, this attitude can easily slip into complacency (and even nihilism) and is a bit like asking why we have to invest time and effort to repair our houses. Impermanence is a characteristic of existence and organisations require maintenance just like houses. Of course, how we respond to changing circumstances are matters of judgement and opinion and this is where we must work with and trust the intentions of our fellow Committee Members.

The changes that we have decided upon are not intended to make any difference to the nature or feel of our events. We will continue to organise days of practice and retreats which are open to all. The five founding principles of the AUA also remain unchanged. We have, however, introduced the idea of AUA Membership. If you like what we do and you wish to support us, then please fill out an application form (enclosed with this Newsletter) to become a member of the AUA. All Committee Members will then be volunteers from the AUA Membership.

At the end of the 4 year tenure of the AUA Committee, the Committee will have the responsibility for identifying a replacement. This will be formed from those current Committee members who wish to continue, and any resultant vacancies being filled from Associate Committee Members or new volunteers from the broader AUA membership. This process has the merit of being reasonably simple and giving a degree of continuity. It also reflects the voluntary nature of the Committee and its purpose to support generosity rather than self-aggrandisement and status. Our experience over the past ten years has been that there is a regular 'turn-over' of Committee places, and we expect this to continue. Even if the Committee is full, we always have Associate Committee Member positions for those who wish to offer their services to help at any time with organising and running events.

The final significant change to our constitution is that we have removed the original 'guidelines' section. We felt that including these within the Constitution constrained us from considering new lay-practice frameworks and also might give the impression that AUA Members were some sort of exclusive Buddhist 'elite'. We wish to emphasise the open and inclusive nature of the AUA rather than appearing to create unhelpful divisions. What unites us is the Dhamma, and so newcomers and old friends, beginners and experienced Buddhists, the old and the young, and women and men, are all welcome to join in our activities.

Chris Ward



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 longer events, as well as other 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 a while, we offer the opportunity to develop all aspects of the Buddhist path in a supportive lay context.

The Bodhinyana Group Programme - Summer 2004

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

21st April	The Hindrances
28th April	Different Types of Meditation?
5th May	Do we need a Teacher?
12th May	Sutta Study
19th May	Meditation and Reflection
26th May	Investigation, energy and joy
2nd June	Sutta Study
9th June	Mindfulness and Concentration?
16th June	Meditation and Reflection
23rd June	What is Dhamma (or dhamma)?
30th June	Sutta Study
7th July	The End of the World?
14th July	Meditation and Reflection
21st July	Friendship

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

www.buddhacommunity.org

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

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.

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.

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

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

**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

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