



# FOREST SANGHA

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### Simplicity

*Ajahn Sundarā gave this talk at Amaravati at the end of vassa 1998, following her return to England after two years of intensive meditation practice in one of the forest monasteries in Thailand.*

My stay in Thailand has been a great learning experience. It gave me the chance to be part of a culture that is incredibly different from ours in its outlook on life; this made me realise how much my mind was conditioned by all the Western values, its assumptions, prejudices and conceit. At first, things were totally alien to me and almost impossible to understand but by the time I left, everything had become familiar and I felt quite at home. So I would like to share with you some aspects of the time spent in this beautiful country.

In the rural area where the monastery is located the people are mostly farmers, simple people, living uncomplicated lives. Unlike us, they do not seem to be burdened with a lot of psychological concerns or existential crises. Their lives revolve around immediate needs such as food, sleep, getting through the day, and simple pleasures of life. Thai people are great at enjoying themselves!

When I met my teacher, Ajahn Anan, for the first time, he asked me how my practice was going. I said that I wasn't too happy with it, and that one of my interests in coming to Thailand was to have the opportunity to develop it. Then he asked me what my difficulties were, so I explained to him

how I was feeling and so on. It was quite extraordinary, as I was talking suddenly to sense that I had a strong mirror in front of me and I saw this 'Me', going through its usual programme with clever justifications, suddenly turn into a big cloud of proliferation! This was a wonderful insight. With anybody else I might have been

offended or felt that I had not been taken seriously but somehow, with him – maybe because he was just himself and deeply at ease – there was a huge sense of relief.

The way Thai people approach the teaching and

themselves is deeply influenced by the Buddhist teaching and its psychology. Even their everyday language is mixed with many Pāli words. I remember noticing how their way of speaking about the mind/heart could seem quite cold-hearted to us. If you were going through some great suffering, some fear or painful memories, the teacher would say: 'Well, it's just *kilesa* (unwholesome mental states).' Strangely enough, in that context such a statement completely deflates the habit to think in terms of: "Me", having a huge problem that needs to be sorted out', and there was always a strong and compassionate mirror and reflection. If anyone

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else had reduced my 'problems' to a simple feeling of unhappiness I would have been really annoyed and felt dismissed, but with Ajahn Anan, in whom I had a deep trust, I was able to see the way my mind worked and, when there was confusion, to drop it. I would be reminded of the present moment by the question: 'What's going on? Is your heart unhappy?'

Of course, in the immediacy of the moment nothing was going on, because the monastery had a peaceful atmosphere. It was a simple place, quiet and secluded, and there was nothing to do all day except sweep one's path for about half an hour. That was all. My mind calmed down a lot.

These experiences gave me a real taste for simplicity, and for the mind in its state of normality – the mind that does not create problems out of the way things are. I'm not saying that this seemingly simple and direct approach to the mind is right or wrong, but I found that practising in this context and culture over a period of two years had a powerful effect. It helped me to stop the habit of creating myself as a person – and this was quite a liberating thing. As the mind calmed down I could see the person, the sense of 'Self', really clearly every time it arose.

The teaching pointed out that if you suffer through the sense of Self, you can't actually go very far in your practice; insight cannot arise deeply enough to cut off attachment. The whole culture facilitates this approach. If you think too much, people consider that you are on the verge of madness. Ask any Thai: when someone thinks too much, they'll say that she or he has a 'hot heart' – and if you are 'hot' ('ron' in Thai), you're seen as deluded. To have 'ronchai' (hot heart) is quite negative, even insulting. People there are not much into thinking – I'm not saying it's good or bad, but they don't trust the

thinking mind. This was very different from the culture I came from where thinking is worshiped, tons of books are written, and people rely on and trust the intellect a lot. So it was interesting to be in a culture that functioned so differently – so much more intuitive, more feminine.

What struck me most when I came back to Europe was the complexity of the Western way of life. I could see that having access to many traditions and teachers had turned our society on the spiritual level into a vast

supermarket. This is not all negative, but it's extremely challenging for the mind that is already struggling with all it receives through the senses. No wonder people become neurotic after being exposed to so much information and choices! When you're in the forest out there, you're just with a few birds, a few creepy-crawlies and nature all around. Days come, rise, and pass away with nothing much happening, and you get used to a very simple, peaceful rhythm. I found that extremely pleasant and I knew that it was conducive to deepening the practice. In fact, I felt quite at home and very privileged to have that opportunity.

The culture itself being predominantly Buddhist keeps things simple, the whole atmosphere was not one in which you felt intellectually stimulated; it's quite amazing the effect that this has on the mind. It would naturally slow down a lot, and

become quite still. So I was scared to come back to the West, and whenever I thought of coming back, my mind would conjure up the image of drowning in a huge ocean of thought – not a terribly auspicious sign! Even though I had to adapt and to follow the Thai maechee etiquette – 'the Thai nuns' choreography', as I used to call it: walking in line to receive my food behind very young boys, crouching down every time I spoke to a monk – it was little compared to the blessings and support I

*continued on page 4*



# EDITORIAL

## *Clearing Space*

When the mind is stirred up with excitement, passion or longing; mildly agitated by doubts or irritation; or simply filled with routine lists of ‘important things to do’, it can be extremely difficult to gain and to maintain any perspective at all – either on its nature, or on the effect of its workings on our state of well being. Strangely enough, there is also a certain pleasure that comes from such mental activity. It brings energy, a sense of aliveness, and we find ourselves doing all kinds of things that make us feel that our life has meaning and value – for others, as well as ourselves. There is that in humanity that thrives on agitation. As soon as things begin to empty out and to settle – as soon as there is nothing to do – we feel uncomfortable, and look around for something to fill up the space. We speak of ‘filling in time’, in a way that assumes that ‘full time’ is good, and that the worst thing that could happen for somebody would be to have an empty life; we are not supposed to waste time doing nothing.

However, when we look at life from a contemplative standpoint, when – even for an instant – we take a step back with a question or two: ‘What am I doing? Why am I doing it? What is the result?’ we begin to have a glimmer of the actual meaninglessness of much of what we engage ourselves with. This can be sobering, to say the least – but it can also be a gateway to an altogether different way of being. Recognising the extent to which even our ‘good’ action or speech is tainted by egoistic longing, we begin the process of ‘self emptying’ or purifying the heart whereby, given time, we arrive at a state of fullness beyond measure. We discover a state of perfect mindfulness that persists independently of the condition and activity (or inactivity) of body or mind.

The teachings presented in this issue point to at least two things that are necessary in enabling this to happen. Firstly, creating time and space in our lives. Of course, as Ajahn Sundarā points out, the opportunity to spend an extended time away from one’s role and daily concerns, practising under the guidance of a teacher in a forest monastery, is rare. We can however, if we wish, consider ways of translating such an experience into our own circumstances: visiting a monastery, taking time for retreat, or simply making time to be with ourselves, quietly, each day.

The second factor is investigation – really watching closely to see how our particular *kamma* manifests through thought, speech or action. We need to train ourselves, like a good naturalist, to be interested in even

the grubbiest, ugliest and apparently most insignificant phenomenon – for it may be the very one that underpins our whole view of ourselves, a view that naturally affects our way of relating to others and to the events of our lives.

One such phenomenon that I’ve noticed within my own mind, and that many many people have confided as part of their experience, is the fearful little voice that says – convincingly – ‘You’re not good enough. You don’t practise enough – or well enough. You’re unworthy. What would people think if they knew what you’re really like?... Oh dear.’ We’re not completely at ease with ourselves – and we wonder why we are not happy: ‘After all, I’ve been practising all these years, trying to be good, trying to do the best I can. Where am I going wrong?’ But the miserable little voice is stuffed away (‘It’s only a thought: *anicca, dukkha, anattā\**). We get on with the business (or busyness) of our life and practice.

Maybe we need to make space for that voice, and for all its companion niggles to come out and be carefully attended to, one by one. Sure, they’re only thoughts: *anicca, dukkha, anattā* – but do we really trust and understand that insight? Can we dare to allow them to dance before us in all their finery and, when they’re done, bow out?

Living our lives in accordance with the Noble Truths (Suffering, its Origin, Cessation and the Path) might seem somewhat paradoxical at times. Are we really being asked to allow space for what is most ignoble, most trivial? But perhaps it is only noble qualities, such as humility, patience, honesty and the willingness to abandon our self-centred yearnings that can allow the fulfilment of such a Path.

*Ajahn Candasiri*

\* Footnote: *anicca, dukkha, anattā* (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, impersonality) the three characteristics of existence according to which conditions are contemplated in meditation and in everyday life.

‘Patient endurance is the supreme austerity for burning up evil.

Nibbāna is said to be the most excellent of all attainments.

One who hurts others cannot be called a recluse -

This is the teaching of all the Buddhas.’

*(Dhammapāda v.183)*

continued from page 2... received there.

So I was not sure that I would cope with the life and rhythm of Amaravati. I decided that if I had to teach, I would keep things simple; I would just speak about practice, just facts: *Ānāpānāsati*, the *Five Khandhas* or Dependent Origination. I would not complicate people's lives with more words, concepts and ideas. But it was a great lesson in letting go when, a few weeks ago, I went to teach at a Buddhist group. As I was being driven there, I said innocently to the leader of the group: 'How do you see the weekend?' Of course, I already had some ideas: 'I'll just meditate with them. I'll really teach them how to do it, rather than to think about it – then we can share our experience afterwards.' But the person answered: 'Well, Sister, we really want to talk with you about practice, and ask you questions, and have some discussion on Dhamma, and ...' I thought, 'Oh dear! Never mind.' I just had to let go. I was reminded of the teaching of Luang Por Sumedho: 'Just receive life as it is. Don't make a problem about it. Open yourself to the way things are.'

It is interesting that most Thai people do not seem to suffer much from self hatred; they don't even seem to know what it means! Once, out of curiosity, I asked a woman who came to talk to me about her practice: 'Do you ever dislike yourself?' and she said, 'No, never.' I was amazed. Self negativity does not seem to be part of their psychological make up, whereas we are riddled with it. So we have a difficult beginning, because the first step on this path is to have peace in one's heart – which doesn't happen if there is a lot of self hatred. Fortunately our teacher has devised a very good way of dealing with this – just recognising and receiving it within a peaceful space of acceptance, love and ease. This is a mature step as most of us find it very difficult to create a space around experience, we tend to absorb into what comes through our minds and to create a Self around it. Let's say we absorb into boredom; if there is no mindfulness, we become somebody who is bored, who has got a problem with boredom and needs to fix it. This approach hugely complicates a simple experience like boredom, whereas Ajahn Anan would just say: 'Well it's just one of the hindrances.' That's it. Simple, isn't it? Just boredom, dullness. But often, for us, it can't be just an ordinary boredom – it's got to be a very personal and special one!

One of the things that attracted me most to the Buddhist teaching was the simplicity of its approach – I think this is what all of us would like to nurture in our practice and in our lives. The Buddha said: 'Just look at

yourself. Who are you? What do you think you are?... Take a look at your eyes, visual objects and at how you receive that experience of sense contact? What are the eyes, nose, tongue, body and ears?' He asks us to inquire into sensory experience rather than absorb into it, and react to pain or pleasure. He said just observe and actually see the nature of experience, very simply, very directly without fuss. Just bring peacefulness and calm into your heart, and take a look.

The sensory experience is really what creates our world. Without knowing its source and its effect, it's very difficult to get out of the vicious circle of 'Me' and 'my problem' that needs to be sorted out, or 'Me, who loves it' – this kind of push and pull agitates the heart further. So instead of pushing and pulling we take a good look and, rather than getting involved, we know things as they are: impermanent, unsatisfactory and not self.

But this requires certain conditions, it doesn't happen by itself.

The first condition is peace and calm; without that, it's very difficult to see anything. That's why a lot of our practice is actually to bring the heart to a state of balance and calm. Most people are in a constant state of reactivity. If you ask them if they suffer, they say, 'No' – they think they are perfectly fine. But someone who has seen the suffering of reactivity gradually comes to realise that that's not the best way to relate to life; it is very limited – always the experience of 'Self', 'Me' and 'You'. But as the sense of 'Self' decreases, the reactivity decreases too.

It is not so much the sense of Self that is the obstacle, it's our identification with it. The Four Noble Truths point to that very experience: the suffering of attachment to Self, the belief that one has a permanent ego. One teacher gave the example of self being like a necklace; when the beads are held together by a thread it becomes a necklace, but as soon as the thread is cut, the whole thing falls apart. I've spent almost twenty years observing closely the experience of the sense of Self. I remember in the early years when I was upset, Ajahn Sumedho would say to me: 'Well you don't need to suffer about that. You've got the Refuges and...' – but this used to enrage me: 'But what about Me? I'm suffering right now!' I felt he was just dismissing the huge personal problem, and wasn't taking me seriously. So for years I cherished that sense of Self without knowing it. I didn't think I was deluded, no, I was simply taking myself seriously!!

In Thailand if you suffer and talk about it, you quickly get this funny sense that your practice has gone

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down the drain. This is because in the quiet and simple life of a forest monastery, the formal practice is strongly rooted in the development of concentration, *samādhi*. It's a different approach there. Here, at Amaravati, the foundation of our practice is the Four Noble Truths which point again and again to suffering, its cause, its relinquishment and the path'. Ajahn Sumedho teaches that to free the mind one just needs to put this teaching into practice right till the day we die. It's not so easy here to get refined states of mind because we are constantly impinged upon by sense contacts: things, work, many strong-minded people living together.

I was struck by how soft and gentle the psyche of the Thai people is compared to ours; I found them generally very easy going. They like to laugh a lot, and life is basically no problem; if you make one you are considered kind of stupid. Even very simple villagers will think that if you make a problem out of life you are stupid. This was a nice contrast to our tendency to create problems around most things – because we have not been taught a better way. Our whole culture is based on the view that the world is understood through the thinking apparatus, rather than through the silent knowing, awakened mind.

The practice is dependent on skillful conditions; it's really important not to make too much of oneself. Basically, as long as you are fascinated by yourself, you will be bound to suffering. When the mind is undermined by thoughts such as: 'I don't like myself', 'I think I've got a problem' and so on, it ends up being fed on the wrong food, filled with unskillful states (*akusala dhamma*). The realisation of Dhamma is dependent on the strength of your mind, so how can that come about if there is not a certain degree of positive energy? That's why *mettā*, kindness and acceptance, is very important. You don't get a bright mind by filling it with a lot of negative states; that weakens it. Whether it's anger, greed, jealousy, despair – if their true nature is not seen, they weaken the *citta*, the heart. But when you see them in the light of mindfulness, then they have no power over you.

Try meditating and filling your heart with *mettā*; then

filling it with depression, and then with joy – you'll see the difference, it's quite simple. Do the same with boredom or jealousy for a while, and then with compassion and love. These are just conditioned mental states, but often we are not really aware of how they really affect us; this is the work of delusion. So knowing very clearly the difference between what is skillful and unskillful, not from an intellectual point of view, but from wisdom, is great progress. The Buddha's teaching is like a map that helps us to recognise skillful and unskillful *dhammas*. If there are unskillful things in the

mind, we should learn to recognise them and let them go.

Remember your heart is like a container filled with things that come from the past. If we've been a thief, or lazy or arrogant, or loving and generous in the past then we'll have certain habits. When we meditate, we receive the result of our habits – we can't just throw them away at will. Wouldn't it be nice if we could? We'd all be enlightened a long time ago! So bearing patiently and compassionately with one's *kamma* is very important.

One thing I learnt from my experience in Thailand is that while the actual practice is always here and now, you can also talk about a gradual process. Let's say when you meditate if your mind is whirling around in all directions, you need to be aware of that. Then you need to apply effort, so that your

mind stays with its object of meditation, rather than just letting it go in every direction, carelessly, without stirring up energy. Concentration, mindfulness and effort are the tools needed to gain insight. We're all here to liberate the heart from delusion, to learn how to live free from remorse or confusion. For the fruits of practice to arise in the heart, we need to develop these conditions.

Here in the West we make a big deal about the body, and make a lot of demands on it. It has to be healthy, strong and comfortable; whereas, in the East, it is made much less of. It's important of course, as without it you would not be able to practise but if it cracks up or deteriorates, there is no need to agitate the mind. So if



you talk too much about your body, or want to sleep a little bit more, you are basically considered a lousy practitioner! From a Buddhist perspective, it is the mind that is more important, since it will condition what happens when you die. When the mind is strong and healthy, then the body calms down naturally, and benefits a lot more than when we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by concern for its well being. This outlook gave me a more balanced perspective on the body and a more detached way to deal with it.

Dwelling upon a negative aspect of oneself or other people can often be the easiest way of looking at life; the hardest thing is to actually train the heart to follow the path with *kusala dhamma*, skillful *dhamma*. You may feel down or depressed but consider, it's only one mental state, one moment; do we want to perpetuate such a state for a lifetime? Or can we actually, through wisdom, realise that it's only one moment, one feeling, one thought? Such realisation brings a real sense of urgency. If we are going to have feelings, or to think – which we can't avoid – we might as well guide our mind towards skillful things. Anything else just drags us down to Hell... but actually we do this to ourselves quite a lot unknowingly. So we have an option: we can stay in Hell or in Heaven, or we can stay in a state of peace that comes from wisdom – knowing that when pleasant feelings are present, that's Heaven and when it's unpleasant, that's Hell. The moment you know both as they are, that's freedom, isn't it? The mind doesn't linger – that's the middle way. We can't control life, but it does take time to go beyond wanting Heaven or fearing Hell.

Just the way people walk or open doors, the way they speak or eat can send you to Heaven or Hell. It doesn't take much. Isn't that ridiculous? Sometimes we feel blissed out or we feel friendly to the whole universe, then, coming back to our dwelling place we find somebody's making a bit of noise, and suddenly we feel enraged. It doesn't take much, does it? So life is very unstable. Yet there is the knowing, that moment of freedom when you know: 'Ah, this is a feeling, sense

contact, ear, nose...'

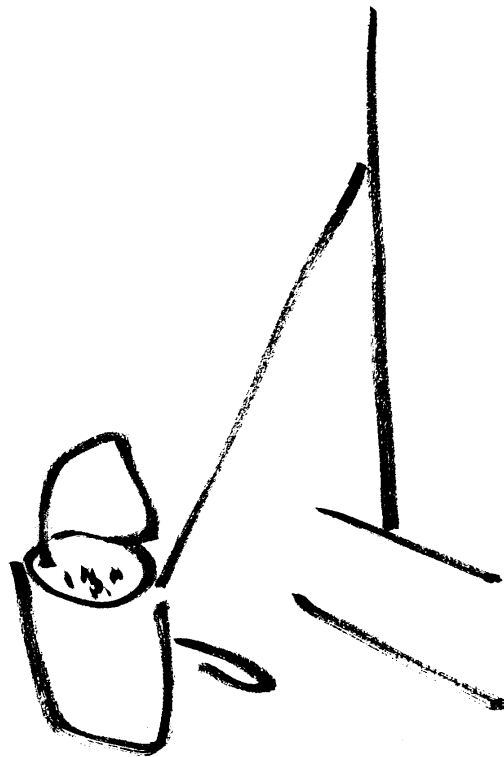
The teaching of the Buddha, remember, is to know sense contact, its object and the effect it has on the heart. So you hear your neighbours making a lot of noise: 'I'm going to tell them off, I can't stand it!' But when you are able to let go of it, you notice that you don't mind really... but then the noise starts again, and finally you find yourself in front of their door knocking: 'Can you stop it!' and of course, if there is no wisdom at that moment, no mindfulness, then later on, you feel remorse: 'I feel awful, I shouldn't have done that...' and the whole thing starts again.

The teaching of the Buddha is very simple. We need to remind ourselves again and again to have *sati*, mindfulness. It's like an endless refrain: *sati, sati, sati*: Where are we now?... The practice of awareness is always in the present moment. There's no knowing in the future or the past. You can know a thought that takes you into the past or the future, but in the moment there is just knowing, awareness.

So we can remind ourselves that we are all here to train and keep the practice simple. To know what nurtures the heart: peace, calm, compassion, *mettā*. When we have *mettā*, the ego, the Self can dissolve. Notice how when people have *mettā* for you, peace arises in your heart, doesn't it? When people feel love towards you, you feel peaceful and calm. This is what you can do for yourself too. If all of us learn

to love ourselves and each other, this will create a good and important foundation for the practice.

So I just want to leave you with this: keep things very simple and remind yourself that whatever complicates life, it's not something to trust. It's more likely to be the work of my friend, *Mara*, the Self or ego. When the heart is at peace and there is understanding, then things are quite cool actually, quite peaceful, quite OK. So I wish you to cultivate kindness and infinite patience towards yourself, and towards whatever resultant *kamma* you have to work through and that is bothering you at this time. This is why the Buddha said that patience and endurance are the highest austerities. ❖



# The Natural History of the Mind

*Nick Scott, who over the past few years has been project manager at Cittaviveka, reflects on the natural reflective ability of the mind and its application to nature study and meditation.*

I have always admired good naturalists; the ones who are interested in all aspects of the nature they study. They take delight in seeing some creature that the rest of us would think was insignificant, or some new aspect of its behaviour – and their delight is not tempered by having seen it many times before. They have that wonderful ability to be interested in it all, for no other reason than that it is there, and interesting.

I studied botany and ecology at university (I even have a doctorate) and I worked for over ten years in nature conservation, but I have never really been a good naturalist. I become too caught up in the things I am trying to achieve to take real delight in the nature around me – but I have known good naturalists. They were not the hunters of rarities who would come to the nature reserves, looking for something new to tick off on a list of what they had seen – the good naturalists would instead spot all manner of minor things, things that I had often missed: a plant that had just come into flower; the way a particular beetle was associated with one side of a tree; or some new behaviour of nesting birds – and they would only tell you if you bothered to ask. That is another characteristic they have – they are not interested in achieving any kind of status from their study. My assistant at the nature reserves had every bird's breeding territory worked out; he'd do this before work, by coming in at dawn. Another good friend is a delight to go for a walk with, because she notices all the small and insignificant members of the plant kingdom – but she never forces her observations on anyone, even when in a party of fellow botanists.

The only time I become a good naturalist is if you give me nothing else to do – like when I'm on a meditation retreat. Then my need to get things done slowly falls away, and I begin to take an interest in the things around me for their own sake. Recently I had an opportunity to retreat in a *kuti* in the forest at Chithurst Monastery. Initially, my mind was full of thoughts about my life and responsibilities. As that subsided, I then

began to notice problems with the *kuti*. Once I had attended to a few of those jobs, I realised that, 'No, that was not why I was there', and so was left with nothing else but to really take notice of the things around me. I found again that sense of interested enquiry that good naturalists have; actually it is innate, we all have it, it is just that for most of us it is covered up with personal concerns.

I became interested in where each bird had its nest, the behaviour of the mouse which lived in my wood pile, the unfurling of new leaves on each of the plants; I also observed things I had never noticed before. Around the *kuti* there were old rotting tree trunks, nearly submerged in mosses and lichens, scattered amidst the growing sweet chestnut coppice. I had seen them, but never really taken them in, or noticed how many there were. Then I remembered that old Dave Bridger who used to cut our chestnut had told me that this part of Hammer Wood had once been an oak wood, but was burnt down and replanted with chestnut and, yes – when I looked closely at the stumps, there were bits of blackened bark on them. They had obviously been burnt and then cut down. Why had I never noticed that before? Then I started to ponder the moon. Does it turn in relation to us, so that one part is always light? Or is it relatively stationary, with the light from the sun moving around it? I had to watch it for several nights to find out. I even got fascinated with supermarket bar codes on the various packets and old jars! Why were there apparently several codes for the same number, was there a system to it? I puzzled over that one for days, staring intently at bottles and cartons after each meal, until I finally got it cracked.

I admire good meditators in the same way as I admire good naturalists. I have been trying to meditate for a long time now, but I have never been a natural at it. I really admire people like the abbot of this monastery, Ajahn Sucitto; he takes every opportunity to practise. I see him walking up and down his meditation path after the meal, when the rest of us are taking a nap, and the

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small light in his bedroom illuminating his shrine is always on as I retire to bed. When we were walking together in India, he got so absorbed in a mantra he was reciting internally that he didn't notice someone calling out to invite us for tea; and if there is one thing in the mundane world that Ajahn Sucitto is interested in, it is tea! I am also struck by the way he really enquires into the mind. He wants to know what things are and why certain things happen; he'll read the scriptures, and then review the lists of this or that while in meditation, looking for them in his own mind – and he has that courageous quality of being willing to try something out, just to see what happens. Ajahn Sumedho does that too. One winter retreat both of them, independently, decided to try rushing straight outside and rolling in the snow as soon as their alarm went off in the early morning – just to see what happened in the mind. Another time, Ajahn Sumedho asked the dentist to fill his teeth without an injection so he could watch the mind react to the pain! Not that he's the slightest bit masochistic, he enjoys sensual pleasures just as much as I do – but I have to work up courage just to get myself to the dentist at all!

The only time I get any good at meditation is when everything else is taken away. On a retreat, once things have settled down and once I have given up being distracted by this or that, finally I am interested in the mind. I start to apply the investigative enquiry of good naturalists – to the creatures of the mind: What is that drive?

Where does this impulse come from? What is that repetitive thought really about? I even get interested in things like: What is making me want to meditate? This investigative enquiry is a natural function that we, as a species, have evolved as our particular adaptation to this world; the other apes can do it, but nowhere near as

well. We humans have been so successful at it that we have been able to colonise every terrestrial habitat on the planet. We can also turn this enquiry inwards, looking at our own minds. It is the same process, the only difference is that it is self corrective – there is a positive feedback cycle. Through enquiring into our own minds we come to understand why we do things and why we

are the way we are. When we see the processes that are self harming, we want to stop doing them. This results in a calmer, more balanced mind that is more inclined towards and more skillful at enquiring into itself.

So investigative enquiry is a process I have grown to trust. When

watching just for its own sake I observe the way that I come to notice, say, a worm on my walking path – just from the slightest difference in colour – then the recognition of what it is, before the response: stopping to pick it up. I come to see the desire to achieve something, anything, and that in the mind that wants to identify with any achievement; I see the discontent which results from identifying until, with a little shudder of resignation, I let it go.

That, to me, is the ultimate point of meditation, rather than sitting there completely concentrated on something (even when we can at last do it, and even though it can be very pleasant) – it is not calm and peace which I am now aiming for, but freedom. And freedom comes from enquiring into the mind. This is an innate ability, even for someone like me – I just have to create the right conditions. It is just like

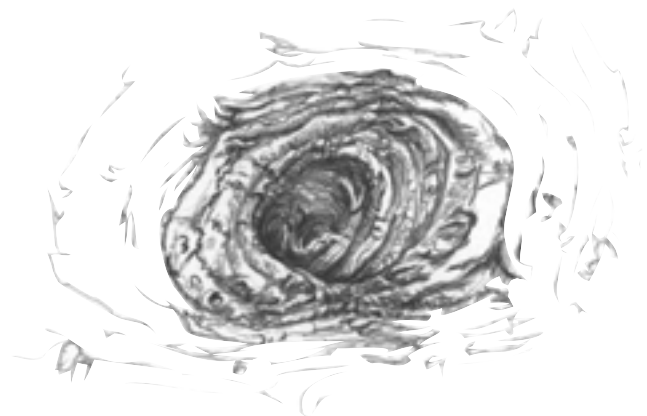
becoming interested in supermarket bar codes: I bet if I put a lot of the people who have read this into a meditation kuti for a month, even if they have not the slightest interest in puzzles, they would still look at the bar codes and wonder: 'Now, which number goes with which code?' – now that I've mentioned it, that is. And I must apologise for that! ❖

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*Knotwhole*



## THE MONASTERY

Once I knew, nothing in life could save me  
 & the monastery will wake you up in the cold mornings  
 it will kick you & drive you with more efficiency  
 than any alarm-clock, it will bore you with its routine  
 then seek forgiveness with a bowlful of food  
 & the monastery will always be showing you  
 that you are nothing & restore a sense of wonder  
 at the falling of a leaf, the monastery will turn you  
 into a giggling child & a crying child & a wise old man  
 whose mission is telling the world that it has to let go  
 & the monastery will dredge up all the horrible  
 secrets from the corners of the mind of a long-dead boy  
 screaming the truth of misery to the birds & trees  
 & the monastery will show you acceptance  
 in a good friend, the poetry of restraint & the patience  
 of sitting with restlessness & you will hate it & hate it  
 because your love is stronger & the monastery will get into  
 your blood  
 more exciting & depressing than alcohol & you know  
 the monastery will forget you if you leave  
 & remember you with gratitude when you return  
 & the monastery will give you the open silence  
 you will be unable to receive they say until years later  
 they say the monastery will give you the strongest of  
 feelings  
 & you will want to run away & curl up & die  
 & be born again like the greenness of a beech & the  
 monastery  
 will make you want to dance & sing & regret those times  
 when you could & didn't & the monastery will protect you  
 like an island & you will want to swim & like a kind parent

### Amaravati Retreat Centre – Managers needed for 2001

We are looking for two or three people to help run the retreat centre at Amaravati from either April or August 2001. There are possible vacancies in the following areas of responsibility:

**Office** (includes booking, finances, answering telephone enquires)

**Kitchen** (planning menus, ordering food, supervising cooks)

**Household and Maintenance** (preparing accommodation, organising work weekends, dealing with repairs, etc.)

If you are interested please write to The Retreat Centre at Amaravati, giving some information about yourself, and which area(s) of work you would be interested in. We look forward to hearing from you.



## SANGHA NOTICES

**Winter Retreat 2001**

From 9th January until the end of March, the monastic communities will be in retreat. During this time overnight accommodation will not be available for guests. Visitors may still come during the day to meditate or to help with meal time offerings; if you would like to offer dana, it is helpful, if possible, to let the kitchen manager know beforehand. At both Cittaviveka and Amaravati for most of the retreat time, visitors may come for evening pūjā at 7.30pm, and at least on Observance nights, a Dhamma talk will be given. The Saturday afternoon meditation workshops will continue at Amaravati; they will be led by an experienced lay meditator. Telephone messages will be processed daily throughout this time, but in general, responses to written requests will not be attended to until after mid March.

**Wesākha Pūjā 2001**

The 'official' Wesākha Pūjā – the day of commemoration of the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbāna of the Buddha – falls on Monday, 7th May (the full moon Uposatha day).

Celebrations of this event will take place at each of the monasteries, either on the weekend preceding or following that day. More accurate information about this event will be available nearer the time at each of the monasteries.

**HARTRIDGE NOTICE – from Trustees of Devon Vihara Trust**

It has been agreed that for the foreseeable future, Hartridge Monastery will be used as a retreat for Sangha members to spend time away from the duties of communal life. Senior monks and nuns will visit periodically (ideally once a month) to provide teaching and support for the local lay community.

We are looking for a suitable person to live at the monastery for at least one year to look after administration and the general upkeep of the place, and to

liaise with the lay community regarding events and the provision of day to day needs of resident Sangha members. Anyone interested should contact Muditā 01395 586742 for further details, information about these visits and other events at Hartridge Monastery.

## AMARAVATI NOTICES

**UPASAMPADĀ & PABBAJĀ**

On 6th January, Sāmaneras Sāvako (Alain Marrec – France) and Gavesako (Jakub Bartovsky – Czech Republic) will request Upasampadā – admission to the Bhikkhu Sangha. Anagarika Alexander Kirillov will also request sāmanera (novice) ordination. All are welcome to attend this ceremony which will take place in the Temple at 1.30pm.

**FAMILY EVENTS FOR 2001**

The theme for the events this year will be **Right Speech**.

**Rainbows Weekend (4th - 7th May) –**

A weekend together to create the Rainbows Magazine.

**Family Weekend (8th - 10th June) –**

A shorter weekend particularly suitable for newcomers.

**Summer Camp (18th - 26th August) –**

A full week of activities.  
*For details contact Kim Waller, 16a Great Russell Mansions, 60 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3BE Tel: 020 7404 5057*

There will also be a **Young People's Retreat** from 7th - 9th December, with details to be announced.

## GENERAL NOTICES

Flooding in North East Thailand – Ajahn Anek, a senior disciple of Luang Por Chah, who has visited Amaravati on several occasions, has established a fund to help victims of extensive flooding in North East Thailand. If you would like to offer support, donations can be sent to Amaravati (before 31st March 2001) clearly marked: **'Ajahn Anek's flood fund'**. We will make sure that they are sent to where they can be of most use in helping those who have lost their

homes, livestock and crops.

**2001 Calendars**

These are available on request. Please send SAE to Amaravati (40p UK mailing, 67p for Europe).

**Christian Buddhist Weekends at Turvey Abbey:**

25th - 27th May

Meister Eckhart: Guide and Friend. A Christian/ Buddhist contemplative weekend, reflecting on the texts of Meister Eckhart through Benedictine Lectio Divina. Led by a Buddhist teacher and Sister Lucy.

15th-17th June

Meditation and Mindfulness Retreat Led by Ajahn Candasiri & Sr. Lucy.

*Please contact the retreat secretary Turvey Abbey, Bedford. MK43 8DE for further information or to book for either of these retreats.*

**Lay Events at Amaravati 2001**

The one day and weekend events provide an opportunity to spend time together, in silence and in exploring themes relevant to practice and daily life. Whether you are just starting, or whether you have a well established practice, you are welcome to participate and contribute.

**April 20 – 21** (Weekend) Dana – Silā – Bhavana.

**June 2** (Day) The 5 Spiritual Faculties.

**June 29 – July 1** (Weekend) "Countryside" meditation.

**July 28** (Day) The Four Noble Truths.

**Sept. 21 – 23** (Weekend) The Creative Arts and Buddhist practice (will include practical explorations of the theme).

**Oct. 7** (Day) The 8-fold Noble Path.

**Dec. 1** (Day) A Day of Practice. *for more information please contact: Nick Carroll, 020 8740 9748 or Chris Ward, 01442 890034*

We try to bring out the *Newsletter* quarterly, depending upon funds and written material. In the spirit of our relationship with lay people, we naturally depend upon donations: any contributions towards printing/distribution costs can be made to: 'The English Sangha Trust', Amaravati. In that same spirit, we ask you to let us know if you wish to be put on (or removed from) the mailing list, or if you have moved. Write to *Newsletter*, Amaravati. The newsletter is also available on the internet from: <http://www.fsnews.cjb.net>

**Data Protection Act:** The mailing list used for *Forest Sangha Newsletter* is maintained on computer. If you object to your record being kept on our computer file, please write to *Newsletter*, Amaravati, and we will remove it.

This Newsletter is printed by: *Ashford Printers*, Harrow. Telephone – (020) 8427-5097

## Teaching and Practice Venues

MEDITATION GROUPS	
<i>These are visited regularly by Sangha members.</i>	
<b>BATH</b> Catherine Hewitt, (01225) 405-235	<b>LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY</b> 58 Eccleston Square, SW1 (Victoria) (020) 7834 5858 <b>Meditation Sundays:</b> led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. <b>Thursday classes – 6.00pm</b>
<b>BRISTOL</b> Lyn Goswell (Nirodha), (0117) 968-4089	
<b>SOUTH DORSET</b> Barbara Cohen-Walters (Sati sati), (01305) 786-821	
<b>EDINBURGH</b> Muriel Nevin, (0131) 337-0901	<b>LEEDS AREA</b> Daniella Loeb, (0113) 2791-375 Anne Voist, (01274) 691-447
<b>GLASGOW</b> James Scott, (0141) 637-9731	<b>SOUTHAMPTON</b> Ros Dean (02380) 422430
<b>HAMPSTEAD</b> Caroline Randall, (020) 8348-0537	<b>SURREY/WOKING</b> Rocana, (01483) 761-398
MEDITATION GROUPS	
<i>These meet regularly &amp; receive occasional visits from Sangha.</i>	
<b>BEDFORD</b> David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892	<b>MAIDSTONE</b> Tony Millett, (01634) 375-728
<b>BELFAST</b> Paddy Boyle, (02890) 427-720	<b>MIDDLESBOROUGH</b> Colin Walker, (01642) 643-0071
<b>BERKSHIRE</b> Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646	<b>MIDHURST</b> Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479
<b>BRIGHTON</b> Nimmala, (01273) 723-378	<b>NEWCASTLE ON TYNE</b> Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726
<b>CAMBRIDGE</b> Gillian Wills, (01954) 780-551	<b>NORWICH</b> Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717
<b>CANTERBURY</b> Charles Watters, (01227) 463342	<b>PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES</b> Peter and Barbara (Subhdra) Jackson, (01239) 820-790
<b>DUBLIN</b> Rupert Westrup, (01) 280-2832 (Dial: 00441 - from the UK)	<b>PORTSMOUTH</b> Dave Beal, (02392) 732-280
<b>ESSEX</b> (Billericay) Rob Howell, (01702) 482-134 or (Harlow) Pamutto, (01279) 724-330	<b>REDRUTH</b> Daniel Davide (01736) 753-175
<b>HEMEL HEMPSTEAD</b> Bodhinyana Group Chris Ward (01442) 890-034	<b>SHEFFIELD</b> Greg Bradshaw (0114) 262-0265
<b>LIVERPOOL</b> Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427 6668	<b>STEYNING / SUSSEX</b> Jayanti (01903) 812-130
<b>LEIGH-ON-SEA</b> Gool Deboo, (01702) 553-211	<b>STROUD</b> John Groves, 0796 7777-742
	<b>TAUNTON</b> Martin Sinclair, (01823) 321-059

## AMARAVATI CASSETTES

Cassette tapes of Dhamma talks given by Ajahn Sumedho and other Sangha members, plus tapes of chanting and meditation instruction are available for sale at cost price. For catalogue and information send SAE to:

Amaravati Cassettes, Ty'r Ysgol Maenan,  
Llanrwst, Gwynedd, LL26 OYD U.K.

## Amaravati

## Retreats

2001:



April	6 – 8	Weekend	(to be decided)
April	13 – 18	5 Day	Ajahn Karuniko
May	11 – 20	10 Day	Ajahn Candasiri
May	25 – 27	Weekend	(to be decided)
June	15 – 17	Weekend	(to be decided)
July	6 – 15	10 Day	Kittisaro & Thānissarā**
July	20 – 22	Weekend	(to be decided)
Sept.	7 – 16	10 Day	Ajahn Sumedho - <b>FULLY BOOKED</b>
Sept.	21 – 23	Weekend	(to be decided)
Oct.	5 – 14	10 Day	Ajahn Sucitto* - <b>FULLY BOOKED</b>
Oct.	19 – 21	Weekend	(to be decided)
Nov.	9 – 11	Weekend	(to be decided)
Nov.	23 – 26	3 Day	Buddhist/Christian with Ajahn Candasiri & Elizabeth West
Dec.	27 – Jan. 1	5 Day	(to be decided)

\*Experienced:(i.e. must have done at least one 10 day retreat) \*\*Lay Teachers

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing any of the 5 or 10 day retreats.

Please note that bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form and booking deposit. The deposit is refundable on request, up to one month before the retreat starts. To obtain a booking form, please write to the Retreat Centre, stating which retreat you would like to do.

## Retreat Centre Work Weekends 2001

April 27th - 29th : June 22th - 24th : Nov. 2nd - 4th

## INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION—AMARAVATI

*Saturday Afternoon Classes 1.30 – 3.30 pm*

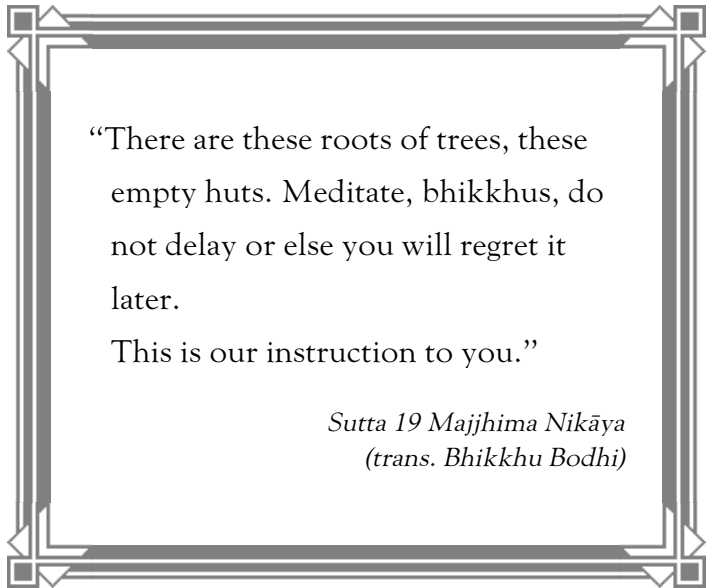
During the winter retreat, January - March, meditation instruction for beginners will be given by experienced lay teachers.

Classes are in the Bodhinyāna Meditation Hall.

*Feel free to come along – no booking is necessary.*

VIHARAS	
<p><b>BRITAIN</b></p> <p>◆ Amaravati Monastery Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ Tel: (01442) 84-2455 (Office) 84-3411 (Guest Info.) 84-3239 (Retreat Info.) Fax: (01442) 84-3721 <i>Stewards: English Sangha Trust, Amaravati.</i></p> <p>◆ Aruna Ratanagiri Harnham Buddhist Monastery Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland NE20 0HF Tel: (01661) 88-1612 Fax: (01661) 88-1019 web site: www.ratanagiri.org.uk e-mail: community@ratanagiri.org.uk <i>Stewards: Magga Bhavaka Trust.</i></p> <p>◆ Cittaviveka: Chithurst Buddhist Monastery Chithurst, Petersfield, Hampshire GU31 5EU Tel: (01730) 81-4986 Fax: (01730) 81-7334 <i>Stewards: English Sangha Trust, Cittaviveka.</i></p> <p>◆ Hartridge Buddhist Monastery, Upton, Honiton, Devon EX14 9QE Tel: (01404) 89-1251 Fax: (01404) 89-0023 <i>Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust.</i></p> <p><b>THAILAND</b></p> <p>◆ Wat Pah Nanachat Bahn Bung Wai, Amper Warin, Ubun Rajathani 34310</p> <p><b>AUSTRALIA</b></p> <p>◆ Bodhinyana Monastery Lot 1, Kingsbury Drive, Serpentine 6125 WA Tel: (08) 952-52420 Fax: (08) 952-53420</p> <p>◆ Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre (Perth) 18-20 Nanson Way, Nollamara 6061 WA Tel: (08) 934-51711 Fax: (08) 934-44220 <i>Stewards: Buddhist Society of Western Australia.</i></p>	<p><b>ITALY</b></p> <p>◆ Santacittarama Via Delle Prata 22 Località Brulla 02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti) Italy Tel/Fax: (0765) 87 21 86 Web site: www.santacittarama.org (written in Italian) <i>Stewards: Santacittarama No 20163/38.</i></p> <p><b>SWITZERLAND</b></p> <p>◆ Dhammapala Buddhistisches Kloster Am Waldrand, CH 3718 Kandersteg Tel: 033 / 675 21 00 Fax: 033 / 6752 241 <i>Stewards: Dhammapala 31921-201-5.</i></p> <p><b>NORTH AMERICA</b></p> <p>◆ Abhayagiri Monastery, 16201 Tomki Road, Redwood Valley, CA 95470 Tel: (707) 485-1630 Fax: (707) 485-7948 (Sangha literature and West Coast newsletters are distributed from here.) Web site: www.abhayagiri.org <i>Stewards: Sanghapala Foundation.</i></p> <p>◆ Boston Area: Buddhaparisa, Boston, Mass. Tel: (781) 861-6837 Mailing for E. Coast USA &amp; Thailand: to be placed on the mailing list, please write directly to Amaravati.</p> <p><b>NEW ZEALAND</b></p> <p>◆ Bodhinyanarama 17 Rakau Grove, Stokes Valley, Wellington 6008 Tel: (+ + 64) 4 563-7193 Fax: (+ + 64) 4 563-5125 e-mail: sangha@actrix.gen.nz <i>Stewards: Wellington Theravada Buddhist Association.</i></p> <p>◆ Auckland Buddhist Vihara 29 Harris Road, Mount Wellington, Auckland Tel: (+ + 64) 9 579-55443</p>

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Closing date for submission to the next issue is 20th February 2001



**OBSERVANCE DAYS**

On these days the community devotes itself to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome to join in the evening meditation vigils, and on the Full and New moon, there is an opportunity to determine the Eight Precepts for the night.

Moon Phase	☾ HALF	◯ FULL	☽ HALF	● NEW
JANUARY	2 <sup>nd</sup> (Tues)	9 <sup>th</sup> (Tues)	17 <sup>th</sup> (Wed)	24 <sup>th</sup> (Wed)
FEBRUARY	1 <sup>st</sup> (Thurs)	☿ 8 (Thurs)	16 <sup>th</sup> (Fri)	22 <sup>nd</sup> (Thurs)
MARCH	2 <sup>nd</sup> (Fri)	9 <sup>th</sup> (Fri)	17 <sup>th</sup> (Sat)	24 <sup>th</sup> (Sat)
APRIL	1 <sup>st</sup> & 30 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> (Sun)	16 <sup>th</sup> (Mon)	22 <sup>nd</sup> (Sun)
☿ Magha Pūjā				

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