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**The Lay Review and Newsletter of the
Birmingham Buddhist Vihara**

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The Power of Sila

by **Pamela Hirsch**

Sone day when I was at the Vihara to do the library work, a monk asked me to do some photocopying for him. I was thinking, "I must do the right number, correct size etc.", but some paper got stuck and the machine stopped working. Instructions came up on the screen about how to fix the error, but I could not understand it. I thought, "I'm here all alone. There is no one to help me. I won't be able to complete what I'd given me to do". I was going to cry.

Then I remembered a story from the commentaries about a boy whose mother was very ill. He was told that the only thing that could make her better was rabbit meat. So he went out to try to catch one. Then he saw a rabbit, and when he chased it, the animal got stuck in some grass. He was just going to kill it when he thought, "It would not be the right thing for me to take the life of another living being to save my mother's life". So he released the rabbit and went back to his mum. He did not have the rabbit flesh he was supposed to bring, but he had something much more precious to offer: unbroken sila. He declared, "For all of my life I have never knowingly killed any living being. By the power of this sila may my mother get well". And his mother immediately recovered. This is the power of sila.

I thought, "I have something to offer as well". Because when I had arrived, before beginning my library work, I had gone into the shrine room, and chanted something like "To the Buddha do I surrender my body and mind. Revering the Buddha I will behave in accordance with the (path of) the Buddha's

Enlightenment...By body, speech and mind, by whatever wrong actions I have committed towards the Buddha, may my acknowledgement of fault be accepted." and other similar chants from the Aston Vihara Chanting book. I have always found it has helped me to review my practice, and if I have done something wrong against the Buddha's teachings, I can make a new start. Then, after praying like this to the Lord Buddha, I can remain in His presence, doing the things that please Him, and I can have the peace and sense of wellbeing that I just cannot get from the outside world.

So, because of this, I could declare, "Although I am not as good as that boy and cannot say 'for a lifetime', maybe not even for a day, but at least for these past few hours since I have been here I have not broken any of the precepts. By the power of this sila, may the machine work". Then I went to the machine and I easily understood the instructions, restarted it and completed the photocopying. That's the power of sila - and very powerful it is!

There's another story in the commentaries about a servant. The family he worked for all took the eight precepts on full moon day. He thought, "I should do this as well", but he died after only half a day's practice. However, because he had passed away in this pure state, he went straight to heaven. So even a short practice of sila is worthwhile.

Although I may not be ready to go immediately to heaven, at least I can experience 'heaven on earth' if I keep the precepts which the Lord Buddha has given to us for our protection; and I can enjoy His peaceful presence, and overcome obstacles as well. Such is the power of sila. ❖

**We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.**

lotus
lay review

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Lotus Review is for free distribution, but donations towards the expenses of publishing, printing and posting would be welcome. Design and editing by Linda Tomlinson and Yann Lovelock.

Lotus is printed on our equipment at the Vihara and collated by the monks there. The summer edition will be a special Commemorative issue. You can help by buying a space to offer a message of commemoration from your family. This should reach us not later than mid-April. (see below)

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.

**REWATA DHAMMA
ANNIVERSARY
LOTUS**

We shall be honouring the first anniversary of Sayadaw's death with a special colour edition of Lotus Review. This will contain tributes, old photos, articles, a biography and a bibliography. To help cover the additional cost you are invited to purchase a space in this commemorative issue where you and your family can offer a message of remembrance. We would also welcome business advertisements and you can help us too by canvassing for adverts from well-wishers.

Donations to be made payable to Birmingham Buddhist Vihara and your messages to Linda at: 13 Drayton Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham B14 7LP. If you would like more information phone her on 0121 443 4851.



Learning to Live in Harmony

by **Bill Strongman**

Our New Year get-together on the first Sunday in January

was a great success. I didn't count the people there but I am sure that there were more than we have ever had before and the atmosphere was wonderful. We gave dana to the monks and shared the vegetarian food we had brought. After the meal we chatted for a while and then there was half an hour meditation followed by a talk given by Ven. Dr. Ottara Nyana, after which he distributed new year presents: bracelets for the ladies and rosary beads for the men. These were given with love, joyfulness and humour, which makes them treasured possessions.

We hope to have similar get-togethers every first Sunday in the month throughout the year - without the presents, of course! Many of us feel that this sort of occasion is very valuable in bringing together our lay supporters and their families; by sharing and talking to each other we can better appreciate what it is like to be together in friendship and harmony. This is how we can build a true sangha where we are not afraid to accept people whose thinking may be a little different from ours, or to touch ideas or thoughts which we are afraid may upset the applecart. It can become easy to maintain a sort of pseudo-harmony with a Hail Fellow Well Met attitude on the surface, while just below it our critical minds are still at work.

Every Monday evening we chant "Do not think that anyone anywhere is of no value"; so if we can truly realise this we shall be able to learn from and open heartedly accept people just as they are and not only as we think they ought to be. Then our sangha will grow in a love and friendship which will not end at the gates of the Pagoda but its influence will spread far and wide. I am sure you will agree such qualities are badly needed in our world.

So we would like to see you on the first Sunday in every month, and don't forget to bring the kids, uncles, aunties, moms and dads, and grans and grandads... and anyone else you can rustle up. 'The more the merrier'. ❖

Thamangone Village Development Project Appeal

In the period between his return from Brazil and his departure for California and Mexico last year, Sayadaw drafted the appeal below, which was to be sent to his disciples and supporters as a leaflet. Death prevented him from doing this and, as everyone now knows, we included his development project among others which make up the Rewata Dhamma Appeal.

Dr. Ottara Nyana visited the village in December last year and had an official meeting with the civic authorities and village leaders. They were greatly relieved to hear that the project was going ahead, having given up hope of seeing the extension of the school achieved after the news of Sayadaw's death. It was decided to start with a one-storey building but dig foundations to support two storeys; this will allow for expansion of the premises at a later date.

We shall shortly be launching the project. if anyone still wishes to contribute to the appeal please contact the Vihara Treasurer.

In December 1929 I was born in a village called Thamangone (Zalun township), in the Henthada district on the banks of the Irrawaddy. The river was then the main route from upper to lower Burma; the land was very fertile and the district was a major agricultural area. There were about 400 houses in our village and it was surrounded by other smaller villages. The village had three Buddhist *kyaungs* (monasteries) and a state primary school, all of which provided the children with a basic education, with the result that most people in the area could read and write.

When I returned there after fifty years things had changed because of cave-ins as the Irrawaddy shifted its course. Owing to lack of bank maintenance, Thamangone had had to move its site three times. However, it still retained its three viharas and the school had been re-graded to include middle school as well. When I was a boy, none among our young people had gone on to university but now there are both men and young women there with degrees.

The school should really be expanded to include high school but in the present economic situation the village cannot afford the building costs. However, the government has indicated its willingness to support its re-grading once the school's capacity is increased and would employ local graduates as teachers. At present anyone wishing to pursue higher education must cross the river (over a mile wide at this point) and go to other towns. Although the children are bright enough, their parents are too poor to support them away from home. Because of the political situation and the consequent economic sanctions against Myanmar, the population as a whole has become impoverished. Although some NGOs (such as Christian Aid and Swiss-Aid) give a certain amount of support in work like improving school buildings and sinking wells, it is necessarily limited in a country with 52 million inhabitants.

It is my ambition to show my gratitude to those who supported me when I was young, not just in words but in a tangible way as well. Next December I shall be 75 and on this occasion would like to help the village by increasing the school premises so as to house a high school, and also to sink tube wells locally so that pure water can be made available to those in the village. I would also like to be able to provide scholarships for up to five students to pursue university studies. I am informed that building costs would be £15,000; tube wells would cost £1,000 each. Expenses for students would come to £500 each per year and a university course covers four years.

I would gratefully appreciate any help you can give me towards raising this birthday present, which I would hand over when I visit my village in December. Hopefully this will benefit the thousands in the area for many years to come.

Dr. Rewata Dhamma

26/03/04

DR OTTARA NYANA WITH THE VILLAGERS
OF THAMANGONE VILLAGE



Globalising Spiritual Values

DELIVERED BY DR REWATA DHAMMA AT THE MILLENNIUM SUMMIT OF WORLD RELIGIOUS LEADERS,
AUGUST 2000, UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK.

e meet at the end of a century of unending violence. Despite an increased sense of our mutual interdependence, despite the improvements in communications and means of transport that have shrunk the globe, despite the best efforts of individual religious and political leaders, we are still unable to lessen violence, let alone prevent the horrible act of war. The United Nations itself, set up at the end of a world conflict in order to decrease such disasters and the conditions that contribute to them, can hardly be said to have achieved the best of success in that aim so far.

One reason for this state of affairs must be that statesmen too often pay only lip service to the humanistic values of the U.N. Charter. Their actions show them far more concerned with the pragmatism of power. They speak of and champion Democracy and Human Rights without ethical values. Political gain and economic profit are their main priorities. But it is a condemnation of us as effective religious leaders that politicians are so often able to profit by stirring up religious hatred and strife. If we conferred together more often, if we were truly united in respect for each other's faith and teachings, we should be a little nearer to a solution to some of the problems now facing the world.



The Buddha's insight into the origin of suffering was that its main cause arises from attachment. This is a manifestation of our preoccupation with ourselves to the virtual exclusion of the good of others. We are slaves to self-gratification through our attachment to sense pleasures. We define ourselves through the views and opinions we hold (including religious doctrines) and are exposed to the temptation of intolerance. Substituting rites and ritual for true spiritual discipline, we become self-righteous. Finally, our insistence on the autonomy of the self makes us lose sight of our duty even to those closest and dearest to us, let alone to our neighbours, humanity or the globe.

It is attachment that blinds us to our real nature and to the effective solution to our ills. According to

the Buddha, the causes of suffering are inescapable, they form the basis of all we experience, but there is a way of going beyond it. The words in the books for this three-fold way translate as Morality, Meditation and Wisdom. In practice this means self-control, mental discipline and the ability to see all sides of a problem or situation. In this way attachment is weakened and finally overcome. As important, however, is that this way of restraint and insight is the necessary training for attempting to put into practice whatever proposals come out of our meeting here.

There is a story about Gandhi that he delayed advising a child not to over-indulge a liking for palm sugar until he had mastered that liking in himself. In the same spirit, we too must learn to govern ourselves before we lay down solutions for others! And even then there is a further cultivation for the mind. Buddhists call this set of meditations the Four Sublime States. They consist of ceasing to discriminate between any forms of being and of sharing in their experience. The first stage is to cultivate unlimited well-wishing towards all beings; then compassionately sharing in their suffering and standing ready to alleviate it; next unreservedly rejoicing in the happiness of others; finally, developing a non-judgmental acceptance of each individual, recognising our essential oneness of experience.

Wisdom and insight are not enough. There must also be a sense of involvement before harmony in society can truly be promoted



We can probably agree that all faiths share common moral values and that in general their aim is to diminish self-centredness. Interfaith activities such as that in which we are presently engaged are also necessary if the changes we propose for the common good are to be at all effective. In putting forward the suggestions that have been invited from us, it should also be borne in mind that the qualities I have already mentioned are the foundation on which they must be based.

I therefore endorse the second of the purposes given for calling this meeting, namely the formation of an International Advisory Council of Religious

and Spiritual Leaders for the United Nations. But I would go further and say that the calling of interfaith councils to advise those in government is necessary at a national as well as at the international level. Until there is a readiness to listen to such advice at the national level, we can hardly expect such advice to make an impact on those who serve their national governments in this place. Until there is a general acceptance of the implications of that ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism that the United Nations has championed from its beginning, we shall get nowhere.

Setting an example to others by adopting this proposal, then, is only a beginning. Indeed, it will generally be regarded as simply a cosmetic gesture, a mere gimmick, unless the extension of this idea to national and regional spheres of government is also encouraged as part of the U.N.'s work in keeping world peace. It is there, after all, that action is taken for social improvement, diminishing conflict and encouraging harmony. It is there that the example should most importantly be set.

Changing human nature takes time and in any case is best pursued at the personal level, as the example of Gandhi indicates. But the encouragement of insight into human nature and of the resolution to transcend it is most effective when one is young. For this reason, education is of vital importance in achieving a viable platform for giving peace a better chance in future generations. Kurt Hahn recognised this when, inspired by the work of the U.N., he set up the first of what were to become the United World Colleges to promote international understanding and a listening attitude among students from all nations.

More of such institutions should be encouraged and given the financial support to make them viable. Students should be exposed there, as part of the curriculum, to the spiritual values of all the faiths. But, equally important, it should be part of the vision of such establishments to encourage scrutiny of the very act of teaching, to test whether the teachers, lay or religious, practise what they teach. From the Buddhist perspective, we would like to see emphasised also that, while ceremony has a part to play in religion, putting what is taught into practice in daily life is even more important.

With regard to the declaration for peace which is the primary purpose of our gathering, I would wish to see as part of its text the plea that a less one-sided political and economic view is taken of human suffering. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that we should declare ourselves as opposed to the naked

materialism and greed that lies at the heart of the false religion of politics and economics and, indeed, of so-called globalisation. Then, in addressing ourselves to individual governments, we should make clear that suffering and need should be recognised wherever it occurs and aid be offered to all, rather than simply to the friends of whatever regime is in power.

Let me sum up by saying that we need to take religion out of the holy buildings and shrines and into the streets. It is only in this way that we can hope to change the present political and economic priorities and open up hearts to the spiritual dimension. The United Nations needs the kind of consultation with religious and spiritual leaders that is envisaged. But not until these leaders and their disciples are seen to be living up to the ideals they teach will their message be heeded.

Note: The formation of a World Council of Religious Leaders was one of the stated goals of the Millennium World Peace Summit. The objective of this Council was to serve as a resource to the United Nations and its agencies around the world, to nation states and other international organisations, offering the collective wisdom and resources of the faith traditions toward the resolution of critical global problems.

The launching of this World Council took place in Bangkok on June 12th-14th, 2002, at Buddhamonthon and at UNESCAP. Participants adopted a Charter that outlines key areas in which religious leaders can play an active role in reducing conflict and addressing the critical needs of humankind. Its mission statement reads:

The World Council of Religious Leaders aims to serve as a model and guide for the creation of a community of world religions. In the spirit of service and humility, it seeks to inspire women and men of all faiths in the pursuit of peace, justice and mutual understanding. It will undertake initiatives to provide the spiritual resources of the world's religious traditions to assist the United Nations and its agencies in the prevention, resolution and healing of conflicts and in the eradication of their causes and in addressing social and environmental problems. By promoting the practice of the spiritual values shared by all religious traditions, and by uniting the human community for times of world prayer and meditation, the World Council seeks to aid in developing the inner qualities and external conditions needed for the creation of a more peaceful, just and sustainable world society. ❖

Where Does the Truth Lie?



In an era of spin it is becoming increasingly difficult to find anyone to believe when it comes to the news. *'It must be true, I read it in the paper'* was what we once said in more naïve times. Later you could only trust your local newspaper. Now the one I take has had a change of editor and has begun narrowing down its coverage to those areas on which it wishes to instruct its readers what to think, rather than paying them the compliment of letting them make up their own minds. So it has to be from the manipulation of news that these thoughts start, rather than any particular item.

Why is it so important, anyway, to the spin-doctors and editors that we should think the same as their paymasters? The myth of democracy, to which they pay lip service, assures us that debate is healthy, that truth can be arrived at through the discussion of opinions. The devil lies in that detail. We define ourselves by our opinions, don't we? We think of them as the expression of ourselves. If someone disagrees with us, therefore, we feel ourselves diminished. We take it as a threat to who we think we are.

But are we really the sort of person we would like people to think on the basis of our opinions? On those rare occasions when we're completely honest with ourselves - at 4 o'clock some sleepless night, say - we know we are not. Our fantasies, our instinctive reactions, are always letting us down. A newly made member of a shadow cabinet supposedly 'led from the middle', for instance, suddenly blurts out that he's in favour of the death sentence. Or to take a less recent example, a police officer counsels the parents of a murdered school-girl and, when he gets back home, relaxes from the pressure of his job by downloading child pornography. You don't ask yourself whether such behaviour on the part of others has contributed to the problem; you want to get away from all that, to escape from the responsibility...

But you can't.

In the East, doctrine is of less importance than putting what you believe into action. It is not what you say, it is not what you believe that matters, but what you do because of how you define yourself. That's the reason why Buddhists emphasize what they call 'the practice'. Those who only know Buddhism from what they read in books are inclined to dismiss meditation and the idea of eradicating negative attitudes through its means as selfish and life-denying. But unless we are aware of the traps our mind sets for us, of the hypocrisy of having all the right attitudes and not living up to them, we too will fail not just ourselves but society too.

Indeed, it is our obsession with our individuality first

of all, with putting our self-definition and our self-gratification before everything else, that causes suffering and heart-break. What the papers and the politicians say or do are only a symptom of what is wrong. It is in our own attitude that the disease is to be found.

Recently we have had occasion to call to mind some more of the Buddha's teaching about opinion. Last December Sikhs protested against a play at Birmingham Rep which they found offensive because it showed murder and rape taking place in a gurdwara. Now the Buddha himself was not only criticised behind his back but even insulted to his face. His teaching was that one should never get angry since this harmed oneself and gratified one's enemy. Whether it is oneself or one's faith that is being attacked, to take it personally is to fall back on the ego.

But I must confess to having sympathy with the Sikh protesters, even if not with the violence that followed. The Buddha counselled patience under insult but he also taught that the artist should have a sense of social responsibility. When a certain actor persisted in asking what would be his reward for giving pleasure to so many people, he was roundly told by the Buddha that he would go to hell for stirring up unskilful states of mind in them. In our diverse and interdependent society, we cannot now assume that we have a perfect right to make a living without considering first the offence or harm we may be causing. The Buddha classified that as morally wrong livelihood. It is also deeply selfish.

It is one thing to suffer insult patiently but quite another to remain silent in a secular society that makes fun of striving to live a good life with its cheap jibes and crass humour, its love of sensationalism and its pleasure in the downfall of others. Given the potential harm such unthinking exercise of 'the right of free speech' brings to society, is it even compassionate not to protest in these circumstances? Making the right decision is not easy!

The Buddha always directs us to our own motivation. We can come up with any number of fancy excuses for our actions, but with our training in meditation we know deep down how feeble and dishonest most of them are. When it comes down to it, we're generally asserting the opinionated self and so are no better than those we want to put straight. On the other hand, timidly hiding behind that possibility as an excuse not to make moral choices is equally wrong.

Let us remind ourselves once again: it is not what we believe but what we do because of those beliefs that matters. If we simply do nothing, then it's not the Buddha's teaching that is at fault but our understanding of it. ♦

SANGHA NEWS

Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

Spiritual Director: Venerable Dr. Ottara Nyana

❁ VIHARA

All three teaching sessions continue to be well attended, as are our two meditation sessions. During Dr Ottara Nyana's absences, Ven's Nagasena and Gawsaka have been taking Monday evening meditation. In addition, Ven. Nagasena has been leading monthly meditations in a doctor's surgery on Pershore Road and weekly meditations with Ven. Maha Laow at Birmingham University. Nagasena too represented the Sangha at Birmingham Council of Faiths' 30th anniversary celebrations, which were held in the Council House. Also there were Executive members Yann, Ann and Ramona Kauth.

At the end of November we had a party from Prague staying with us. By prior arrangement between Dr Rewata Dhamma and Ven. Kusalananda, we ordained one of his Czech devotees as Ven. Akasa with eight bhikkhus present and Mar Mar Lwin as his sponsor. This was Dr Ottara Nyana's first opportunity to act as preceptor since taking on his new duties here.

In November, too, a neighbour drew our attention to plans for the redevelopment of the reservoir and canal loop sites which appeared to threaten our privacy and security. As well as sending a letter to the Planning Department, we attended a consultation at St John's Church in December. Our party included Ven's Rattapala, Gawsaka and Nagasena from the Vihara as well as Trustees Maung Maung Than, John Beard and Ann Lovelock, with Yann to put our case. We were assured our concerns would be noted but shall keep an eye on developments.

Next month the same three monks attended the celebration of Maha Laow's Ph.D degree at Buddhavihara Temple, along with Mar Mar,

Sunny, Ashwin, Yann and Ann. Coming from the poor village of Ban Nong Rang, he used this occasion to share his good fortune by raising money to complete the village hall they are building.

As well as teaching sessions in the library, we continue to host the various groups who hold meetings there. These include the BCF executive group and the West Midlands Buddhist Council. At the latter they were joined in January by Ven. Kassapa and colleagues from the International Buddhist Relief

Organisation who have joined the relief effort after the tsunami, concentrating particularly on orphans. They explained that, since its costs £950 per container to send material aid, they preferred to be given money. With this they can buy what they need much cheaper in the countries concerned and help the local economy besides.

❁ DR. OTTARA NYANA

At the beginning of December, Ven. Dr Ottara Nyana left for Yangon to attend the 4th World Buddhist Summit, where he gave a paper on the broad education that a missionary monk should receive. The Summit was convened in the Mahapasana Cave, a large meeting hall in an artificial hill originally constructed to house the 6th Sangha Council in 1954. Attending were monastics from 36 countries of which the great majority were, of course, from Myanmar. Also there were the prime ministers of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar.

While in the capital, Bhante had meetings with the Vice Chair and Secretary of the State Sangha Council Sayadaws, with the Buddhist Missionary Association and with the Dept of Religious Affairs. Much of their discussion centred on plans to site a Buddhist Academy in our grounds and its possible expansion into a



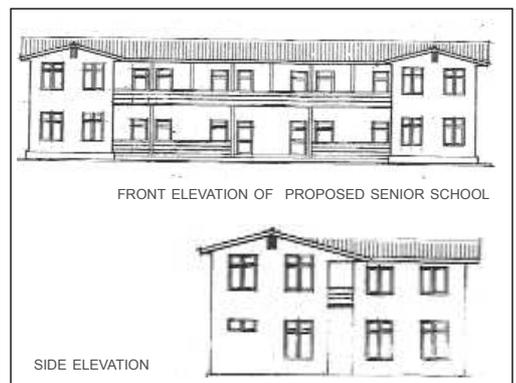
CZECH DEVOTEE BEING SHAVED BEFORE ORDINATION AS VEN. AKASA, WITH HIS PRECEPTOR DR OTTARA NYANA AND SPONSOR, DR MAR MAR LWIN, WATCHED OVER BY FRIENDS

university. In the midst of this he also set out into the countryside, travelling by car, boat, bullock cart and on the pillion of a motor bike. His main mission was to visit Thamangone and arrange for the building of a senior school in Sayadaw's village. He was greeted with joy and relief since the people there had given up hope of that project after Dr Rewata Dhamma's death. We now have enough to dig foundations for a two-storey building and complete the first at least.

While in England, Bhante attended a Civic Service in the Liberal Jewish Synagogue with Yann in November and Holocaust Day in the Convention Centre, with Yann, Ann and Ramona, in January. For the coronation of the Radiant Buddha at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, he was also joined by our monks, with the addition of Maha Laow. A large audience filled the Buddha Gallery. Afterwards there was chanting by groups of Jains and Hindus, since there are also artefacts from their religion there.



VEN DR OTTARA NYANA ENTERING THAMAGONE VILLAGE IN A BULLOCK CART



FRONT ELEVATION OF PROPOSED SENIOR SCHOOL

SIDE ELEVATION

At the beginning of February, Bhante left for Brazil where he will be teaching and leading retreats for most of that month. His travels have meant that he has not been able to attend the last two meetings of Birmingham Faith Leaders Group. Just lately, however, two other Buddhists have been appointed: Tony Lister, from Birmingham Sakya Ling, who will represent Mahayana; and Dh. Vajragupta, of the Birmingham Buddhist Centre, for the West Midlands Buddhist Council.

After his return, Dr Uttaranyana will be leading a retreat over Easter, beginning at 8.00 p.m. on Thursday 24 March and finishing at 4.00 p.m. on Monday 28th. Please let us know beforehand if you wish to stay at the Vihara and bring a sleeping bag if you can.

❁ **PAGODA**

There have been many visitors to the Pagoda, despite the seriously defective heating which makes the experience a distinctly chilly one! In November we held the pre-London launch of "Discovering Buddhism", a book edited by Ramona Kauth and Elizabeth Harris which has taken four years to compile and publish. It is a collection of essays on all aspects of Buddhism and includes pieces on meditation by Dr Rewata Dhamma and on pagodas by Yann Lovelock.

School groups visiting us have included Stamford Junior and Moor Hall Primary. We are now attracting an increasing number of those with disabilities and have hosted visits by autistic children from Longmoor and Calthorpe Schools, some with learning difficulties from The Pines and young women with behavioural problems from Redditch College. Other groups included the College of Food, Bath University and the Baptist Missionary Society.

Ven. Nagasena has continued to teach the

regular groups from primary schools who come as part of the Ladywood Interfaith Project. He also talked to two Swedish interfaith groups, an international youth forum and a group Chris Hewer is instructing about faiths in Birmingham.

❁ **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Yann and Ann have been representing us on a variety of occasions. In November they attended Eid celebrations at the Ahmaddiya mosque and Civic Mass at St Chad's Cathedral. They are also our delegates on the West Midlands Buddhist Council. Ann resigned from being Vice Chair at the AGM this year but Yann remains as Publicity Officer and has special responsibility for interfaith matters. They also both visited Wolverhampton Interfaith Group in January as part of the BCF committee.

As well as teaching most school groups at the Pagoda, Yann visited St Michael's C of E Junior School in Hockley to take a lesson this term. In November he told Jataka tales to young children at Birmingham Museum and in January told the story of the Buddha's enlightenment. In addition he talked there to a 'twilight briefing' for teachers about the resources of the pagoda.

Yann has also given a talk to the University Buddhist Society on the Buddha's historical background and taken part in a discussion at Derby Multi Faith Centre on the topic "How do we know we worship the same God?" He returned to Derby at the beginning of February to join a panel discussing the variety of traditions within Buddhism. Finally, he was among the speakers at the London launch of "Discovering Buddhism" in the SPCK bookshop behind Westminster Abbey.

Last autumn Yann took part in the consultation with DTI Minister Jacqui Smith on the proposed unitary Commission for Equality and

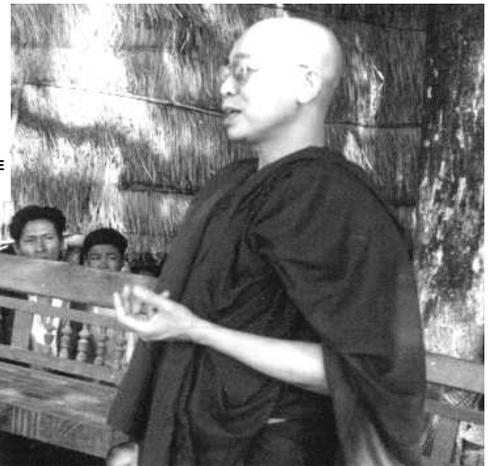
Human Rights. At this he urged the use of dialogue in its work. Now he is one of the two delegates from the West Midlands Faiths Forum on the committee considering how to implement the new legislation across our region.

❁ **REWATA DHAMMA ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**

We shall be honouring the first anniversary of Sayadaw's death with a special extended edition of Lotus Review in time for the Pagoda anniversary on 24 July. It will contain tributes, old photos, articles, a biography and bibliography, and will be printed in full colour. Since this will involve us in a great deal of additional expense, we are appealing for help to cover the cost. We suggest sponsoring a quarter page message or contributing an advert if you have a business. You could help us too by canvassing for more adverts from well-wishers. Please contact the Editor.



from l. to r: VEN.DR. OTTARA NYANA, AJAHN MAHA LAOW AND U RATAPALA AT THE CORONATION OF THE RADIANT BUDDHA AT THE BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM & ART GALLERY



VEN.DR. OTTARA NYANA TALKING TO THE VILLAGERS OF THAMAGONE VILLAGE



SANGHARAMA ACTIVITIES

Meditation: *Advanced*, Mondays 7.30pm *Beginners*, Thursday 7.00pm.

Retreats and Teachings For 2005 Programme send sae. **Zen Group:** First and third Friday in the month.

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

Full Moon Days: 23 Feb., 24 Mar., 23 Apr., 22 May, 21 June (*Chanting in the Pagoda*)

Festivals and Special Days: **Buddha Day (Wesak)** Sunday, 22 May, 10.30am **Kuan Yin Day** Tuesday, 21 June, 7pm
5-Day Retreat led by Ven.Dr. Ottara Nyana : 24-28 March

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