



lotus

The Lay Review and Newsletter of the
Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

AUTUMN 2001

ISSUE No. 2

Generosity - the gift of the dhamma

Listening to Radio Four one winter's evening some years ago I was moved by a short story on the theme of giving. The story is of a newly married couple without the means to celebrate Christmas in the conventional sense of exchanging gifts and fine foods. They both harbour a secret longing to express their love with a Christmas gift, but it seems hopeless. However, as with all such stories, love prevails. Though having nothing material with which to buy a gift the girl, seeing a sign in a barber's shop for hair to make wigs, sells her hair and buys her husband a long wanted chain for a precious watch left to him by his grandad. He, on the other hand, knowing how much she had admired a haircomb that would tie up her lovely long hair, sold his watch to buy it for her.

What is so moving about this story? I think it is because it represents the true spirit of generosity. Each had parted with the very item that mattered most to them. Yet it hadn't been hard to do because their care for the other made the act of sacrifice a pleasure not a pain. How easy to give when one has plenty. How easy to give when we know that giving will bring reward back to us in one form or another. But when we give for the love of another being, that giving becomes pure.

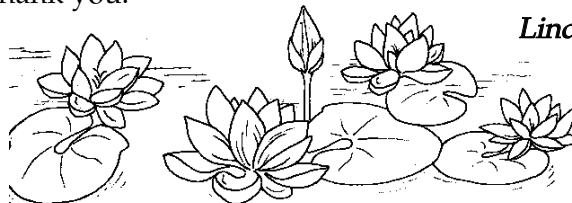
Generosity is the first of the Buddhist Perfections and, practised well, serves to undermine

greed, avarice and selfishness. At the Kathina season we celebrate giving and this has therefore been chosen as one theme for our second issue. Providing the requisites of food, clothing, shelter and medicine for monks and nuns is an aspect of giving with which we are familiar. Yann has written about other kinds of offerings elsewhere in this issue. Yet another meritorious offering to others is the gift of the Dhamma and it is the contribution of so many of you towards this on which I finally wish to focus.

What wasn't anticipated, when we at the Vihara first decided to share the dhamma with a wider audience, was that you would join in and support us so quickly. The financial support, as well as the positive messages and affirmations we have received, have quite overwhelmed us. There have been small contributions and large, but each of you has given from the heart, from the true spirit of dana, and the cost of printing and distributing Issue 2 of Lotus Review has been covered.

So, in no particular order, we would like to offer our thanks to David Ramsay, Dr Marlar Yin, Mrs Vajira Bailey O.B.C., Bill Strongman, N.T. and E.U. Kottegoda, Mr R Pe Win, Keith Perks and Su Dawson, Dr Thant Syn and Mrs Toe Lwin-Syn and family, Bryan Lester, Dr Chit Ko Ko and Dr Khin Mar Aye, Neil North, Mark Scan, Dr & Mrs Lwin, Dr N.W. Khine, Gordon Pagett, Daw A.M. Khin, Ms Khin Thant Hin and not forgetting those who have written articles for Lotus Review and Dea, whose drawings illustrate the pages so well. Thank you.

Linda



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lay review

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The Dhamma and Reality and Reality

by Bhikkhu Nagasena

*No God, no Brahma can be found.
No matter of this wheel of life,
Just bare phenomena roll
Dependent on conditions all.*

Visuddhimagga

The scripture of Dependent Origination demonstrates the Buddha's view of the nature of reality by showing how human beings wander in Samsara as a result of ignorance (*avijja*); it further defines the path leading to the end of rebirth as the development of wisdom (*vijja*). The ultimate reality as defined in Buddhism rests on the definition of these words *avijja* and *vijja*. Reality as perceived through ignorance is conditional and is that pointed to in the first and second Noble Truths.

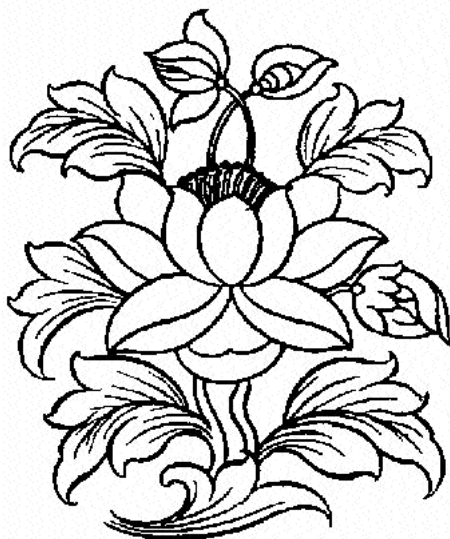
In the Dependent Origination formula it is suggested that due to lack of wisdom, through not seeing reality clearly, a person is bound to produce kamma. Conditional reality, therefore, leads to wandering round the wheel of becoming. The nature of wisdom, on the other hand, is pure and unconditional. This teaching is the subject of the last two Noble Truths and it is this teaching alone that leads to the end of rebirth. The Buddhist training aims at abandoning the production of kamma and should be developed by the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. It is just through this that we attain the ultimate wisdom that ends rebirth.

There are thus two ways to experience reality in this world: the arising of rebirth dependent on ignorance and the cessation of rebirth dependent upon wisdom. This is all there has ever been. From this point of view, the Middle Path means understanding the reality of the present, that no abiding self ever existed in the past nor will persist in the future. When recollecting all of His past births the Buddha found only this reality. There was no self, no soul to be found. The existence of these two realities is not dependent upon the manifestation of a Buddha to point them out.

Buddhism came into existence as the result of the discovery of these two realities. Accordingly, practice within it should be concerned with practice rather than with ceremony. Since the realisation of ultimate reality is the central element of Buddhism, the practice of the Dhamma therefore means the practice of religion.

Human beings in a state of ignorance are subject to suffering and the Buddha makes use of wisdom to show how one can be rid of this suffering. Ultimately, experience of suffering and the cause of its arising are products of the mind. Since this is so the Buddha insists that to investigate such metaphysical questions as the creation of the universe and our place in it only enslaves the mind and

cont'd on p.6



Offerings

by Upasaka Nyanaloka

do things the Indian way. But while this appeals to the devotional type of person, there is the drawback that our teachings say that there is no-one of a divine nature to receive such offerings. The practice is therefore chiefly of use in encouraging right states of mind.

The chief offerings are of light, incense, flowers, food and drink. Each of these reflects one aspect or other of the practice which should be brought to mind at the moment of presentation. Lighting a candle, for instance, one remembers that the Buddha's title means 'The Enlightened One' and that we follow His teaching in order to be like him. The spiritual ignorance which is the cause of our suffering is a form of darkness. Indeed, the root meaning of *avidya*, the technical term for it, carries within itself the idea of not seeing. The point of the practice is to bring light into the darkness and so dispel it.

When offering incense, having lit the stick from the candle, one brings the hands into the position of respect (*anjali*) at the forehead, with the stick held between the thumbs, before placing it in the incense holder. What we reflect on at this moment is the influence of our actions (*kamma*). No matter how private or insignificant, each has its result personally and within the world generally. Smoke is a weak looking thing and yet the perfume of incense swells to fill a room and lingers long afterwards. Again, just as the incense was lit at the candle of wisdom, so for our deeds to be truly effective they should be guided by wisdom.

Flowers are meant to remind us of death. No matter how freshly cut they are, the Indian heat can shrivel them in a day, which brings the lesson home more sharply there. Offering plastic flowers (as some do) defeats the object. You might just as well offer a plastic replica of yourself and believe that its permanent presence in the shrine room will bring you good results while you're off watching football. In fact, we are meant to be reminded of life's uncertainty and the need to practise with energy right now. Send your plastic look-alike to the football match instead!

Food and drink offerings are of various kinds. A simple glass of water represents purity of heart, the mind without thought of self which is also symbolised by the lotus. If supplies are being offered to the Vihara these (or a representative sample) may first be placed on the shrine. The same goes for a meal offered to the monks. Most monasteries have what is called a puja tray, containing a beaker and

different shaped pots into which may be placed samples of all the food presented. This is placed on the shrine before the monks are served and taken away when they have finished eating. The food in the tray is then left outside the building for birds and animals to eat.

Such offerings are a reminder that our generosity in the special case of the Sangha is only a small contribution towards the boundless generosity towards all beings of the first of the Buddhist Perfections. The Dana Box which stands in front of the shrine also reminds us of this. Sikhs also make giving a central part of their practice. On entering their Gurdwara, they go to salute the Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book) and at the same time put money in the collecting box.

Each offering, then, points to the fact that we are disciples under training. The most effective offering is ultimately of ourselves to the practice. This we do when we bow. Kneeling down with hands joined in respect, we touch brow, lips and heart: we dedicate ourselves in body (from head to toe), in speech and in mind. The Theravadin bow is called three pointed in that our knees, hands and brow all touch the ground in humility, respect and dedication. It is a symbolical touching of the Buddha's feet, an Indian form of reverence for teachers and elders which persists to this day. We do this three times to indicate sincerity, another Indian form of manners which comes up time and again in the Scriptures.

Like everything else in the practice, why we do something is always more important than what we do. If we only bow or make offerings out of habit, because this is just something that Buddhists do, we are wasting our time. If our heart isn't in it we might as well not do it at all. For this reason it is always important that we remind ourselves of the meaning of the offerings and the reasons why we make them.



The copy deadline for the January issue is 23 November. Articles, photographs or drawings for submission should be sent to the Vihara by this date.

If you feel able to offer a donation towards the cost of the next issue please send this to the Vihara marking your envelope 'Lotus Review'.

When starting to meditate you're usually told "Sit with a straight back", but this isn't easy to achieve unless you have an intuitive awareness of your body. Worse still is being told that the lotus position is the traditional position. This involves sitting cross-legged on the floor with each foot on the opposite thigh. To most Westerners it is sheer torture, although it is said that the folded legs give a firm base and position the pelvis correctly so that the spine is automatically lengthened.

■ Sitting cross-legged

Firm base, correctly positioned pelvis and lengthened spine are the essentials. We also need to be relaxed so that little effort is needed to maintain our preferred posture. A half lotus (i.e. with only one foot on an opposite thigh) is not recommended since it is unbalanced.

The easiest position is to sit with both feet resting on the floor with both heels in line with the centre of the body. To ensure that the pelvis is correctly tilted, sit on sufficient cushions so that you don't feel discomfort in your lower back. If you are stiff in one hip and both knees don't rest on the floor, put a cushion under the raised knee so that it has a base to rest on, or else adopt a kneeling position.

■ Kneeling

This is easiest on a meditation stool. It should be about six inches off the floor and the seat should slope forward. There is no need to make any adjustment as the pelvis is automatically tilted forward and there is no pressure on the calf muscles. If it is very painful on the knees, rest the whole of the knees and the shins on a folded blanket.

If no meditation stool is available, kneel on the floor with knees together and a pile of cushions placed between the legs. Experiment until you get the correct height. Too high and you will have too much pressure on your knees; too low and your pelvis won't be tilted and there will be pressure on the calves. To release this, put your thumbs in the crease of your knees and slide your hands towards your feet, pulling the calf muscles to the outside.

■ Sitting on a chair

It is possible to meditate sitting on a chair, in which case you need to make sure that the feet can rest flat on the floor, that your thighs are parallel to the floor and your shins at right angles to the thighs. If the chair is too high for you, put cushions underneath your feet; if too low, sit on a cushion. Do not rest your back against the back of the chair.

■ Lengthened spine

Whatever position you have adopted, make sure that you are sitting on your buttock bones. Press down firmly and evenly on both sides. The action of

Meditation Posture

by Ann Lovelock

pressing down causes the upper body to feel light and free. If your shoulders are rounded and slumped forward, don't be tempted simply to pull them back as this causes tension. It is better to bring them back by pressing the lower spine inward. It is amazing

how a small adjustment in the correct area of the lower spine holds the back upright so that the shoulders automatically fall into the correct position. Now pay attention to the head. It is very heavy and needs to be positioned correctly. The top of the head should be facing the ceiling (or sky). When this is the case, the chin will be slightly downward and not sticking out. If the head is too far back, there will be tension in the neck and the spine will be shortened; if too far forward, the whole body will slump.

■ Relaxed but alert

Make sure that your shoulders are relaxed. To do this, create as much space as possible between the ear lobes and shoulders. If you are sitting correctly you shouldn't feel any pain or tension in any part of the body. When you are sitting comfortably, fold your hands in your lap with the dominant one underneath - i.e. if you are right-handed, that should be underneath the left. This is because we usually carry the dominant shoulder slightly forward. Making the adjustment suggested in the position of the hands corrects this.

Sitting with a straight back or lengthened spine ensures that you stay alert. There will be no restriction of blood flow to the major organs. In particular, if the head is balanced correctly there will be a good supply of blood to the brain. Body and mind are linked and this influences the results of meditation, as the Buddha made the vina-player realise. Too taut a string, He said, one that is too tense, gives a sharp note; a slack string gives a flat note or none at all. The instrument (as actors sometimes refer to their body) must be finely tuned for a good performance. Likewise, for an alert mind the body must not be slumped; for right concentration or awareness it must not be too tense.

You should need very little energy to maintain your chosen posture. If pain arises during the meditation, only small adjustments should be needed: relaxing the shoulders, pressing in at the base of the spine, pressing down evenly with both buttock bones. Unfortunately, however, there will always be a certain amount of pressure on the knees if adopting a kneeling posture for any length of time.

■ Bowing

At the end of the session, follow the advice given by a Japanese Zen Master: bow forward with joined hands and when resting on the floor (or as near as you can comfortably get) let any tension that has developed during the session dissipate. ♦

The Stuff of Nightmares

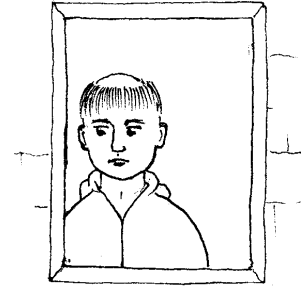
(The undeniable universal truth of cause and effect: Kamma)

During a recent meditation, out of the depths of my memory I started to relive an event that happened to me as a nine year old boy. I watched as a mixture of fear and excitement rose up in me. My heart pounded, my lungs worked to full capacity. I was aware of my breath, short, fast, loud, echoing in my ears as if amplified by the ancient sandstone wishing well I was being hauled out of after being lowered down by my older brother and his friend some 37 odd years ago!

They were all older than me, and bigger, which is probably why I had been given the prestigious honour of retrieving coins. O.K. then, not so much retrieving as thieving coins: half crowns, two bobs, tanners, threepenny bits and halfpennies galore, as many coins as my pockets could take!

There was panic as I re-experienced the fear that my brother's grip wouldn't be strong enough to hold on to me as my hands and knees slipped against the sides of the well, covered as they were with mud and moss. Would my brother's pal hold on to him as he pulled me up or would the two of us tumble into the well with our ill gotten wealth?

The well in question was set in the grounds of Grayfriars Abbey. We had seen the monks on many occasions from a vantage point high in a nearby tree. Brown-habited, hooded, mysterious, faceless monks who seemed not so much to walk as to glide by. You'd never hear one coming, that's for sure. Luckily for me I emerged safe and sound. No-one



escape.

However, whilst running away I caught sight of two figures that were to haunt me and cause unbearable delirious nightmares. The first was the statue of Mary looking directly at me from an alcove above me as I ran through the archway. Although this was only a statue and I thought it should not have an effect on me, it did. The look of sadness on her face triggered something very uncomfortable, guilt!

But the next sight I glimpsed, though only for a moment, was enough to cause a photographic impression that came into clear consciousness again as I sat in meditation 37 years on. It was of a monk I had seen looking down on us from a window. His look was unnerving, neither blank nor with expression, yet full of knowing. I just knew that he would not give chase.

Our visit to the Abbey had taken place during school summer holidays, so there were many friends and acquaintances around to admire our brave adventure and treat us like heroes; particularly since our average pocket money might have purchased a bag of crisps - or perhaps a bar of chocolate or a few penny sweets - yet now we all sat around and devoured what must have been a good six months' worth of goodies as a result of our ill-gotten gains.

Either overindulgence, or more likely guilt at our theft, caused me a restless night that night long ago. Visions of Mary, Mother of Christ, coming into the room and looking down on me with sorrowful eyes, asking why a good boy such as I would steal from the monks, filled me with terror. I knew I was in a nightmare but I couldn't tell whether I was asleep or awake. My sheets were wet with my sweat.

The nightmares continued the next night with visions of faceless hooded monks chanting "Why?" in plainsong, as they circumnavigated my bed, led by the monk at the window who was now smiling down at me, his mouth baring bloody fangs!

The nightmares continued for a few nights more, eventually wearing themselves out. At least I thought so until they returned in meditation, as vibrant and alive as before.

Maybe now that they have surfaced again they will have cleared themselves out. I do hope so! ♦

Tom Maxwell

Making offerings on shrine or altar is a common form of religious practice throughout the world. In Buddhism we

cont'd from p.2 overpowers it with concepts of god, divine grace and dependence. Such mind games do not provide empirical evidence and, in fact, create the bondage that is called Samsara. He further confirms that it is not possible to get rid of suffering by such investigation.

In our ignorance it appears to us that a permanent being or soul, or even inner spark of divinity, sets in motion a process which surfaces in the form of physical, mental or verbal action. These are the product of a mistaken belief in an unchanging self. Thus any form of craving, either for sensual pleasure or for an eternity of individual existence (or indeed, anything else), is called conditional reality and subjects the mind to the production of kamma.

Conventional religious practices, for example, can be seen as the result of attachment to the concept of a creator, an eternal soul and so on. Such clinging produces kamma and results in rebirth. In Buddhism the concept of liberation is opposed to such clinging to concepts. That is why the Buddha avoids metaphysical speculation, judging it to be extremely harmful. Down the centuries many battles have raged, much blood has been shed by religious factions striving to prove the true message of their religion.

The Buddha says that attempting to fathom the metaphysical world does not put an end to the human predicament but creates Samsara. Similarly, by craving pleasurable sensations there arise conflict and suffering which, in their turn, produce kamma. For the mind to become stable and at peace one has to experience for oneself the conditional nature of reality. Ultimately, a human being is solely a psycho-physical construct of five components: form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness (the khandas). This is the reality that the Buddha discovered.

The existence of a human being is a mere phenomenon of the rebirth process. Such renewed being should not, however, be considered dependent on an everlasting soul. There is no eternal soul nor is there annihilation. Ultimate reality is completely apart from concepts of annihilation and of eternal being. There is no place for them. Samsara, conditional existence, is due to the clinging of the five aggregates. It is necessary to learn the theory and practice as discovered by the Buddha in order to achieve liberation. When beginners learn the theory they see it as philosophy rather than reality and misunderstand the teaching. One must practice insight meditation to see things as they really are.

What ultimately exists is only peace which is experienced right now. Sandithiko. That means *Get cracking!* ♦

Letter from Bill

Many of us feel let down at times during our lives because someone has fallen short of our expectations of them. We have a set of standards and requirements for the people we choose to be our guides, counsellors, gurus or just helpful friends. When they almost inevitably fall short of our expectations by committing some minor infringement of our rules, or by acting out of a character that we have created for them, then we may feel they are no longer worthy of their position. We feel let down and disappointed.

"Oh dear, I am disillusioned now. Is there nobody worthy of my faith and trust?"

The answer is "Yes".

Write down all the criteria for someone you would put your faith and trust in and then look in the mirror. There you are. Now all you have to do is apply all the criteria to yourself and live up to them as best you can and Hey Presto, you have your guru. Then one day, when you have learned to relax your standards for others a little, you will discover that you can learn something from everyone, even if they do fall below your standards.

Oh, and don't forget to smile a little.

Bill

WEEKEND RETREAT

with **Bhikkhu Bodhidamma**

**Oct 5-7
at 47 Carlyle Road**

Bhikkhu Bodhidamma belongs to the Swejjan Sect of monks in Sri Lanka who draw their ordination from the great Burmese teacher and scholar, Mahasi Sayadaw. And it is his particular method of Vipassana Meditation that the order propagates throughout Sri Lanka. Bhante is a member of the foremost meditation centre at Kanduboda which services approximately 1000 meditators every year.

Retreatants should arrive at the Vihara between 7pm and 7.30pm on Friday Oct. 5. Those wishing to attend for only part of the retreat may join the morning session from 9am-12noon on Saturday or Sunday - or the afternoon sessions of these days from 2pm-5pm or the Saturday evening session from 6pm-9pm when there will be a Dhamma talk.

Anyone wanting to take part in this retreat may leave their name and contact number on the noticeboard at the Vihara or ring Bryan Lester on **0121 414 0850**.

MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

Meditation classes are held on Thursday evenings at the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara, 47 Carlyle Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B16 9BH.

Tel: 0121 454 6591

Classes start at 7.15pm and end by 9pm

SANGHA NEWSLETTER

Birmingham Buddhist Vihara, 47 Carlyle Road, Birmingham B16 9BH

Phone: 0121 454 6591 Fax: 0121 454 0734 E-mail: dhamma@globalnet.co.uk Website: www.nibbana.com

Dhammatalaka Pagoda, Osler Street, Birmingham 16

Phone: 0121 455 0650

We have been so impressed by the quality of Lotus Review and the enthusiastic response to it that we have now decided that the Newsletter should be merged into it and mailed out as a single document. We would also like to thank Mike Regan for his continuing service in the production of the Newsletter, which he has been doing for several years now.

✿ GENERAL NEWS

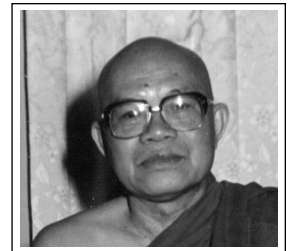
We are pleased that this summer has seen an increase in the numbers attending the Monday and Thursday classes. Attendance on Monday evenings averages at about 15, but at times goes up to 20 or more. The Monday classes are generally led by Bhikkhu Nagasena, who now has a lot of training experience and so Bhante is very confident about delegating this class to him. The beginners' class on Thursdays is led by Bill, the attendance averaging about 10 people. We are very grateful to both of them for the energy and enthusiasm that is evident in the way that they run these classes. During the summer the number of visits we have from schools and colleges naturally goes down due to the holidays, but still we have had a steady number of enquiries from groups and individuals who are interested in learning about Buddhism. We thank Yann for his work in dealing with these enquiries.

This summer we have had three ordinations and one wedding blessing ceremony. The first ordination, which took place on 14 July, was of the young son of Dr. Wanna and his wife Dr. Barbara who live near Wakefield. The boy lived as a novice (Samanera) for several days, and studied with the resident monks. The second ordination (on 4 August) was of our trustee U Maung Maung Than from Nottingham, who spent one week as a fully ordained Bhikkhu. This ordination was sponsored by our patron Mrs. Aye. The third ordination took place on 18 August, when Dr. Min Than ordaining as a Samanera for one week. We also had several ordination ceremonies taking place at the Pagoda led by monks from the Thai monastery in Aston. We are delighted that our neighbours are using it in this way because it has always been our policy to make the building available to other Buddhist groups. The next Thai ordination will take place there on 8 September. On 2 September there will be a wedding blessing

ceremony for our friend Lodro, who has disrobed from the Tibetan order.

This year we have had more invitations than previously to receive Dana (alms food), and perform other ceremonies in the houses of Myanmar devotees who now live in the Midlands.

Another invitation of a different kind was when Venerable Nagasena was invited to accompany Sis. Ann Buckeridge's Interfaith Peace Walk round various places of worship in the north of Birmingham. This ended at the Dhammatalaka Pagoda where Yann welcomed the marchers and led them in a Loving Kindness meditation.



✿ VEN. DR. REWATA DHAMMA

During the past couple of months Bhante has spent most of the time at the Vihara, and has not been abroad now for some time. On 20 June he helped facilitate a workshop on training for nurses in Worcester. On 25 June he attended a meeting on Christian - Buddhist dialogue. On 23 July he attended the farewell ceremony for the Bishop of Lambeth. Bhante will travel to Taiwan on 15 September to attend an international conference on cooperation between religions. He will return to the UK on 22 September. On 23 September he will attend the Anagarika Dhammapala Centenary ceremony at Hammersmith Town Hall, which is being organised by the London Buddhist Vihara. He will return to Birmingham that evening. Bhante has accepted an invitation to lead a meditation retreat in Switzerland from 5 to 13 September. He will then lead another retreat in Belgium from 24 to 31 October. He will then return to the UK in time for Kathina day.

✿ BHANTE'S NEW BOOK

Bhante's new book '*The Buddha and His Disciples*' has recently been produced in Myanmar. The book describes the history of Buddhism in India, and in particular the role played by the Buddha's early disciples. It is very attractively produced, is becoming very popular in Myanmar, and is also available for purchase at the Vihara, price £12 plus £1.50 p&p. Proceeds from sales of the book will go towards the Theravada Missionary University in Myanmar. The

book was published by Dhamma Talaka Publications. The costs of the publication were sponsored by Dr. Mar Mar Lwin.

✿ DEVOTEES ACTIVITIES

We are pleased to announce that Linda and Gordon took devotee ordination this September. Their order names are Upasika Samvara and Upasaka Dhammasami.

Yann has been busy with educational outreach. As well as hosting a visit of 100 students from Adams Grammar School, Newport (Shrops), at the Pagoda, he has visited the George Fentham Endowed School in Hampton-on-Arden and the Abbey Infants School in Bearwood. He also represented Buddhists on the Birmingham SACRE panel at the Martineau Educational Centre. Together with Ann, he was a special invitee at the Krishna Consciousness Movement's Jagnath Festival in the centre of Birmingham. They also both attended the Atlantic College Interfaith Conference at St. Donat's Castle, South Wales and led various activities there. And together with Ramona Kauth, Yann represented Buddhists at a Third World Debt Vigil in the Peace Gardens in July.

✿ DHAMMA TALAKA PAGODA

We celebrated the third anniversary of the Pagoda opening on Sunday 1 July during the morning and the day was well attended. We were very pleased about the way our western devotees are now learning how to chant and that so many of them (even newcomers) were able to join in. Afterwards Bhante and Ven. Nagasena gave Dhamma talks. This was followed by Inter-Faith dialogue on the theme "Who is my neighbour?" organised by the Birmingham Council of Faiths and led by Rev. Richard Tetlow.

Visitors to the Pagoda are welcomed by Ashin Rahtapala. The other monk resident at the pagoda, Sayadaw U Gandhasara, works very diligently at his duties of keeping the site clean and tidy. He has created a lovely garden in front of their mobile home; and everyone finds it a very pleasant place with all the flowers and shrubs he has planted. He has also repainted the pagoda roof. In doing this he did not use scaffolding but instead employed a special technique using only a ladder! Everyone very much appreciates his hard work and dedication.

After many months in preparation the construction work on the new Vihara is now due to begin. John Beard, who is responsible for managing the work on our behalf, has found a company who can do the initial piling. We have signed a contract for the main construction work, which will commence as soon as the piling is completed. We are very grateful for the many donations that have been made and hope that this generosity will continue as the work progresses.

The old Vihara at 47 Carlyle Road is now up for sale. We have so far had visits from about four or five prospective buyers. We hope to find a buyer soon, but it looks as though this will be after construction work on the new Vihara starts.

✿ ONE DAY RETREATS

For many years we have had weekend retreats at the Vihara on the second weekend of the month. Our experience has been, however, that people seem to find coming for the whole weekend difficult. We have therefore changed the format to a single-day retreat, held on the second Saturday of every month. The retreat held on 11 August was led by Nyanaloka, and was well attended with over 10 people turning up. The next one-day retreat will be on 8 September and will be led by Dr. Nath Kottegoda. After that the next retreat will be on 13 October, led by Bill Strongman. If you are interested in attending any of these retreats please contact the Vihara, or just turn up on the day.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Pagoda opening times:

Weekdays: 7.00am - 9.00am,

3.00pm - 8.00pm

Weekends: 7.00am - 8.00pm

Other times by Appointment

Chanting at the Pagoda:

Every Full-moon day at 7.30 p.m.

Tues. Oct.2., Thurs.

Nov.1 (Abhidhamma Day),

Sun. Dec.30.

Daily Chantings at the Vihara:

Every morning: 6.30am

Weekly Meditations at the Vihara:

Monday: 7.30pm

Introductory Meditation -
Thursday: 7.30pm

Monthly meditation days:

Every second Saturday of the month:

13 Oct, 10 Nov., 8 Dec., 12 Jan.

Weekend Retreat:

5-7 Oct. (see advert on p.6).

Monthly Social Sundays:

7 Oct., 4 Nov., 2 Dec., 6 Jan.

Dhamma School for Children at the Vihara

Last Sunday of the month:

11.00am - 1.00pm

30 Sep., 28 Oct.,

25 Nov., 30 Dec.

Abhidhamma Day (Thurs. November 1)

Essentially this is the equivalent of the Hindu Festival of Lights (Diwali), during which the pagoda will be lit by hundreds of candles. The day signals the end of the Rains Retreat and is of greatest cultural significance in Myanmar. Traditionally it celebrates the occasion on which the Buddha returned from spending the Vassa in the Tusita Heaven, during which he taught the Abhidhamma to his dead mother. On his return he gave a short explanation to Sariputta, whose expanded teaching version is said to represent the present Scripture.

Kathina (Sunday, November 4)

The word means *difficult* and refers to the accomplishment of spending the previous three months of the Rains Retreat confined to the monastery. The festival has great cultural significance in Myanmar and, in that it centres upon generosity, might be described as the Buddhist Christmas. It is held any time in the month following the close of Vassa and during it the monks are presented with their requisites for the next year. In particular a special robe is presented to the Sangha who then decide among themselves which monk is most in need of it or is the worthiest recipient. This year's ceremony will be sponsored by three families of senior Myanmar doctors: Dr. Aung Myin, Dr. Mya Thauang and Dr. Aung Thein. We will shortly be sending out a formal invitation, but even if you are not on our mailing list please do not hesitate to come and bring family and friends. Everyone is welcome.