



# FOREST SANGHA

## newsletter

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## As Prepared as We Can Be

*Extracts from a Dhamma talk given by Ajahn Munindo  
to the Sangha on the occasion of  
the annual gathering at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, April 2003*

I'd like to start by talking about a really good Dhamma book that I've just finished reading. It's not one that you will find in the Tipitaka. It's called 'Savage Arena' by Joe Taska. Some of you may have come across it, those of you that are into mountain climbing. It's full of stories about impossible situations, about determination, concentration, focus and cooperation, things that I can relate to from the perspective of a commitment to the contemplative life, including the experience of seeing your friend fall off the cliff and wishing desperately it hadn't happened....

There was one area of the story that strongly held my attention and which I would like to discuss this evening. It was about that aspect of the journey that wasn't the most glorious part. The most glorious part of course was reaching for the summit. However, one of the most *important* parts of the journey was the preparation. So, every time the climbers went out on a trip, there was a huge amount of effort went into preparation – preparing the gear, preparing the funds, preparing the food, sorting out the politics, getting visas ready. And this part of the journey can be tedious. *They* found it tedious.

In the case of the monastic life, the intense experiences and profound insights are the bits that we tend to most readily focus on. But so many of the teachings recorded in the scriptures and given to us by our teachers are really about preparation. So this is what I would like to contemplate this evening.

There's a tape recording I have of a talk of Luang Por Chah, probably one of the last recordings of anything he said. It was taken at Tum Saeng Pet when Luang Por was receiving some lay guests. They were just about to come over to visit us here in England, and so when they were with Luang Por they gave him a tape recorder and suggested he might like to send a message

to the Sangha in Britain. So Luang Por took the tape recorder and started going through the names 'Oh, Sumedho, Sucitto, Ānando...' and gave a friendly and uplifting talk. One of the things he mentioned was how being an abbot is like being a rubbish tin, where you just sit there and be dumped on. That's your job. If nobody else dumps on you, you process your own rubbish. That was helpful, and to the point. When he'd finished giving this specific message, the tape was left running and he just started chatting informally about practice. In the course of this, at one stage he said 'You know, people think sitting on their cushion is practice. They've got it all wrong'. He said, 'This is preparation, and it is very important. We've got to do the preparation, but the *practice* is when the "arom kattup jai"', which means that when the passions impact on the heart, are you there for it? He said 'That's the moment of practice'. And it's not something we can do actually. You don't go on a course and learn how to do that. We sit and prepare ourselves, so that when it happens we are ready.

So I have this perspective, that there are these two aspects of the journey, preparation and practice. Of course we all want 'to be there for the moment' but aspiration is only one aspect of training. There's also the preparation, and if we don't do it, then there are consequences. Many of you will have your own experiences of being not properly prepared. I certainly have mine.

There's a verse in the Pali that we know as the *Ovādapātimokkha*. This gathering that we're having now is something that in previous years used to occur around Māgha Pūjā, when by tradition, we would recite this verse. I'm sure you know it:

*Sabbapāpassa akaranam,  
Kusalass' ūpasampadā,*



*Sacitta-pariyodapanam,  
Etam buddhānasāsanam.*

The last line of the verse, *etam buddhānasāsanam*, translates as ‘This is the teaching of all the Buddhas’. I find that so inspiring! It’s great to know that not only Gotama Buddha said it, but all the other Buddhas said it as well. The story goes that Ānanda went to see the Buddha and said ‘Can you tell us about Konāgamana and Vipassi and all the great noble Buddhas of the past: What were their teachings?’ And this verse is reported as being what the Lord Buddha said.

### Initial Restraint

The first line of this verse talks about refraining from, and restraining that which is evil – *Sabbapāpassa akaranam*. I can remember times in my life when I could have been better prepared in this area. So this is where the verse begins, to refrain from doing that which shouldn’t be done. If we don’t understand that, we dive into the third line – *sacitta-pariyodapanam* – the purification of the heart, ‘How inspiring to have a pure heart, and to become purified like the masters!’ I know that’s what I wanted to do in my first vassa when I was living with Ajahn Tate; I wanted to purify the heart.

I’d had my initial insights when I was living with a group of beautiful friends in Mullumbimbee in Australia. I have happy memories of being up there on the ridge meditating all day long, hugging trees, sitting in *samādhi* and crying with tears of bliss. I used to like to bake bread and let it rise for 40 minutes while I walked meditation. Then, with *samādhi*, I’d come back, and would quietly, sensitively break it and savour the

aroma. Then, with *samādhi*, I would share it with my fellow hippies.

In those days I had some very inspiring and encouraging insights. However, what I didn’t see was that the radiance I was enjoying was dependent on getting my own way all the time.

I decided I wanted to head off to Asia – which is where I believed all the enlightened people were. I needed some money, so I went down to Sydney to find work. When I found myself in a position where I had to work at things I disliked, and live with people who didn’t share the same values and interests, and who were not impressed with my refined spirituality, the inner sense of radiance disappeared.

Losing my peaceful mental states was agonizing for me. In losing something inherently beautiful, I can still remember the pain. A few weeks earlier up there on the ridge, looking out from Byron Bay at the sunrise, sitting and feeling so peaceful, there had been something very appropriate and truly beautiful. At that time I wasn’t smoking anything either. It was a natural reconnecting with something wonderful that I found was already there. And it was there – I wasn’t imaging it! When I would go back to it, it was still there – a natural self-existent peace. All that was needed was for me to focus attention in a certain way, and I could go back to this wonderful beautiful place of tremendous joy. But when I went to Sydney I couldn’t find it anymore. It wasn’t because of the change in environment. That was something that I realized even then, although I tried for some time to pretend otherwise. In fact, it was because of my lack of restraint, for sure.

I can remember, during those few weeks that I was in Sydney, thinking, ‘If ever I’m in a position where I am encouraging people to practise meditation, there’s one thing I want to do: encourage people to learn restraint’, because if you potentize consciousness and yet haven’t learned restraint, then the consequences are excruciating. Ignoring this stage of preparation is like a man already sick, setting out to climb Everest without a medicine kit.

### Cultivating Goodness

The next line of the verse is *kusalass’ ūpasampadā*: to cultivate the powers of goodness within ourselves, to cultivate that which is truly good. We can cultivate, generate and maintain wonderful things. And it counts! There are wonderful things that I know I can do. When I know that, then I don’t feel powerless; I don’t feel ashamed; I don’t feel guilty; I don’t feel any sense that I’m abdicating responsibility. I’m doing what is mine to do.

So refraining from that which is unskillful, unwholesome, shouldn’t be done; and cultivating that which is good: for me this is preparation. And if we’re not prepared, then we take the consequences, and don’t go blaming somebody else. Like those climbers on the

mountain; at one stage they went up without enough food. They could have done the summit if they'd taken more food. In the event, they couldn't do it. They were stuck in a snow cave for three days. On another occasion they didn't take enough gas, so they couldn't melt the snow. They were so dehydrated they barely made it down the mountain.

So it is with us. If we don't prepare ourselves, then when the passions impact on the heart, as Luang Por Chah was saying, we are not able to practise. This is what I would call *sacitta-pariyodapanam* – the purification of the heart, the purification of awareness. The purification happens in those rare precious moments where I can't handle myself. I can't handle it anymore. It's beyond me. Such moments, we can't strategize. People may disagree, but I don't feel we can strategize practice. We can prepare ourselves for it, we can equip ourselves for it, but when it happens, it happens, and it's usually not convenient. Once when I was having a Dhamma conversation with the Venerable Myokyoni, I fell into complaining about how difficult practice can be at times. I am most grateful to her for the comment she made. She said, 'Venerable, when it's the real thing, it's too much, too soon.'

I remember listening to Luang Por Chah talk about certain states that you can get into in practice. Some of you will be familiar with the story he told about a stage of practice that was unfamiliar to him that he once got stuck in. Having prepared himself as a young monk with conceptual understanding, he then threw himself into practice with tremendous enthusiasm and apparently made rapid and good progress. Then he says he reached a point where an image would come to him in meditation, where he was crossing a bridge. He got to this point on the bridge where it was like there was nothing there. He was used to getting somewhere in his practice, and he got to this point where he was stuck. He said that every time he'd sit in meditation, this same image would come back, and he'd just have to walk back to the beginning of the bridge. He kept going at it like this for nearly two years, until eventually he met Ajahn Wung, a contemporary of Ajahn Lee, a very impressive *Dhammayut* monk.

When Ajahn Chah came across Ajahn Wung out in the forest, he was inspired by him as soon as he saw him. He just saw him and he knew – he knew. So he started talking about the struggle of his practice and Ajahn Wung said 'Oh, that's what's been happening to you. You want to hear what's been happening to me! I had this experience where I was doing walking meditation, and I got to the end of my meditation track and it was like, I just started sinking into the earth. I don't know how far I sank; I just sank as far as you could sink. It was a long way. Then I started coming back up again. And I came to the ground level – it really appeared that this was happening – I came to the level of the ground, and then I levitated! I went up into

the air and my body hit the branches. When my body hit the branches, it exploded. I could see my large intestines thrown over there, my small intestines over here, and my liver and kidneys hanging somewhere else. And I thought "This is really unpleasant!" But,' he said, 'I was prepared for it. I knew this is just the way it appears to be. There was sufficient mindfulness, so I didn't lose perspective.' And so Luang Por Chah said 'Well that's very strange, but what can you say about me?' He told him his story, and Ajahn Wung said to him, 'You need to understand that you've reached what can be called "the edge of perception". And if you keep pushing, you're going to suffer.' He said, 'When you reach the edge of perception what do you do? You stand there. You wait.'

The ability to wait like that takes an agility of practice, which is a force of goodness. If we haven't equipped ourselves with this ability to just wait, then we keep hammering away at the same technique, doing the same thing we've been doing. We hammer away, but it doesn't work. We need to be willing, we need to be agile enough, to wait. What's called for is just standing there, just being. And that can be the transformation. Then the Way happens. It's astounding.

I'm very grateful to Luang Por Chah for telling that story. I remembered it just at the right time some years ago. I was in America, and having an exceptionally bad time. I was having one of those moments where I had dropped into my own perfectly defined black hole, as unique in its way as everyone else's. I can still remember the day very well. It was one of the worst





days of my life. We were at the Grand Canyon. I had decided it was better to be on my own. I left the people I was with, and walked off along this edge of the Grand Canyon. I was feeling really bad, I mean *really* bad. I reached a particular point where the ground just dropped away. It seemed to drop away forever. I was standing there, right on the edge of this, looking. My belief in rebirth is such that suicide has never been an option in my life; so that wasn't in my mind. There was a shaking; there was a trembling going on. I looked up just off to the left, and there was a sign that said 'The Abyss'. It was around that time that I remembered Luang Por's story, while standing on the edge of this abyss and not knowing what to do. So I just sat down and waited. It wasn't enlightenment, but it was an important moment for me, a moment when I remembered that when you reach a point where you can't handle it any more, you need to be agile enough to change tack. To just keep moving forward is not always there for you.

### INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION—AMARAVATI

Saturday Afternoon Classes 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm

Meditation instruction for beginners;  
with an opportunity for questions  
to be answered.

Classes are in the Bodhinyāna Meditation Hall.

Feel free to come along – no booking is necessary.

### Purification

So the purification of the heart, the purification of one's own heart, for me is not something that I know how to do, but I trust that it happens if we've adequately prepared ourselves with restraint, and sufficiently cultivated the forces of goodness. Then one's heart is oriented towards that which one loves more than anything else. What is it that we love more than anything else? To know this, or at least to feel this, is so profoundly important. To know that one is not just *interested* in Dhamma, but that one loves. It is something that I profoundly care about, more than anything else. We may have our own word for it, or maybe no word, but this is what is meant when I say 'I go for refuge to Dhamma'. There is something, merely a reality, that I'm not *happy* to bow down to, I need to bow down to. And if it is a dimension that one consciously connects with, if it is something that we actually feel within, if it is a reality in relationship with which I'm just utterly insignificant, then I trust that when life comes to the point of utter impossibility, then that which needs to be realised can be realised. But it's not on my terms. That's why when I go for refuge to the Triple Gem I do it quite consciously. This I, this me, this person that was born in Te Awamutu, who grew up in Morrinsville, and has this mother, and that father; has this history, has that reputation and has these features – this character that I experience myself to be, I willingly go for refuge to Dhamma. Because why? Because if I don't orient myself towards this principle, then *my way* is what's more important; that becomes the default mechanism that takes over when I'm in a fix and don't know what to do. If I haven't prepared myself, if I haven't gone for refuge to Dhamma, consciously, regularly, physically, mentally, verbally, if I reach this position where I don't know what to do, I just say, 'Well, what do I *want* to do? I want to know what I'm supposed to be doing. I want to be sure. I want an answer. I want someone to tell me.' And we are driven by such wanting. But if we have prepared ourselves, with going for refuge to *what is*, then even when we're faced with the situation where our only apparent reality is 'I really don't know', we can be there for that. We can stay there with that. Then Dhamma sustains us. And so going for refuge to Dhamma, prepared with the conscious recognition of there being something that we love, there's a willingness to orientate ourselves towards that; and there's a wish to offer ourselves in service of that. Then we will be sustained, we will be nourished. What happens next is not up to me, but I do trust that the Way will unfold.



# Monastery of Confusion

*An extract of a talk given by Ajahn Chah at Wat Pah Nanachat in 1977,  
recently translated by Paul Breiter.*

For the sake of us monks, laypeople provide robe material, almsfood, dwelling places, and medicine in appropriate measure. They have the faith to support us with material offerings, giving us requisites for living. It's quite a big deal. It's no small thing. Donating food, dwellings and medicines to treat our illnesses, is not a small thing. If we practiced for the attainment of Nibbāna, but didn't have food, it would be pretty difficult. How could we sit in meditation? How could we build this monastery?

It's true that they are simple country folk, but they support us out of faith as best they can. So don't get carried away with your ideas of how you think they should be. Don't think, 'Oh, I try to teach these laypeople, but they do upset me. Today is the observance day, so they'll come and take the precepts. Tomorrow they'll be out there casting fishing nets and drinking whisky.'

We should recognize that they are people whose spiritual faculties are not yet mature. What should we do about them? We are like someone selling medicine. You've probably seen those sellers driving around with loudspeakers, peddling different medicines. People with bad headaches or poor digestion might stop them and buy.

We are like those peddlers. We accept money from those who buy our medicine, but we don't take money from those who don't. We might feel glad about the people who come out and buy, but if others stay in their houses, we shouldn't get angry with them for it. We shouldn't criticize them. If we teach people but they don't practise properly, we shouldn't get angry with them. Don't criticize them. Just keep on instructing them and leading them along. When their faculties have ripened sufficiently, then they will want to practice. Just like selling medicine, we just keep on doing our business. When people have ailments that trouble them, they buy. Those who don't buy medicine maybe aren't suffering anything. So never mind.

If you keep at it with this attitude, the problem will be done with. If we want to get it right, but can't do it yet, it means that our own faculties are not sufficiently mature. Our spiritual perfections (*pāramī*) are not complete. It's like the fruit on a tree. You can't force it to be sweet. It's still unripe. The reason that it's small and sour is because it hasn't finished growing yet. You can't force it to be bigger, to be sweeter, to be riper; you

have to let it ripen according to its nature. As time passes, the fruit will grow and ripen and become sweet by itself. In the same way, as time passes, people reach spiritual maturity. With such an attitude, you can be at ease. But if you are impatient and dissatisfied, if you keep asking, 'Why isn't this mango sweet yet? Why is it still sour?', then what can be done? It's sour because it's not ripe; that's the nature of fruit. Likewise, as people's spiritual faculties mature, they develop faith. It's not something we can force them to do. If we look at it in this way, we will be OK.

Your life here at Wat Pah Nanachat is certainly meaningful. It's not something without benefit. So try to practise harmoniously and amicably. When you experience obstacles and suffering, recollect the virtues of the Buddha. What knowledge did the Buddha realize? What did he teach? What does the Dhamma show us? How does the Sangha practise? Constantly recollecting the qualities of the Triple Gem in this way brings a lot of benefit.

Whether you are Thais or foreigners is not important. It's only important to maintain harmony and to work together. So all of you, please work together,



cooperate, and live in harmony. Don't let Wat Pah Nanachat Bung Wai (The International Forest Monastery of Bung Wai District) become Wat Pah Nanachat Woon Wai (The International Forest Monastery of Confusion and Trouble – one of Ajahn Chah's favorite plays on words). It's a legacy that you are creating. Whoever comes to stay here should be helping create this legacy. So make your best efforts to practise well and to establish yourselves firmly, and then good results will come.

For one who practises, we shouldn't be the kind of people who merely follow others, because if our friends aren't doing the practice, then we won't do it either. We will feel too embarrassed. If they stop, we stop. If they do it, we do it. If the teacher tells us to do something, we do it. If he stops, we stop. This is not a very quick way to realization.

The realization of truth doesn't happen by relying on others. You should understand that all doubt will be resolved through your own efforts, through continuous and energetic practice. You won't get free of doubt by always asking others! You'll only end doubt through your own unrelenting efforts. Remember this. It's an important principle in practice. The actual doing is what will instruct you. You will come to know all right and all wrong. 'The Brahmin shall reach the exhaustion of doubt through unceasing practice.' Everything can be resolved through ceaseless effort.

In meditation we meet with all sorts of mental afflictions. The correct attitude is to be ready to let go of everything, both the pleasant and the painful. Even though happiness is what we desire and suffering is what we don't desire, we should recognize that they are of equal value. Maybe you can't bear the difficulties you meet. Maybe you find it hard to face your suffering, to



not run away from it; but if you do face it and bear with it, then you'll gain knowledge, and then the practice starts instructing you automatically, teaching you about right and wrong, and about the way things really are. It really happens like this, but it's hard to find people who can see it through to the end. Everyone wants instant awakening, rushing about here and there following their impulses. They'll end up worse off for it. So be careful about this.

I've often taught that tranquillity is still, and wisdom is flowing. It means that we practise meditation to calm the mind, to make it still, and then it can flow. Although we understand that still water doesn't flow, and we understand that flowing water isn't still, when we practise we take hold of both stillness and flow. The mind of a true practitioner is like still water that flows, or flowing water that's still. Whatever takes place in the mind of a Dhamma practitioner is like flowing water that is still.

This is something we've never seen. When we see flowing water, it flows. When we see still water, it is still. But within our minds, it will really be like flowing water that is still. In our Dhamma practice we have tranquillity and wisdom mixed together. Then the mind is both flowing and still. Still, flowing water.

What is the purpose of tranquillity? Why should we have wisdom? It is only for the purpose of freeing ourselves from suffering, nothing else. At present we are suffering, living with suffering, not understanding suffering and therefore holding onto it. But if the mind has tranquillity and wisdom, then there will be many kinds of knowledge. We will know suffering, we will know the cause of suffering, we will know the cessation of suffering, and we will know the way of practice leading to the end of suffering. These are the Four Noble Truths. They appear themselves, when there is still, flowing water.

When it is like this, then no matter what we are doing, we will have no heedlessness; the habit of heedlessness will weaken and disappear. Whatever we experience, we won't fall into heedlessness, because the mind will naturally hold fast to the practice. As we keep practising and learning from experience, we will drink of the Dhamma more and more, and our faith will keep increasing.

What's the point of our training here? It's so that when we are alone, we can continue practising. So now, while living together here, when there are morning and evening gatherings, we should join in; we should practise with the others. We should build up this habit so that practice is buried in our hearts. Then we will be able to live anywhere and still practise in the same way. Now it's the time to learn the practice, to understand it and to internalize it. It's like children coming of age.



# The Parable of Birth, Decay and Death

*A farewell talk given at Amaravati by Venerable Jināṅkārā on 28th June 2003.*

In my talk today, I would like to tell you a story, a parable. One day, there was a meeting, a discussion between Birth, Decay and Death. In that meeting Birth, Decay and Death discussed how they should run this world, because by listening to the Buddha's teachings, some people had managed to escape the world.

'We should not let people escape this world; we should keep them in this realm; we should keep them in this world.' So in this way, Birth, Decay and Death, these three friends discussed this great matter.

Then Birth came forward and suggested, 'My friends, I can do something to help keep people in this world. I can give birth to them. I won't let them escape. I'll catch them and I'll give them birth onto any planet, into any world, even into the *deva* world or the human world, or the animal kingdom, or even into hell. Wherever it is, I'll give birth to people who try to escape.'

So, then the other two friends, Decay and Death agreed: 'O.K., you are very powerful, you have a kind of strength. You can do your business.' Then Birth promised something else. He said, 'O.K., whenever I give birth to someone, I'll hand over that born person to my friend Decay. Then Decay can do with them whatever he likes.'

So then Decay promised, 'O.K., I'll accept your born beings. I am very powerful and with that power I can decay anything and everything. I can decay eyes, ears, noses, tongues, and physical strength. I can age everything that beings have. Then I'll hand over the decayed weak persons, the aged persons to my next friend, Death.'

Then Death said, 'Yes, O.K. I'll accept your decayed people, and as soon as I've accepted them, I'll kill them.'

So this is how these three friends discussed the matter. This is how they were going to run the world. So they started work. Birth started; it started by giving birth. It didn't like people to escape, so it spent its time giving birth, birth, birth. And Birth was very deceitful, very clever at cheating people, very clever at luring dying people back into birth.

One day, a person died. After death, he tried to disappear. So Birth came forward and caught him and asked him sympathetically, 'What happened with you and my friend Death? What did he do to you?' The dead man said, 'Death killed me.' Then Birth said, 'Oh dear! I'm sorry! But I'm afraid that is the attitude of Death, the vicious nature of that cruel and nasty Death. But I am not like that. I am not such a being. Just come with me

and I will give you birth.'

Then Birth took that dead person's hand and brought him to human birth. This was the way in which he was cheated and deceived by Birth. Then the man said, 'Oh, this Birth is a very good fellow. He gave me a birth. Now I am a born person. This Birth gave me a good birth, a human birth. How I enjoy this, this human birth!'

But unfortunately, Birth then passed this born being into Decay's hands. Decay accepted that born being with both hands and started his duty. First of all he started by building him up. He said, 'OK, you grow up year by year, you become a baby, a child, then in due course you will become a boy or girl; you will become teenager; and a young adult. All the time I'll be giving you strength.' So the born being thought, 'This fellow Decay is very supportive. He is strengthening me and making me grow.' So little by little, he gained strength and power in his body, in his eyes, ears, nose, tongue; and he also





gained strength in his mind, and in knowledge through education. Decay provided everything that the born being needed. Then, little by little, Decay decayed the person.

Apart from all this, the three friends, Birth, Decay and Death, created something else, they created the pleasures of life. For instance, they created sunrises and sunsets. Why did they do that? So that this born being could *enjoy* sunrises. He could say 'Good morning!' He had all of life's pleasures to satisfy and gratify himself. Every born being starts the day saying, 'Good morning! Good morning!' What is the goodness of morning? He's been cheated! He's been deceived!

After a few hours, he says 'Good afternoon!' What is the goodness of afternoon? It is just decay! In the evening he says again 'Good evening.' What is the goodness of evening? It is just decay! The man is slowly being aged by Decay. And this is how he passes his life. So the three friends created these and other toys for the born being, for this foolish man who had been born, a man who enjoyed the morning, he enjoyed the afternoon, he enjoyed the evening, and then he enjoyed 'Good night!'

But what is the goodness of 'night'? Night is the dark when the sun has set. So this person, having been deceived by Decay and Birth, enjoyed all these pleasant things, and all they were, were little toys.

So then little by little, Decay destroyed the eyesight of the born being, and he destroyed the hearing ability, and he destroyed the sensitive ability of the nose, and the tongue and the body. Slowly, slowly Decay destroyed the man. He slowly twisted the man's body; it slowly bent him over.

After 50 or 60 years of this, it became difficult for the man to walk or stand erect. Why? Because Decay had slowly destroyed him. It bent and twisted the man's body. After all, that is the responsibility of Decay. It is his duty to destroy every single thing connected to the person that is born.

So, after weakening everything, destroying all his abilities, Decay handed over this decayed and aged person into Death's hands. Then Death accepted this

### **Amaravati Lay Events – 2003**

**Days of Practice** – During the Monastic Winter Retreat we will be holding our regular Winter Days of Practice.

A day of silent sitting and walking meditation, with some guidance for those new to meditation. We have a shared meal at midday and the opportunity for (optional) small groups in the afternoon.

No need to book. All are welcome. Please bring some food to share.

The days will start at 9.45am for 10am – 5pm.

Saturday January 17th  
 Saturday February 14th  
 Saturday March 13th

Dates of Retreats and Days of Practice for the remainder of 2004 to follow

**For more information please contact:**

Nick Carroll, 020 8740 9748 or  
 Chris Ward, 01442 890034  
 Please write to AUA for booking form (see address below)

Organised by the Amaravati Upāsaka/Upāsikā Association (AUA), Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ



decayed and aged man with both hands, and immediately killed him.

Then, once again, Birth came up to the man. Again he comforted him, 'Oh! Again you have been killed by that nasty Death! But I am not such a being. Come on! I'll give you another birth. Never mind about the human realm! Come! You have some merit. You have some power. I won't take any of your merit. I won't take any of your good *kamma*. I will take you to *deva* realm.'

It is by such deceit that all beings, not just this man, have been deceived and cheated. Being cheated, they cannot escape from the three busy friends – Birth, Decay and Death. So, understanding this, and seeing the terrifying nature of these three colleagues, the Buddha developed his mind so that he could escape them. When the Buddha realized Nibbāna they could no longer cheat or deceive him. The Buddha was thus able to point out to others, 'This is the way to follow Dhamma.'

So in this monastery this is what we are doing. As monks, *sāmaneras*, sisters, *anagārikas*, *anagārikās*, and devout lay people, what we are doing is following the Buddha's teachings to deceive these three beings. So far they have deceived us, they have decayed us, they have killed us innumerable times. Now, by realizing the Buddha's teaching, we in turn will cheat them, we will decay them, we will attack them, not by exploding bombs, but by realising their true nature.

So, in order to understand Birth, Decay and Death, we have to practise *samatha* and *vipassanā*, concentration meditation and insight meditation. Through concentrative meditation we can achieve a calmness of mind. With calm and a deep peace in our mind we can focus, we can put the light of understanding onto the subtle aspects of all formations. And in each and every formation, in all *sankhāras*, in all created things, we can recognise these three beings – Birth, Decay and Death, which are always working away. Hidden. They are working, hidden in *sankhāras*, in created formations. That is why the Buddha said, 'When you concentrate on formations, you can realise Birth, Decay and Death in each and every moment, in each and every object.'

What do we do as monastics? Our duty should be to become skilled, to become very powerful in terms of concentration. Then we can do what Birth, Decay and Death did to us. They have cheated us, they have killed us, and they have decayed us. Birth gave birth to us,



Decay decayed us, destroyed our energy and changed us. And over and over again Death has killed us.

By following the Buddha's teaching, we will cheat these three colleagues; we will stop their work. We don't need their deadly business. If you would like to be decayed, if you would like to be killed, if you would like to be born, don't practise meditation. Just stop it! But if you would like to put an end to birth, decay and death, then follow the Buddha's teaching.

May you realise the supreme state of unconditioned Nibbāna by following the Buddhadhamma!



#### 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.

**The FSNL's new editor writes:**

Ajahn Thānīyā has edited the newsletter for the last two years. She has done this very well, and deserves much praise and thanks; so too do the many other people who have supported the Sangha newsletter for 24 years, particularly Ajahn Sucitto. Many others have been unstinting in their offerings: typesetting, web minding, computer repairing, transcribing, proof reading, printing, and distributing. However, I would like to reserve special thanks for the contributors of talks, for their willingness to share with the world their words of such sincerity.

*Tahn Varado*

## AMARAVATI NOTICES

**Winter retreat January - March.**

As in previous years we are looking to have a small group of lay people staying at the monastery to help with the kitchen, maintenance, etc. We will only accept people who have stayed before, and ask for a minimum stay of one month. Please write to the secretary before mid-November

**Annual Gratitude to Parents' Day**

to be held on Sunday 5th October at Amaravati. All welcome. 11.00am arrival for 11.30 meal offering. *For further details contact* Amaravati on 01442 842 455 or Mr. Chandi Perera 0208 977 7642 (after 6pm).

**Odd Job Person**

We are looking for someone who would like to practise within a monastic community setting for at least a year and who would be willing and able to help out with a wide variety of basic maintenance tasks around the site. *For further details please contact the monastery.*

## CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

**Winter Retreat 2004**

We welcome applications from lay practitioners (male and female) who are experienced with meditation practice and the monastic lifestyle, who are willing to offer support to the Sangha during this special, silent time, January - March 2004. Two weeks minimum; month or more preferred. Please write to the Guest Monk or Nun.

**Plumb Loco**

Chithurst welcomes long-stay guests with plumbing skills and experience, together

with an interest in helping the Sangha. Our antiquated plumbing system needs long-term study and understanding prior to possible modification.

**Lay Forums**

Sunday October 12th: Bereavement

Sunday December 7th:

Four Foundations of Mindfulness

**Forest Day:** Sunday November 2nd

These afternoons will be spent helping the Sangha in ongoing work in Hammer Wood. Meet at the monastery at 1.00pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation write to the guest monk/nun.

**Garden Day:** Sunday October 5th

Meet at the monastery at 1.30pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation write to the guest monk/nun.

**Chithurst Forest Work Month** will be from 20th October until the 10th of November. Any men who would like to join the group of monastics doing conservation work in the forest – for all or part of the time – should contact Sāmaṇera Nārado at Cittaviveka. Please include a brief description of any relevant experience you have and also your previous contact with the Sangha.

## HARNHAM NOTICES

We are still looking for helpers with our Retreat-house project. If you have skills in plumbing, carpentry, plastering or general building skills as well as some time and energy to share, please contact the monastery on 01661 881612 or email [retreathouse@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:retreathouse@ratanagiri.org.uk)

## HARTRIDGE NOTICES

In early November we will begin working on the grounds. If visitors wish to assist over a period of 3 or 4 days in the first two weeks of November please could they contact us in October. Workers will need to be prepared for wet ground and wet weather – so good boots and rainproof wear are essential. Accommodation by arrangement.

## GENERAL NOTICES

**Forest Sangha Newsletter**

The current and many previous issues of the Forest Sangha Newsletter are now available to view or download from the internet at; <http://www.fsnewsletter.net> or

by following the link from <http://www.amaravati.org>

**Ajahn Amaro's book 'Small Boat, Great Mountain** – Theravādan reflections on The Natural Great Perfection' is now published for free distribution. It is available by contacting Abhayagiri Monastery, or it can be downloaded easily from the Abhayagiri website (*see back page*).

**Young Persons' Retreat**

Amaravati Retreat Centre: 28th - 30th November 2003. Bookings and details can be obtained through Ray Glover at: 36 Ottersfield, Greet, Glos. GL54 5PN. or by e-mail: [raymond.glover@tesco.net](mailto:raymond.glover@tesco.net)

**The Forest Sangha Trust for Scotland**

is a new charity aimed at establishing, in the long-term, a Sangha of the Theravada Forest tradition in the hills and forests of Scotland. If you would like to have more information, or to offer support, please contact The Charity Secretary, Forest Sangha Trust for Scotland (Registered Charity No. SC 034446), PO Box 7495, Perth, PH1 5YR, UK; e-mail: [fstscot@hotmail.com](mailto:fstscot@hotmail.com)

**Sunyata Retreat Centre, Ireland**

The present owners have decided to move on and are seeking others to buy this beautiful up and running retreat centre in the west of Ireland and continue it as a Buddhist meditation centre. If interested please contact Stan de Freitas, Sunyata Retreat Centre, Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, Ireland. Tel (from UK) 00-353-61-367073; email: [info@sunyatacentre.com](mailto:info@sunyatacentre.com). Photos of the centre can be seen on the website [www.sunyatacentre.com](http://www.sunyatacentre.com)

**Nun's Pilgrimage, India, 2003**

If you would like to support a nun's pilgrimage to India in any way, however small, please contact: Jill Osler: 9B, Alpha Road, Southville, Bristol. BS3 1DH. Tel: 0117 963 1610 or Jen Thomas: 46, Maesingli, Newport, Pemas, Dyfed. SA420TE. Tel: 01239 820138. Any cheques should be sent to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery and made payable to 'English Sangha Trust Ltd.'. On the back of the cheque clearly state that it is for the Nun's Pilgrimage.

## RETREATS OUTSIDE THE UK

26th of December - 3rd of January 2004. Retreat at Dhammapāla led by Ajahn Khemasiri. *Contact:* Dhammapāla.

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. Back issues of the newsletter are available on the internet from: <http://www.fsnewsletter.net> We are working on improving the site and hope to be able to post latest issues in the near future.

**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

These are visited regularly by Sangha members.

BATH – Thursday/Weekly	Catherine Hewitt, (01225) 405-235
EDINBURGH	Neil Howell, 0131-226 5044
GLASGOW – 1 <sup>st</sup> Friday/Monthly	James Scott, (0141) 637-9731
LEEDS AREA – Friday/Weekly	Daniela Loeb, (0113) 2791-375 Anne Grimshaw, (01274) 691-447
HAMPSTEAD – Wed/Weekly	Caroline Randall, (020) 8348-0537
LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY	Tel: (020) 7834 5858
58 Eccleston Square, London SW1(Victoria)	
Meditation Sundays: led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month.	
10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday classes – 6.00pm	
SOUTHAMPTON –	Ros Dean, (02380) 422430

### MEDITATION GROUPS

These meet regularly & receive occasional visits from Sangha.

BEDFORD	David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892
BELFAST – Sunday/Weekly	Paddy Boyle, (02890) 427-720
BERKSHIRE – 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Wed/Monthly	Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646
BRIGHTON – Wednesday/Weekly	Nimmala, (01273) 723-378
CAMBRIDGE – Sunday/Fortnightly	Dan Jones, (01223) 246 257
CANTERBURY	Charles Watters, (01227) 463342
CO. CLARE, IRELAND – Wednesday/Weekly	Stan de Freitas, (00 353) 61 367-073
DUBLIN	Rupert Westrup, (01) 280-2832, (Dial: 00441 – from the UK)
ESSEX – Monday/Weekly	Pamutto, (01279) 724-330
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD Bodhinyāna Group – Wednesday/Weekly in school term times	Chris Ward (01442) 890-034
KENDAL – Sunday/Weekly	Fellside Centre, Low Fellside Jayasīli, (01539) 740-996
LIVERPOOL	Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427 6668
LONDON/NOTTING HILL – Tuesday/Weekly	Jeffery Craig, (0207) 221 9330
LEIGH-ON-SEA	Rob Howell (01702) 482 134
MACHYNLLETH/MID. WALES – Monday/Weekly	Angela Llewellyn, (01650) 511-350
MIDDLESBOROUGH – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Wednesday/Monthly and 4 <sup>th</sup> Thursday	Colin Walker, (01642) 643-071
MIDHURST – 2 <sup>nd</sup> /4 <sup>th</sup> Wed/Monthly	Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE – Wed/Weekly	Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726
NEWENT, GLOUCS – Friday/Every 3 weeks	John Teire, (01531) 821-902, john.teire@virgin.net
NORWICH – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Thursday/Monthly	Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717
PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES – Weekly meeting and other events	Peter and Barbara (Subhadrā) Jackson, (01239) 820-790
PERTH – Saturday/Every 2 weeks	Neil Abbot, (07765) 667-499
PORTSMOUTH – 1 <sup>st</sup> Mon/Monthly	Dave Beal, (02392) 732-280
REDRUTH – Mon & Wed/Weekly	Daniel Davide, (01736) 753-175
SHEFFIELD	Greg Bradshaw, (0114) 262-0265
SOUTH DORSET – Thursday/Weekly	Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati), (01305) 786-821
STEYNING / SUSSEX	Jayanti (01903) 812-130
STROUD	John Groves, (07967) 777-742
SURREY/WOKING – Wed/Weekly	Rocanā, (01483) 761-398
TOTNES – Wednesday/Weekly	Jerry, (01803) 840-199

## Amaravati Retreats



### 2003 – Retreats

Oct.	17 – 19	Weekend, Sister Ānandabodhī
Oct.	31 – Nov 2	Weekend, Ajahn Natthiko
Nov.	14 – 23	10 day, Ajahn Sucitto
Dec.	12 – 14	Weekend, Ajahn Sundarā
Dec. 27 – Jan 1 2004	6 day,	Ajahn Sundarā

All remaining 2003 retreats are now **fully booked**, please contact the Retreat Centre if you would like to be placed on the waiting lists.

### 2004 – Retreats

April	2 – 4	Weekend, Ajahn Natthiko
April	16 – 18	Weekend, Sister Ānandabodhī and Sister Santacittā
April	30 – May 9	10 day, Ajahn Amaro
May	21 – 23	Weekend
June	5 – 12	8 day, Ajahn Jitindriyā and Ajahn Thāniyā <sup>B</sup>
July	2 – 11	10 day, Ajahn Vimalo
July	23 – 25	Weekend
Aug.	6 – 15	10 day, Ajahn Vajiro
Sept.	3 – 12	10 day, Ajahn Sumedho <sup>#</sup>
Sept.	24 – 26	Weekend, Sister Mettā
Oct.	15 – 17	Weekend, Ajahn Vimalo
Oct.	29 – Nov. 2	5 Day, Ajahn Natthiko
Nov.	19 – 21	Weekend, Ajahn Thāniyā
Nov.	26 – 30	5 day
Dec.	10 – 12	Weekend
Dec. 27 – Jan. 1 2005	6 day,	Ajahn Khantiko

<sup>B</sup> Begins and ends on a Saturday. Registration on first day 2 pm – 5 pm.  
<sup>#</sup> For experienced meditators: must have done at least one 10 day retreat.

### Retreats in 2004 will operate on a donation basis No Booking fees are required

- Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form. Note that bookings cannot be made by telephone or by e-mail messages. Booking forms are available from the website, by e-mailing or writing to the Retreat Centre.
- Unless specified otherwise, retreats begin in the evening of the first day. Registration on first day 4 p.m. – 7 p.m. Orientation talk is at 7.15 p.m. Weekend retreats end at 4pm. Other retreats end at lunchtime.
- All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. Generally it is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing any of the longer retreats.
- Applicants requiring confirmation – either that they have a place on the retreat or that they are on the waiting list – are asked to supply a stamped addressed envelope or an e-mail address.

The retreat programme for 2004 is also available on our website

Telephone: 01442 843-239 e-mail: retreats@amaravati.org  
website: <http://www.amaravati.org>

# V I H A R A S

## BRITAIN

◆ **Amaravati Monastery**  
Great Gaddesden,  
Hemel Hempstead,  
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ  
Tel: (01442) 842-455 (Office)  
84-3239 (Retreat Info.)  
Fax: (01442) 843-721  
Web site: [www.amaravati.org](http://www.amaravati.org)  
Stewards: *English Sangha Trust, Amaravati.*

◆ **Aruna Ratanagiri**  
**Harnham Buddhist Monastery**  
Harnham, Belsay,  
Northumberland  
NE20 0HF  
Tel: (01661) 881-612  
Fax: (01661) 881-019  
Web site: [www.ratanagiri.org.uk](http://www.ratanagiri.org.uk)  
E-mail: [community@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:community@ratanagiri.org.uk)  
Stewards: *Magga Bhavaka Trust.*

◆ **Cittaviveka: Chithurst**  
**Buddhist Monastery**  
Chithurst, Petersfield,  
Hampshire GU31 5EU  
Tel: (01730) 814-986  
Fax: (01730) 817-334  
Stewards: *English Sangha Trust, Cittaviveka.*

◆ **Hartridge Buddhist**  
**Monastery**  
Upottery, Honiton,  
Devon EX14 9QE  
Tel: (01404) 891-251  
Fax: (01404) 890-023  
Stewards: *Devon Vihara Trust.*

## THAILAND

◆ **Wat Pah Nanachat**  
Bahn Bung Wai,  
Amper Warin,  
Ubon Rajathani 34310  
Mailing for Thailand: to be  
placed on newsletter  
mailing list please write to  
Amaravati.

## NEW ZEALAND

◆ **Bodhinyanarama**  
17 Rakau Grove,  
Stokes Valley,  
Wellington 6008  
Tel: (+64) 45 637-193  
Fax: (+64) 45 635-125  
e-mail: [sangha@actrix.gen.nz](mailto:sangha@actrix.gen.nz)  
Stewards: *Wellington Theravada Buddhist Association.*

◆ **Auckland Buddhist Vihara**  
29 Harris Road,  
Mount Wellington,  
Auckland  
Tel: (+ + 64) 957 955-443

## ITALY

◆ **Santacittarama**  
Località Brulla,  
02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)  
Tel: (+ + 39) 0 765 872-186  
Fax: (+ + 39) 06 233 238-629  
Website: [www.santacittarama.org](http://www.santacittarama.org)  
Stewards: *Santacittarama Association.*

## SWITZERLAND

◆ **Dhammapala**  
Buddhistisches Kloster  
Am Waldrand,  
CH 3718 Kandersteg  
Tel: 033 / 6 752-100  
Fax: 033 / 6 752-241  
Stewards: *Dhammapala 31921-201-5.*

## NORTH AMERICA

◆ **Abhayagiri Monastery**  
16201 Tomki Road,  
Redwood Valley,  
CA 95470  
Tel: (707) 485-1630  
Fax: (707) 485-7948  
(Sangha literature and all  
USA newsletters are  
distributed from here.)  
Web site: [www.abhayagiri.org](http://www.abhayagiri.org)  
Stewards: *Sanghapala Foundation.*

◆ **Boston Area:**  
Buddhaparisa, Boston,  
Mass. Tel: (781) 8 616-837

## AUSTRALIA

◆ **Bodhinyana Monastery**  
Lot 1, Kingsbury Drive,  
Serpentine 6125 WA  
Tel: (08) 95 252-420  
Fax: (08) 95 253-420

◆ **Bodhivana Monastery**  
780 Woods Point Road  
East Warburton  
Victoria 3799  
Tel: +61 (0) 359 665-999  
Fax: +61 (0) 359 665-998

◆ **Dhammaloka Buddhist**  
**Centre (Perth)**  
18-20 Nanson Way,  
Nollamara 6061 WA  
Tel: (08) 93 451-711  
Fax: (08) 93 444-220  
Web site: [www.bswa.org.au](http://www.bswa.org.au)  
Stewards: *Buddhist Society of Western Australia.*

## KATHINA & ALMSGIVING CEREMONIES

All welcome – for further information please contact the monasteries;

**Aruna Ratanagiri (Harnham),**  
Sunday 12th October  
Contact: *Khun Mac, Tel: (0191) 386 2020*

**Dhammapala (Switzerland),**  
Sunday 12th October  
Contact: *Dhammapala*

**Santacittarama (Italy),** Sunday 26th October  
Contact: *Santacittarama*

**Cittaviveka (Chithurst),** Sunday 19th October  
Contact: *Mr Tann Nam, Tel: (020) 8672 5298*

**Amaravati,** Sunday 26th October  
Contact: *Pushpa Fernando for dana offerings*  
Tel: 01553 840 347, or by e-mail: [katinaklynn@onetel.com](mailto:katinaklynn@onetel.com)

To volunteer help please contact *Anne Jameson,*  
Tel: 01525 229 172, or by email [a.jameson@btinternet.com](mailto:a.jameson@btinternet.com)  
10:00am arrival for 10:45 pindapat.

for details of programme, requisites etc. see: [www.amaravati.org](http://www.amaravati.org)

Please use the contact person detailed if you would like to offer any help with any of the arrangements.

## OBSERVANCE DAYS

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

Moon Phase	☾ HALF	☉ FULL	☾ HALF	● NEW
OCTOBER	3 <sup>rd</sup> (Fri)	☉10 <sup>th</sup> (Fri)	18 <sup>th</sup> (Sat)	24 <sup>th</sup> (Fri)
NOVEMBER	1 <sup>st</sup> (Sat)	8 <sup>th</sup> (Sat)	16 <sup>th</sup> (Sun)	23 <sup>rd</sup> (Sun)
DECEMBER	1 <sup>st</sup> & 30 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> (Mon)	16 <sup>th</sup> (Tues)	22 <sup>nd</sup> (Mon)
JANUARY	29 <sup>th</sup> (Thurs)	6 <sup>th</sup> (Tues)	14 <sup>th</sup> (Wed)	21 <sup>st</sup> (Wed)

☉ Pavāraṇā Day (Vassa ends)

The Buddhist New Year (2547) starts: 24th November

Forest Sangha Newsletter© is edited from material sent to or written at our monasteries in Britain; it is distributed without charge. Comment within is personal reflection only and does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Sangha as a whole. We welcome appropriate articles and artwork, information for fellow Buddhists, or comments on the Newsletter itself (please send c/o 'Newsletter' to your local monastery). For permission to reprint any material please write to the editor c/o Amaravati.

Closing date for submission to the next issue is 20th November 2003.

If undelivered, please return to: AMARAVATI MONASTERY  
Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead  
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ, England

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