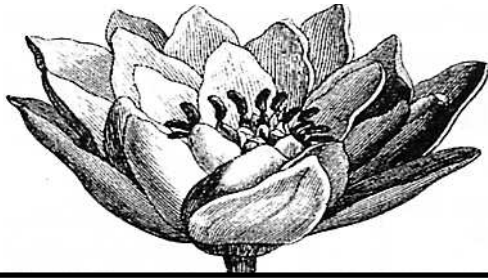


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Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

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A Kathina Offering

Pamela Hirsch

At the beginning of November we celebrated Kathina day, the end of the Rains Retreat. Buddha instituted the retreat because He cared about His monks. He didn't want them to go out in the monsoon and risk getting drowned. Also, during the rainy season, lots of new life is coming into being. Many new animals are born. Because Lord Buddha cared about the small animals, He didn't want the monks to wander about preaching the Dhamma in case they stepped on some of them and killed them. This is also the time in India when the crops are growing abundantly. As Lord Buddha was concerned about the people who depended on the crops for food, He did not want the monks to walk everywhere, because they may have trampled some of them. Also the monks needed spiritual refreshment, after preaching all year, so He kept them inside and improved their understanding of the teaching.

At the end of the Rains Retreat, the lay people would come to bring new robes to the Buddha and His Sangha, to help them prepare for a new season of preaching. How I would love to have been there and to have presented to the Lord Buddha a robe which I had spun, woven and dyed myself...like Sujata, who offered to the Buddha the work of her own hands, some food which she had prepared with care and gratitude. The first time I heard the story was when Linda and I were at the Buddhism class at Buddhavihara Temple. Ajahn Laow told us that she had offered milk-rice to the Buddha. As typical Buddhist women, always on the lookout for

something good to cook for the monks, we asked him enthusiastically, "Was it sticky rice or ordinary rice? Coconut milk or ordinary milk"? Ajahn Laow laughed heartily and replied, "I'm sorry ladies, I don't have the recipe".

Sujata was unable to have a baby, so she went to a tree to ask the tree-spirit to help her. It just happened to be the pipal tree under which the Bodhisatta would eventually shelter as He strove for enlightenment. After some time Sujata had a baby and she thought, "I must return and thank the tree-spirit for answering my prayer". When she arrived with her offering of food, she saw the Buddha seated under the tree. He had attained three kinds of supramundane knowledge. The third one was *asavakkhaya*, the destruction of all the corruptions. Therefore his body was shining, because He was so pure, perfect in behaviour, compassion and wisdom. Sujata thought He was the tree spirit who had granted her wish, so she paid respect to Him and made her offering.

At Kathina day, I had the opportunity to offer a robe to the Sangha. Of course, in terms of His physical presence, unlike Sujata, I could not bring my offering directly to the Buddha but in my mind I was kneeling before Him. So that was exactly what I did and it brought me spiritual happiness. We know these rituals cannot bring us liberation from the cycle of samsaric life, but perhaps they can prepare our minds for it as they provide us with a temporary escape from the defilements. Because at that moment of offering the robe, there is no greed, no ill will, no sceptical doubt. There is only peace. ❖

Follow such a virtuous and wise man as the moon follows the path of the stars.

Dhammapada v.208

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lay review

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WILL YOU STILL LOVE ME WHEN I'M OLD AND GREY?

Like so many other people, I suffer from an irreversible disease known as old age.

You become aware of getting old when you get tired more quickly than you used to, when minor illnesses hang around longer than before and sometimes become chronic. You need a magnifying glass to read small print and you're convinced that people don't speak clearly now because you used to hear every word. Then there is the memory retrieval mechanism which lets you down just when it's most needed so that you forget the name of the person introduced to you ten minutes ago yet can remember things from 50 years ago. Look in the mirror, now look at a photograph of yourself when you were twenty.

All this could be depressing, worrying, even frightening, but there is really no need. Remember the Buddha's teaching concerning the three characteristics of existence - Impermanence, Suffering and Not-Self. We are experiencing the first as a reality, not as a theory. We can clearly see where suffering arises from, trying to hold on to anything that is impermanent, and it is not too difficult to see that impermanence applies to every aspect of what we are conditioned into thinking of as self. So age and everything that goes with it tends to bring reality home to us. We are more aware of the passage of time and feel more urgency about working with Dhamma, realizing that every day we should try to gain more insight and practice, taking care of ourselves and others. Perhaps we, the old 'uns, can see more clearly than when we were younger that time is passing rapidly away and we cannot be sure how much of it is left.

So you see, we old folks have an advantage because we see the sands of time running out in this lifetime and there is the incentive to make progress while we can. Not that you'll envy us our advantage, but getting beyond old age, sickness and death is surely a worthwhile goal for all and while you still have youth on your side it is by far the best time to go all out for enlightenment. There is no knowing when the next lifetime will come along in which you have the good fortune to be in touch with the Dhamma.

There is just one more thing: don't be hard bitten and doggedly serious about it. Don't pick a fight you can't win. Learn to let go, open up and be happy about it and persistence will get you there.

Happy Christmas to everyone. ❖

Bill



Articles published in Lotus are edited from material supplied by a variety of individual contributors. Whilst every effort is made to publish only appropriate material, there may be times when the opinions expressed may be at variance with your own. Comment and criticism is always welcome and should be addressed to the Editor at the address given on p.8.

Lotus Review is for free distribution, but donations towards the expenses of publishing, printing and posting would be welcome. Copy for the Spring issue should reach us by not later than February 22nd.

Our thanks to Dea for her drawing of Sujata and the Buddha, and Linda for the photograph.

We also hoped to add the whole of our 2004 Programme with this issue, but unfortunately it has been delayed and will be posted out later.

Buddhism and Social Justice

Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma



hen the Buddha was teaching in India in the sixth century B.C.E, it was not his intention to found a new religion. Indeed, he was a critic of religion, pointing out that many of the injustices which afflicted the society of his

day were imposed in its name. One such injustice was the caste system which placed every human being in a fixed social order that was determined by birth. This caused Indian society to be divided immoveably into high and low stations. One consequence of this was that those deemed untouchables were denied basic human rights, human justice and human dignity from the moment they were born. Women and members of the lower castes were also deprived of an education and denied the chance to develop themselves spiritually.

In those days, too, people of all castes used to spend a great deal of money and time on ritual sacrifices, hoping that their efforts and outlay would earn them salvation after death. Going beyond their means and depriving the family dependent upon them was to be compensated by the enjoyment of Heaven. People also used to dress in a special way, use ornaments and decorate their bodies in a prescribed way to demonstrate their affiliation and loyalty to a particular religion. These practices very often led to their being regarded (on this slim evidence alone) as pious and very highly developed spiritual people.

The Buddha's teaching went against many of the current beliefs of the day and sought to expose these injustices and the superficiality underlying many religious customs. What the Buddha taught was Dhamma, one of the meanings of which is righteousness, what is just. To strive for righteousness in one's life depends on one's being moral. Morality itself depends on one's mental inclination. Whether one is moral or immoral is governed by the purity or impurity of the mind. Buddhism, therefore, is not a religion in the sense that the

word is most commonly understood, with hierarchies of priestly mediators. It is the path of mental purification.

According to the Buddha, morality is not only the foundation of our life in society but the axis round which the whole of our spiritual development revolves. Buddhism encourages people to make a radical change in their motivation and character. External shows of piety and the use of religious objects are not what are important. It is that we should develop our minds and purify them through the practice of morality, concentration and wisdom.

*No water from any great river can rinse
Or wash away the mind's impurities;
Only the water of morality can cleanse
The stains from living beings.*

[Visuddhimagga]

The Buddha emphasised morality, that is the practice of social virtues, as being the first step we need to take on the path to purification. The goal of our spiritual development aims at the attainment of Liberation. Liberation in Buddhism means freedom from bondages such as greed, hatred and delusion. So it is that without moral development there can be no Liberation.

Right Livelihood figures prominently in the Buddha's moral teaching. This traditionally entails not dealing in arms and lethal weapons, and animals for slaughter, not exploiting human beings or selling intoxicating drinks and poison. Though the Buddha mentioned only these five things, there are many other wrong ways of earning a living mentioned elsewhere in the scriptures. We understand that the Buddha was addressing the developing society in India which consisted for the most part of farmers, herdsmen and traders. Poverty, in fact, is the main cause of crime. If people are deprived of the bare necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter and medicine, they cannot and do not think of moral behaviour or give a thought to

righteous living. Owing to lack of economic security or often even the simple wherewithal to live, people are led to commit theft and other crimes. The precept about Right Livelihood was designed to bring true happiness to the individual and society and to promote unity and proper relations among people.

The Buddha makes ironic fun of the concept and result of sacrifice in the *Kutadanta Sutta*. There the story is told of a king who wishes to make a great sacrifice to ensure that his spiritual future is as comfortable as his present material circumstances. When he asks his chaplain's advice about this, a very different sacrifice is suggested to him. His land, he is told, *'is currently harried by robbers who pillage the villages and townships, and who make the roads unsafe. Were the king, so long as that is so, to levy a fresh tax, verily His Majesty would be acting wrongly. But perchance His Majesty might think: 'I'll soon put a stop to these scoundrels' game by degradation and banishment, by fines and bonds and death!' But their licence cannot be satisfactorily put a stop to so. The remnant left unpunished would still go on harassing the realm. Now there is one method to adopt to put a thorough end to this disorder. Whosoever there be in the king's realm who devote themselves to keeping cattle and the farm, to them let His Majesty give food and seed-corn. Whosoever there be in the king's realm who devote themselves to trade, to them let His Majesty give capital. Whosoever there be in the king's realm who devote themselves to government service, to them let His Majesty give wages and food. Then those men, following each his own business, will no longer harass the realm. The king's revenue will go up; the country will be quiet and at peace; and the populace, pleased one with another and happy, dancing their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors.'*

In order to raise the social and economic conditions of this country whose king, it is implied, has hitherto only considered his own well-being, there should be a redistribution of income so that its inhabitants can carry on their businesses and state servants be paid a fair wage. Thus when they have enough for their subsistence and are economically secure, crime is lessened and peace and harmony prevail. But generosity is only the foundation for this sacrificial altar. Beyond that material sacrifice, the scripture goes on, there is the moral sacrifice, the giving up of the selfish impulse; and beyond that again is the development of meditation, the sacrifice of time and energy in order to discipline the mind. In another discourse the Buddha describes to the banker Anathapindika the four kinds of happiness a layman may lawfully

enjoy. The first is ownership or economic security, so that he has sufficient means acquired righteously by his own effort; the second is the happiness gained by its judicious expenditure; the third is the bliss of not being in debt; but the fourth is the bliss of being without blame. The other three, it is proclaimed in verse,

'are not worth one sixteenth of a sixteenth of the bliss of blamelessness.'

[Anguttara Nikaya - 4/62]

The word livelihood implies not only a pure means of earning one's living but also that we have to be morally responsible towards all of society. If we do not take any responsibility for society then our minds are easily overwhelmed by self-interest and we become selfish and uncaring. If the mind is not pure, then we cannot behave in a moral or just and righteous way in our day to day dealings with other people. Moreover, when our mind is dominated by greed, then morality is lacking and our spiritual development is arrested.

The Buddha never expected us to worship him blindly but he wanted us to be pure in mind and just in deed. For these reasons we regard the Buddha as a great teacher but not as a saviour of mankind. He was a guide and his teaching is a light to guide us on our spiritual path. The Buddha himself said again and again that the teaching was to be used as a raft to ferry one across the river of rebirth and suffering to the further shore of Nibbana. His aim was to show people how to help themselves and so successfully cross over from the mundane to the supramundane state.

If we study the Buddha's teachings of moral discipline, mental discipline and wisdom, we will come to realise how we ourselves must take responsibility for the purification of our mind. If we also investigate the Buddha's teachings on the Four Sublime States of Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity towards all beings, then we will see in addition that we have a responsibility beyond ourselves to the wellbeing of society as well. Just as we want to enjoy prosperity and happiness in this life and the next, so we want the same for all living beings. This planet is our home and each of us has the right to live here, as do all other beings, animals, trees, plants and every other kind of living organism. This is to say that the development of animate and inanimate things in this world are interconnected and interdependent, so that worldly and spiritual growth is dependent upon everyone and everything else in this world. Nothing exists or can develop independently.

This lesson is emphasised in the *Singhala Sutta*, often referred to as the Layman's Code of Discipline. Here gentle fun is made of unthinking religious ritual. The Buddha comes upon young Singhala early one morning in his habitual worship of the six directions and asks him the reason for this practice. But he doesn't know, he had simply promised his father on his deathbed to do it. A dutiful young man, therefore, whose fallow mind is prepared for the Buddha's sowing. To begin with he is instructed in the ways of moral diligence. Then the Buddha proceeds to redefine righteous behaviour in the same way as he did sacrifice to Kutadanta the Brahmin with his fable of the king. The six directions, says the Buddha, represent the six pairs of human relationships which are to be properly observed. These include teacher and pupil, religious teacher and disciple, parents and children, husband and wife, employer and employee, friends and associates.

Society is seen as a network of interlinking relationships which is held together by the performance of duties relative to each other. The parent receives the obedience of his children but at the same time may owe obedience himself to his guru's teaching or his employer's direction. If the individual has rights, they are not absolute but dependent on the performance of mutual obligations. Obedience in one's own sphere gives the good example to those from whom one expects it. But a dependent is also obedient as a response to benefits received. In the case of parents, for instance, they are expected to give a moral training, to provide for their children's education and professional training, to arrange their marriages and finally to hand on their inheritance at their own retirement. Then the children will take over the duty of supporting them; having received moral training, they will maintain the family's good name, carry on its good practice and make themselves worthy of their inheritance.

The duties of husband and wife are almost exactly balanced. He treats her with politeness and affection, she conscientiously performs her duties; he treats her with respect in public, she is hospitable to her husband's relatives and friends (as well as her own). Each is faithful to the other. He gives her trust and is generous, she is not extravagant and works hard in the home. It is generally the duties of the dominant partner which are described first in this scripture, further emphasising that rights are dependent on duties performed. In all cases, one seeks the welfare of those for whom one is responsible first, whether teacher, parent or

spouse. This is the foundation of social justice, the emphasis on care rather than exploitation.

Extending this to the workplace, the employer suits the work to the ability and physical strength of employees; besides giving them food and a fair wage, he provides treats and grants them holidays. In return the employee works hard, diligently and honestly, and guards his employer's good name. Once abandon this paradigm and the world is exposed to the poison of universal greed with which, under the name of globalisation, it is afflicted at present. In all of these relationships, one should note, economic wellbeing is not overlooked by the Buddha. Friends lend to each other in need; husband, parent and employer are not stingy. Generosity is the first of the Buddhist virtues in any case, but the Buddha has much to say in other scriptures about the stupidity of miserliness and the danger to oneself of meanness and acquisitiveness.

According to Buddhism, then, whatever injustices, abuses and crimes occur in society are not only the product of poverty or economic decline but are also conditioned by our own mental inclination. All suffering in this world, the Buddha said, has three causes: human greed, human anger and human delusion. These three things are the real root causes of all injustice. This being the case, the whole of the Buddha's teaching is directed towards the uprooting and eradication of these three harmful mental defilements. Once free from them all, then we are liberated and can experience the bliss of Nibbana here and now, in this very life.

The teachings of the Buddha therefore do not encourage us to engage in religious rites and rituals but to develop ethical and moral principles and to act on them in our daily lives. He contradicts that English Prime Minister who denied even the concept of society. Indeed, he is no sort of a politician at all. He turns away from 'the big picture' to refer us always to the microcosm of society, the pattern of its relationships, breakdown anywhere in which brings misery to those either up or down the scale. A selfish king who does not look after the economic welfare of his subjects brings a breakdown in society just as surely as unruly and disobedient children disrupt the peace of a street. Without ethical and moral principles there can be no Liberation, certainly; neither can there be happiness, peace or harmony among mankind in general. ♦

(An earlier version of this article appeared on the UK Online site on the internet under the title "*Buddhism & Economic Justice*")

A NATURAL HABIT

Ashin Gawsaka considers the Buddhist robe

I would like to write about the robes worn by Theravada Buddhist monks, taking my reference from the Pali scriptures.

In the beginning of the Buddha's lifetime all the monks wore only robes made of discarded pieces of cloth (*panthukula civara*), sometimes taken from rubbish heaps or even from the cemetery and sewed and dyed by themselves. Why did they wear such unattractive old robes? Because they wished to remove all the impediments to the solitary life.

The number of Buddhist monks increased day by day. In later years the Buddha allowed monks to accept robes offered by people. But if the monk practiced the austerity of wearing old rags he had to wear only robes made of these and never an offered robe. In those times most people offered a strip of cloth. If there was not enough to make a robe, the monks went on collecting until there was. Up to about 1955 this tradition was carried on in Burma and Sri Lanka. The Buddha taught no attachment to beauty, nor did he encourage unnecessary ugliness, but rather a simple approach to dress that would give the right impression to devotees.

What colour were the monks' robes and how did they dye them? In the Buddha's time a few monks dyed their robes with animal waste and mud. So they were ugly in colour. The Buddha was told about it and he said to the monks, 'I will allow you to dye with six things: roots, boles, barks, leaves, flowers and fruits.' Thereafter some monks dyed their robes in cold water. But the robes stank of the dye. When this was reported to the Buddha, he allowed the monks to boil the dye in a small pot. The *Mahavagga Commentary* lists the names of improper things for dye. But most of these only existed in Asia so it is difficult to understand.

Monks could dye robes to get between yellow and brown-red with any of the six materials allowed. Bright yellow like saffron, dark-brown and bright red were not allowed because they were considered beautiful and used to satisfy personal vanity. You can see where the monks lived in the Buddha's lifetime and which suitable trees or plants were easy to get dye from for the robes; they were not exactly the same as today. Nowadays people offer ready-made robes so that monks have no need to sew and dye their own. But they keep on wearing the traditional colour.

In Burma some Buddhist sects alter the robe to be more in accordance with the rules of the Vinaya. If they think the robe is not close enough to the traditional colour they will dye it again. When I was living in my village's monastery as a novice my teacher collected three or four different barks and boiled these together and put the ready washed robes in the dye's boiling water. He also put in some alum and catechu for setting the colour. He told me that some trees had an astringent taste which meant they were good for this task. The robes were washed and dried carefully to avoid loss of colours. The robes held their colour for some two years but I found the colours didn't hold as well as in present-day clothes.

Why don't monks wear ordinary clothes? Well there are nine listed faults in such clothes. These disadvantages relate to expense, maintenance, keeping clean, durability, restrictions of size and style, unsuitability for a life of simplicity, social implications, motivations of attractiveness and finally clarity of duties relating to dress. There are also twelve qualities of the robes listed. These relate to cheapness; simplicity of making, of wearing, of mending and of fitting; suitability for a monk's lifestyle; ease of wearing and packing; not breaking any precept in their manufacture; causing very little envy; low temptation to thieves; low satisfaction to personal vanity and, finally, that there is less sense of personal possession. When you compare these robes with those of other Buddhist traditions you may gain more insight into Buddhist ideas.

May you understand the Dhamma. May you love the truth. May you be happy and peaceful. ❖



SANGHA NEWSLETTER

Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

Spiritual Director: Aggamahapandita Bhaddanta Rewata Dhamma

✿ GENERAL NEWS

Our activities at the Vihara continue much as normal, except for the reduced attendance at Monday meditation. Thursday sessions are led by Bill, with the assistance of Tom and Gordon and continue to be popular. The last Saturday meditation retreat also drew 22 participants, which seems to prove the success of this innovation.

The teaching programmes led by Ven's Uttaranyana and Nagasena have been drawing about a dozen from across the city to each session. Tuesday scripture studies will be recommencing after Christmas with another ten-week session studying the *Mahasattipatana Sutta* from January 6 to March 9 at the new time of 2.30-4.30pm. Study of other Middle Length Discourses will follow after a two-week break. General Studies weekends will continue and everyone is recommended to attend.

There are now six monks in residence after U Tiloka's return to Singapore. Beside Dr Rewata Dhamma and the two teaching monks, there are Ashins Gandasara and Ratapala, who look after site maintenance and the Pagoda; and Gawsaka, who is responsible for the Vihara and is being trained for other duties. We congratulate him on authoring his first article in this issue. Another studious guest has been Susanna Zimmermann from Mainz who spent two weeks meditating and joining in classes.

Gordon and Tom have lately cleaned and repainted the dome inside the Pagoda. Meanwhile Mar Mar, Ann, Jean, Linda and Pam continue to attend at the Vihara and help with its business and upkeep. We are also grateful to Leslie Gray who has come up from London on several occasions to install the office computer and network it with the others in the house.

✿ DR. REWATA DHAMMA

As well as his own Kathina ceremony, Bhante also attended those in Wembley and Wolverhampton. Other engagements included Birmingham Council of Faith's AGM, the Birmingham Faith Leaders' Meeting and Civic Mass at St Chad's Cathedral. There the Archbishop, Rt Rev. Vincent Nichols, quoted a recent address by the Pope in which he spoke of the advance of secularism as a frame of mind which 'exaggerates individualism, sunders the essential link between

freedom and truth and consequently destroys the mutual bonds which define social living.'

To gaze like the ancient prophets into the visions of the night, the Archbishop continued, 'is to see trends of disintegration, to glimpse the threats to social cohesion and wonder where they could take us. It is to see the aimlessness of life, felt so keenly at times, masked by ferocious and excessive 'entertainment', which sometimes disfigures this city.' Echoing recent thinking in the Church, and his own complaints in the media, he blamed 'secularism and its accompanying cynicism, that always seeks to corrode the faithful witness of those who live lives of evident virtue. There is something in our society which insists that we seek to bring down the good and exalt only the tawdry and flawed.' He therefore urged the necessity for those of faith and especially civic leaders to uphold, encourage and maintain faith in the practice of the good.

Bhante has now completed his three-day Abhidhamma course in Switzerland and four-day meditation retreat in Belgium. In December he leaves for Singapore and will go from there to attend the World Buddhist Sangha Council in Indonesia. After that he will go on to Penang, where the Myanmar Vihara is celebrating its 200th anniversary with a programme running from before Christmas to the New Year. In March next year he will briefly return to Switzerland. He has also been invited to a seminar in Mexico to mark the 5th anniversary of the Centro Mexicano del Buddhismo Theravada.

✿ PAGODA

Our Kathina Day at the beginning of November was very well attended. By cunningly waiting until the other viharas in Birmingham and London had had their celebrations we were able to draw 21 monks to ours! Among the speakers, in both English and Myanmar, were Ven's Rewata Dhamma, Uttaranyana, Nagasena, Kassapa and Kossallasa. The last of these, one of the best known Dhamma teachers in Myanmar, had been spending the Rains Retreat at the Santisukha Vihara, Hounslow. Described by Bhante as 'a professional speaker', his necessarily brief talk went down well among those who understand the language. Some 50 robes were presented on the occasion and we received £5,000 in donations. The event was

sponsored by Dr Wunna and family. Sponsors for the coming two years have already pledged themselves, but others are welcome to join the queue!

Among our visitors this autumn Ven. Nagasena has welcomed Trinity College (Carmarthen) and the primary schools taking part in the Interfaith Project. Yann has talked to two groups from Sir John Talbot's School (Shropshire), Malvern Girls' College, Queens College, Brookes University (Oxford) and the Baptist Interfaith Group. He also gave a two-hour seminar on Buddhism to the Christian Study Group at St John's Church in Cotteridge; on another afternoon they visited the Pagoda and were welcomed by Ven. Nagasena.

✿ DHAMMA HALL APPEAL

With the growth of our new teaching programme, it is becoming obvious that we need to extend our premises in line with our plans. We lack sleeping accommodation for long retreats and space for large seminars. Furthermore, as the overnight collapse of our marquee just before Kathina illustrated, we also need a large hospitality area. If we could relieve the pressure on the monastery by providing such facilities in a separate building, we could also cater for other monastic plans. Firstly the preliminary training of Westerners who then go to Eastern monasteries to further that training; secondly, training missionary monks who have completed their studies in their homelands and now wish to learn English and have experience of adapting their teaching methods to Western cultural expectations.

We are therefore launching an appeal to build a Dhamma Hall which will include a teaching area and kitchen facilities on the ground floor while upstairs there is sleeping accommodation for both males and females and separate bathroom facilities. Such rooms may also double as meditation cells and smaller teaching areas. The estimated cost of this is £300,000. Please contact us to make offers, suggestions, and for further information, at the address overleaf.

✿ DEVOTEES

Yann has given another Thought for the Day on BBC WM's Sunday morning programme. A more curious duty was to attend a seminar on religious tourism at Stoneleigh. The West Midlands region is developing a



AUTUMN DHAMMA CLASS HELD IN LIBRARY

tourism strategy which includes visiting all religious buildings. Yann was the only one there not connected with Christian churches.

Ramona, Linda and Dea Paradisos attended the One World Quilt event in support of Sustainable Development mentioned in our last issue. Indeed, they were the majority group of the dozen or so faiths present. A number of beautiful quilts have been made by groups of women as well as schools, but ours from Birmingham will be unique in its Multi-Faith theme. Each religious group will make one 18" x 18" square. The Buddhist section designed by Dea is circular with twelve panels emanating from a centre circle containing the Buddha. Each of the twelve panels is divided in two, rather in the style of the YIN/ YANG symbol, and has the theme of Dependent Arising and the reverse process involving the Factors of Enlightenment. Our work must be finished early in January and we are suggesting that those Buddhists interested should meet at the Pagoda to work on it on Wednesday or Thursday evenings. If you are interested in

joining the group ring Linda on 0121 443 4851 or e-mail her on linda@kutika.com for further information. In March there will be a ceremony in the Council House to mark its completion and handing over.

❁ **PALI TEXT CLASS**

Several of us have just completed a series of ten sessions with Dr. Uttarayana studying the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha.

During this we managed to study just three of its total of 152! In the *Sallekha Sutta* Buddha explained to Maha Cunda that wrong views about self and the world (*loka*) could only be removed by the practice of insight. Absorption leads to a blissful existence; only by refraining from the forty-four unwholesome deeds named in the sutta, can we remove our moral defilements. It describes four ways to achieve this. The first is to incline our mind towards the opposite wholesome deed, for example, 'Others will be cruel, we shall not be cruel here'. Simply to incline our minds towards doing a good deed brings us a good result; that result is infinitely more if we actually perform it. The second way is to avoid the unwholesome deeds. The third is to be aware that unwholesome deeds lead us downwards to the lower realms, while wholesome deeds lead us upwards. The fourth way to refrain from unwholesome deeds is to extinguish them by performing the opposite wholesome deed, for example, 'A person given to cruelty has non-cruelty by which to extinguish it'. One who has not removed his own moral defilements cannot rescue others in the same state.

Sammaditthi Sutta is an explanation of right view given by Venerable Sariputta. Physical, verbal and mental actions motivated by greed, hatred and delusion are considered to be unwholesome. Those arising through non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion are considered to be wholesome. To have right view is to understand whether a deed is wholesome or unwholesome. By abandoning the underlying tendencies to greed, aversion and the conceit of self, we can put an end to suffering. Further, Right View is to fully understand the Four Noble Truths and not to incline to eternalist or annihilationist views. We went on to learn about the four nutriments necessary for the existence and continuity of beings: ordinary physical food, contact of the sense-bases with sense objects, mental volition and consciousness. We also studied the conditional nature and interdependence of all phenomena. The Dependant Origination formula is given in reverse order in this sutta and has a thirteenth factor, the taints of sensual desire, being and ignorance.

The Buddha gave the *Mahadukkhakhandha* discourse to disprove the claim by Jains that they followed the same path and taught the same Dhamma as the Buddha. He explained to His monks the nature of the sense pleasures, their gratification and their danger, and how to escape from them; and similarly, the nature, gratification, danger and escape from both material form and feelings. Interestingly, the Buddha chooses as an example of feelings, not those which follow sense contact but those associated with the four jhanas. The highest gratification in the case of feelings is 'freedom from affliction'. The danger in the case of even these feelings is that they are 'impermanent, suffering and subject to change' and the escape is by 'the removal and abandonment of desire and lust for feelings'.

We took turns to read from the suttas and Dr. Uttarayana clarified many points in them from the commentaries and later commentators. We were also introduced to the Pali where appropriate. Before the class, I was a bit daunted by the prospect of trying to understand the Pali Texts but now, having had the guidance of a teacher and the company of fellow students, I feel sufficiently confident to read some texts by myself. But I am looking forward to the next series in the new year. Why not join us then?

Report by Pamela Hirsch

SANGHARAMA ACTIVITIES

Meditation: Advanced, Mondays 7.30pm

Beginners, Thursday 7.00pm.

Retreats: usually 2nd Saturday of each month.

Zen Group: First and third Friday in the month.

Family Open Day: Sunday, 4th January

Devotees Day: First Sunday of the month. (Sanghadana, communal meal, teaching or discussion of Vihara support).

Full Moon Days: Chanting in the Pagoda, 7.30pm.

(Tues. 6 Jan., Thurs. 5 Feb., Fri. 5 Mar.).

West Midlands Buddhist Council: Sunday, 29 February 1.00pm

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