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lotus

The Lay Review and Newsletter of the
Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

SPRING 2002

ISSUE No. 4

The Lotus Blossoms

Spring is here and this issue completes our first year of publishing Lotus Review. For me, as editor, it is time to take stock and look at whether we have achieved our initial objectives and where we are going next.

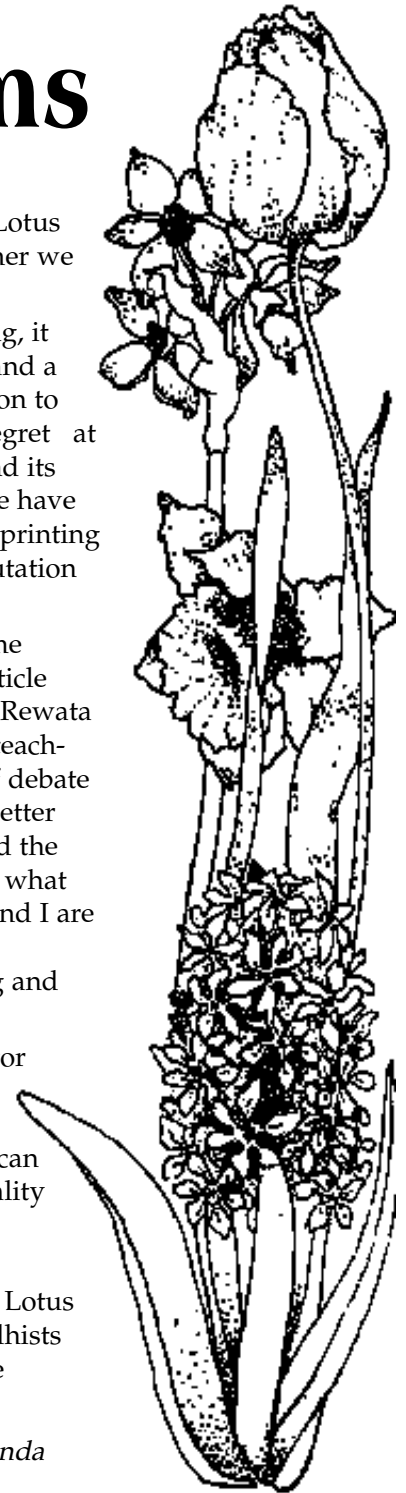
When we decided to publish, and I took up responsibility for its editing, it was with the naive belief that because I had some experience of design and a relatively good grasp of the English language I would be a suitable person to take overall responsibility. There have been moments when I have felt regret at such confidence. To produce a document which represents the Vihara and its teachings is a more subtle and delicate task than I ever realised and there have been moments when I have been frightened by the enormity of actually printing something which might be misconstrued and, at worst, damage the reputation of our Buddhist way of life.

As you will see further along in the Review, there has indeed been some discontent at an article I published in issue 3. In fact the author of the article 'It Aint What You Say...' is a devout Buddhist, a foremost disciple of Dr Rewata Dhamma and the sub-editor of Lotus Review. His love of the Buddha's teachings is undisputed. However, his wit, his academic approach, his love of debate can, at times, raise contention and this time it did as you will see in the letter and reply published in full on page 2. I am sure that when you have read the letter you will be going back to issue 3 to make your own mind up as to what is actually being said. What I can and do confirm is that the sub-editor and I are totally devoted to the use of Pali as the language of transmission of the Buddhist scriptures, we love the richness of its resonance when chanting and we believe in its power to protect.

What I have learned in this first year of publishing is that to be an editor one not only has responsibility for addressing aspects such as clarity of language, appealing layout, interesting content and meeting deadlines but also, and most importantly, one must ensure that what is published can in no way be misinterpreted or cause embarrassment. The necessary quality here is mindfulness, precisely what the Buddha teaches us is the way to wisdom, harmony and harmlessness.

As Spring takes us into the most fruitful time of year, may year two of Lotus Review fulfil its promise of uniting those of us who are committed Buddhists and at the same time provide an interesting and accurate insight into the Buddha's teachings for those who know little about our Path.

Linda



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

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Our thanks go to Dr Kyaw Mint Oo, his wife Daw Than Than Ywe, and their daughters Julie and Ruby for sponsoring Lotus a second time. Thanks also to Tom Maxwell, Elena Utton and Dr Paul Trafford for their generosity and to Dea Paradisos for her bouquet of Spring flowers which illustrates this issue's cover.

Articles published in Lotus are edited from material supplied by a variety of individual contributors. Whilst every effort is made to publish only appropriate materials, there may be times when opinion appears to be at variance with the teachings of the Sangha. This should be borne in mind. Comment and criticism is always welcome and should be addressed to the Editor at the address given on p.9.
Copy for the Summer issue should reach us by 31st May, 2002.

Talking through the issues

Dear Editor

Thank you for your newsletter which I did enjoy. However, I did not agree with certain aspects in the article on page 3 (your Winter issue, 2001). I think we would all agree that in speeches and articles on Dhamma easily understood English, which is grammatically sound and flows easily, should be used. The same applies to translations of Suttas and Sutras. We certainly need to avoid heavy, boring or self-righteous sermons! (I have seldom experienced this in Buddhism).

However, to dismiss the special and sacred nature of chanting in Pali, Sanskrit or Mandarin Chinese during our services in UK would be a real tragedy. It should be remembered that these words and sounds have been chanted by millions of people worldwide over the centuries since the times of the Buddha Himself and are now charged with special meaning and power. They can have an amazing effect in healing the mind and in opening one's understanding or insight. There are many anecdotes to describe this phenomenon, so I will quote a personal experience some years ago, in Hong King.

I had recently met Dr Rewata Dhamma who was fundraising there for the Birmingham Pagoda. I had made a donation on behalf of my late father, whom I had met on only a very few occasions (he had left my mother and me when I was a small child). Bhante said he would chant in Pali and the merits of this act would be for my father. He sat opposite to me and commenced, and I felt happy and relaxed at doing a good deed. Suddenly, without any warning (and to my acute embarrassment), tears flowed down my face and before long I was really sobbing, yet internally I did not feel either sad or unhappy! To his great credit Bhante was in no way put out by my reactions. He explained that my loss as a child had caused considerable pain over a very long period of my life. Much of this pain would have been suppressed and so lay deep in my subconscious. The chanting had released these painful feelings, bringing me relief. Since that time I have been able to think of my father without feelings of bitterness and even make friends with the children of his second wife. For me there is a real power in chanting holy verses and I can understand why one of the great schools of Chinese Buddhism is dedicated to the practice of mantras and rituals; Tibetans also.

I so hope the author of your article will keep an open mind on this subject. He could be surprised one day. My best wishes to all at the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara.

Michael Waller

One of the benefits of publishing an occasionally controversial article is that it brings us interesting letters like Michael Waller's. Actually I agree with most of what he has to say. All chanting in our Vihara is in Pali and I nowhere suggest it should be otherwise. My article deals only with how Buddhism is to be taught effectively in the UK and takes its direction from the Enlightened One's own advice to His disciples that they should use the language of the land in which they find themselves. There's no arguing with that! But on looking at Michael's letter again, I see that we are in closer agreement than he may realise. Among the 'sacred languages' he mentions, in which certain chants are charged with special meaning by long use, is Mandarin Chinese - which the Buddha certainly never used. Will he find it in his heart, therefore, to deny a fellow Englishman the patriotic wish not only to see the Dhamma firmly established in his own land but also that its tongue too should eventually stand beside Chinese as one of the Buddhist languages?

Upasaka Nyanaloka

Reading the Buddha's Body Language

Watching out for falling tortoises with UPASAKA NYANALOKA



NE of the Jataka stories tells us of a certain chatterbox king who was nearly brained by a falling tortoise. His chief Counsellor, the Buddha to be, seized the moment of silent astonishment to say 'That's what

comes of talking too much!' and related how this tortoise happened to fall.

The Buddha often pointed out that much of our suffering is created by language. He set us a good example by not answering useless questions, by silent assent and, of course, by teaching a practice which puts a stop to the mind's constant jabber.

But it is also important to remember that the Buddha was illiterate, as were most people in His time - and as have been the majority of His devotees since, until comparatively recently, at least. Other means than the written word had therefore to point to the teaching. Among such devices were eventually the statues of the Enlightened One himself.

Phra Maha Somboon once showed me a Thai book which illustrated something like 180 different forms of the Buddha, each of which had its own meaning and told a story. One of these (of which there is an example in our pagoda) is especially intriguing because it's so English. The Buddha stands pointing directly upwards as if to say 'You'll need an umbrella today' - or perhaps 'Watch out for falling tortoises'. In fact, the statue represents the newly born Gautama announcing his future.

Anyone who has watched Indian or other Eastern styles of dancing is aware that there is a subtle vocabulary of hand movements which tell the story or refer to the emotion expressed. The hands talk for the dancers. These gestures are called *mudra* and knowing some of them is essential for reading the meaning of Buddhist statues as well.

Actually, we use one such gesture all the time at the Vihara. This is the *anjali* form of greeting with joined palms. The realised Sangha, we chant as a Recollection, is *anjali-karaniyo*, 'worthy of reverence'. If we see a statue using this gesture we can be certain that it is of a devotee, not the Buddha.

Two positions of the Buddha himself are quite familiar to us. The first is the lotus-seat (*padma-asana*) - further emphasized by the fact that the Buddha is usually sitting on a lotus flower. The feet

are tucked on top of the opposite thighs while the right hand rests on top of the left in the lap, thumbs lightly touching, in what is known as *samadhi-mudra* (meditation position).

The other is the earth-witnessing gesture (*bhumi-sparsa*) in which the left hand is positioned palm-up on the lap and the right hangs over the knee, with palm inward and extended fingers touching the ground. This refers to the occasion immediately after His enlightenment when Mara challenged the Buddha to say by what right He laid claim to the title of Enlightened One. He silently indicated that the earth, on which He had been reborn so many times, was witness of His development of the required Perfections.

If the palm faces outwards rather than inwards, then He is making the gesture of generosity (*varada*). When the right palm is raised upward at shoulder height instead, we have the gesture of fearlessness or protection (*abhaya*). It is reputed to be the one made by the Buddha immediately following His enlightenment.

There are also statues where the Buddha makes these gestures standing. When the Buddha has the right hand raised in fearlessness while the left indicates generosity, the reference is to the time He tamed a raging elephant sent by His wicked cousin Devadatta to trample Him. From this we can deduce that the open-handed gesture also indicates loving-kindness and corresponds to what we express as opening the heart.

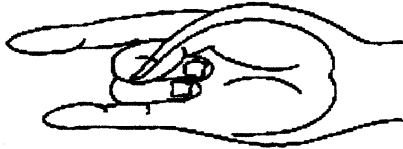
Finally there are two teaching gestures. The turning of the wheel (*dhamma-cakka*) refers to the Buddha's first sermon. It is made by placing both hands in front of the chest. The left palm faces inward and overlaps the right hand; the right hand is facing outward. The index finger and the thumb on each hand are touching and form a circle. If only one hand is held in this way, rather like a connoisseur recommending a brand of coffee, then it is the gesture of disputation (*vitarka*).

Not only were all of these signs taken over into the Mahayana system, where the position of their hands helps you identify which of the many Buddhas is which, but several other gestures are used. One of these, strangely enough, is what Europeans call 'the →



horns of Horus', much used during the Middle Ages for warding off the evil eye and other Satanic devices. In the East too it is a sign for dispelling evil. You make it by holding out the index and little fingers of the right hand while closing the other two fingers on the palm with the thumb.

Since they are of Indian origin, Hindu gods also



make mudras. There is even a branch of self-healing yoga which uses them to cure various illnesses. If you have a cold, for example, you lock your fingers in front of you, thumbs crossing with the right underneath; then raise that one as if making the OK sign and, like they say, you'll feel better in no time.

Hand-signs in the Buddhist context are a way of communicating while remaining silent. We use a whole range ourselves in the West, although when they coincide with the Indian gestures their meanings are generally very different. Just recently, American street gangs have started making a cultural thing of hand signs - which means that it won't be long before they catch on in Britain.

So, if you feel like getting in a bit of practice and don't want to be taken for a gangster, do it where no-one can see! ♦

Coming Clean

BILL STRONGMAN on keeping
the fourth precept in mind

Oh what a tangled web we weave

When first we practise to deceive

How true this old saying is becomes apparent when we tell our so-called Little White Lies or, as can happen, we fail to correct someone's ideas about what we have done or said, particularly when what they are saying tends to show us up in a good light. We would, of course, quickly correct someone whose idea of us is less than favourable.

This sort of deception frequently leads to more deception as one strives to cover up the original one. It can go on and on until we are so tightly bound up by the sticky web that there seems to be no escape. We have to be wary in case we slip up and give ourselves away.

There is no doubt that we can all be guilty of some form of deception and the consequences is usually

A native Indian boy just home from school was asking his grandfather how he felt about the events of 11 September. "It's like I have two wolves fighting in my heart" he replied.

"What are they?" the boy wanted to know.

"The wolves of hate and of love," he answered, locking his fingers together and pulling hard.

"Which one is going to win?" asked the boy, leaning forward wide-eyed.

"The one that I feed," smiled the wise old man.

Salutation to the Dawn

English translation from the original
Sanskrit. Used in a recent BBC1 drama.

Listen to the exhortation of the dawn,

Look to this day

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all the verities

And realities of your existence.

The glory of action,

The bliss of growth,

The splendour of beauty.

For yesterday is but a dream

And tomorrow is only a vision.

But today, well lived, makes

Every yesterday a dream of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day!

Such is the salutation to the dawn.

self-deception. Of course, a quick cure is full and open confession, but this is too difficult and painful for most of us and so the whole thing becomes one more hindrance which often sinks deep into the subconscious, where it lurks in dark corners ready to pounce and spoil our meditation.

But the Buddha has given us some very good ways of dealing with this problem. The main one is awareness, being mindful and watchful. Having learned what suffering we cause ourselves by slipping into deception and lies, we can be on our guard and try not to make the same mistakes again. Eventually, of course, through practice we will arrive at a stage where we are not so affected by praise or blame, then we can "come clean" (as the Americans would say) and be free.

Keep smiling and may the broom of the Dhamma sweep all obstacles from your path. ♦

The Lost Key

**ELEANOR HEWSON's advice
on not losing your cool!**

IT HAD BEEN A BUSY DAY AT THE START OF A BUSY WEEK. I SCRAMBLED AROUND, PREPARING FOR VARIOUS MEETINGS AWAY FROM THE OFFICE FOR TWO DAYS. IT ALL SEEMED SO IMPORTANT, AND IN A WAY IT STILL IS. BUT THE WORLD WILL NOT BE SAVED, NOR EVEN MY LITTLE BIT OF THE NHS, IF WE ARE NOT MINDFUL. ONCE PANIC SETS IN THE MIND STOPS FUNCTIONING CORRECTLY.

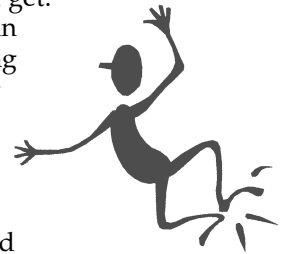


It was Monday, and I was determined to get to my meditation class. I rushed home, dashed about preparing for an overnight stay away, then zoomed off in the car to the Vihara. The calm of the Shrine Room worked its magic on me, although stray thoughts crept into my meditation, about getting up early; leaving my hotel number for Alan; was I right in rocking the boat over a consultancy proposal – oops, where is my breath? Then it was time to go, and my mind leapt back to packing and worldly matters. I was not keeping the calm within me, I was just pitching straight back in there.

‘Take your practice with you,’ my Yoga teacher always says, and I usually more or less float home with my mind disengaged. To make matters worse this time, I turned down an opportunity to help a Dhamma friend, being half-hearted in the offer of a lift. I just wanted to get home. Walking to the car, I was prodding about for the large car key. Once there,

I tipped the contents of my bag on it, then stuffed my hands in my pockets looking for it again. Getting anxious, I patted myself all over where the pockets were (I hope no-one was watching!) Nothing. But I had my mobile – I could phone a friend! Husband Alan, suffering from a bad cold, was not amused. His comments were what you would expect and what I deserved, but anxiety turned to panic. The probability of my finding the key approached zero. I ventured back to the Vihara, where Bhante and Mar Mar helped with the search, but the most effective thing they did was to calm me down. I did not like to admit it at the time, but will own up now, the key WAS in my brand new fleece, which has a sort of through hand warming pocket in the middle of which was the missing key.

Feeling somewhat foolish, I thanked my helpers and drove home, trying to restore equanimity but wondering what reception I would get. Alan had been part way to the Vihara in the Landrover, cold and all, when I rang to say that I had the key. I thought that if I were a dog, I could make appeasement gestures, like rolling on my back with my feet in the air. I did the best that I could, and the relief was overwhelming when I was forgiven and peace reigned again.



I stayed up late, preparing calmly for the morrow. Though I did not get a lot of sleep I slept soundly, so much so that it took a good dig in the ribs to get me to turn off the alarm clock.

Next time you start to get anxious, take a deep breath and steady your mind before tackling the job in hand. Or things could go from bad to worse. ♦

The Creator's Game: Frankenstein

An appeal for reason by GORDON PAGETT

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME WITCHDOCTORS, WITCHES, SHAMANS, AND THE LEARNED MEN AND WOMEN OF SCIENCE, HAVE LOOKED FOR WAYS OF CURING MANKIND OF ITS MANY PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ILLS.

Over the centuries the treatments have been many and varied. They have tried such things as blood-letting, the laying on of hands, herbal cures, chemical cures, hypnosis, etc., all with varying degrees of success. Doctors have a quick solution for their errors - they put them in a hole in the ground!

Recently science broke the code for human DNA, and opened up a whole new era in medical science. Using this knowledge they have had some success in cloning animals, the best known of which is Dolly the sheep.

Scientists now hope to grow human tissue and organs in the anticipation of using them for organ transplantation, thereby reducing the risk of rejection.

They are also manipulating human genes in an effort to eradicate diseases.

However, the implications are far-reaching and, possibly, even sinister. Could we be heading towards cloning human beings? Are we going to make Mary Shelley's story about Dr. Frankenstein's monster come true?

As Buddhists we do not believe in a creator. Nevertheless we must ask ourselves whether we have the right to create life other than by the normal reproductive method. After all, most humans seem to enjoy it and, judging by the overcrowding of this planet, we seem to be doing quite well enough as it is.

Should we not leave well alone and let Nature be? After all, nothing is PERMANENT. ♦

Letting things be

The joy that comes from being free of expectation by ELENA UTTON

Embraced Buddhism just short of a decade ago. It was an innocent and exciting move, a not knowing, yet a deep awareness that this was the path of loving kindness and harmlessness that provided the antidote to this world's many dilemmas.

In the early days I devoured Buddhist teachings like a starving man devours food. I was hooked. I learned how to sit, to meditate, to watch the breath. I became obsessed with the amount of time I gave to my practice and compared myself unfavourably with other practitioners who seemed to be able to sit longer than I felt able. This developed within me a good girl/bad girl attitude which coloured and distorted my practice.

I did not realise at the time that such negative thinking could hold me back, distort the truth and cripple the mind. Resultantly I built up aversions which led to phobias. I tried to get off the Path but I couldn't succeed there either. My spiritual way was descending into struggle. What looked, on the surface, so easy to other people, became a path of seemingly insurmountable hurdles, but I never stopped my daily sitting meditation and within my limited awareness of meditation in action throughout the day I did the best I could.

Two years ago I flew to South Africa. I hadn't been back there for over thirty years. Staying with Christian nuns, I had the chance to attend daily Mass, Vespers and Matins. I observed the nuns in daily action: the sincerity of their practice; their seemingly uncomplicated love of God; their aim being to reach the Kingdom of Heaven through Jesus Christ. I shared in their devotions with an ease and uncomplicated attitude that was at odds with the difficulties I was experiencing in my own Buddhist practice. There was something going on here but I didn't understand what. I returned home to England with my problem unresolved.

The following year I went on Buddhist pilgrimage, first travelling to Sri Lanka to visit Buddhist sites and temples, then on to India to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha: Bodhgaya, Sarnath, etc. I bathed in the sacred Ganges. Inside of me I felt a stirring, an awakening, a joy, a knowing. In Hindu Ashrams, at Darshan with living realised Indian saints, I experienced an openness and uplifting of the spirit just as I had experienced in Africa the year before. The confusion was the same: why, as a practising Buddhist,

It is not enough to just sit and watch the breath as is well put in the story of a very enthusiastic young monk who spent every possible moment sitting in zazen (meditation).

His master noticed and one day sat down by the side of the meditating monk and started to rub at a brick with his hand. "What are you doing?" the master asked his disciple. "I am trying to become a Buddha," he replied.

"And what are you doing, Master?" the young monk asked curiously. "I'm trying to make a mirror," his master replied. Shocked, the monk said, "But no amount of rubbing can turn a brick into a mirror." "...and no amount of sitting will turn a clod into a Buddha," his Master answered.

did I feel so open and happy following a Hindu tradition, a Catholic practice of devotion? Why was it so much more difficult to experience within my own practice the bliss and joy I experienced sharing others' Paths?

When I returned to England I sank into despair and confusion. Nothing made sense to me, I didn't know what was going on. I continued my daily sitting practice, however, and it was here I found the time and courage to investigate. In the dark abyss of doubt I explored and felt my fears and anxiety, the not knowing. As the darkness started to clear I began to understand a little about this person I called Me, to understand something of conditioning, the effect of environment and childhood, and the result of kammic actions both past and present.

This is where I am now: a new beginning; still the same Path but walking in new shoes; seeing, hearing, learning, with a clearer mind; embracing what is to be embraced, accepting what is difficult, aware that everything is a teaching. No longer need I compare, judge or desire to be like others. I just strive to do the best I can as this person, getting to know this person, beginning to unravel the binds of time, of habit, of conditioning; a freeing of myself, enabling me to practice from the heart with sincerity: to truly walk my own spiritual path.

It has been, and at times still is, a difficult journey, but it is the only one I want to travel. I am finding out that it is only by letting go of pressure to do or to be and just rest in the being that gives space for change and development and truly opens the

Bird Shit on the Buddha

TOM MAXWELL, resident story gatherer, shares two more tales.

Inherent Jewel

THUS HAVE I HEARD: The Abbot of a monastery, in a pure state of all-encompassing supraconscious awareness-meditation sat in the shade of a tree on a glorious sunny afternoon, observing the mutual interaction of natural phenomena such as flowers of stunning beauty yielding their pollen to bees and butterflies fluttering past. The peace was broken by a sudden outburst of spontaneous laughter. A young monk had observed that a bird, perched on a dignified standing Buddha rupa's head, had shit on it!

A senior monk had also observed this. He angrily stormed over to the young monk, shouting at him that he had no respect for the Buddha Nature.

The Abbot rose from his seat, walked over to the senior monk pointing out to him that what the bird had just done was absent of ill-will, as had been the young monk's spontaneous laughter and so, what he had observed was, indeed, the true Buddha Nature!

The Abbot suggested it would be helpful to the senior monk to engage in an act of humility to diminish the ego and awarded him the job of cleaning the Buddha Rupa. ♦

A good bedtime meditation: instead of the last thoughts in your mind before falling asleep being your plans and concerns, no matter how urgent or important they may seem, try consciously to bring to mind an act of compassion by someone. It doesn't have to be recent. See it in front of you and breath it in. This will set the pattern for your sleep and feed the unconscious mind with the right sort of nourishment. You'll wake feeling lighter.

heart and mind. Only by observing ourselves and having the courage to let go of the safety of conditioning can we ever walk in truth.

I realised a long time after returning from India that the happiness I had felt both in the Catholic services and in the Hindu Ashrams came from my just being present without any pressure on myself to be anything at all, to perform in any particular way. It was a great insight.

Old habits die hard, however. The feelings continue to rise up again and again before they can be let go of, so I have to re-investigate those feelings as they arise. I read somewhere that we must find our own way of practice, to suit our individual personalities. We are not cloned robots. How boring the world would be if we were. I realise I cannot Be just by desiring it to be so and I know it is only myself who cannot match up to my own expectations of who I think I should be. I

IS THIS PART OF A DIVINE AND SYNCHRONISED ORDER OF EVENTS BORN OF AN UNSEEN CONSPIRACY OF COMPASSION, OR OF PURE CHANCE, OR EVEN BOTH?

A friend from the WBO relayed this story to me.

Last summer, while trying to trek into Tibet from the Himalayas, a party of westerners discovered that the Chinese had closed the border point. They tried another route across the mountain a few thousand feet higher where they came across a resting post run by a Buddhist.

The guardian showed great concern for the party of travellers. He treated them with the courtesy, compassion and respect instinctual to these dignified yet very poor mountain dwellers. In fact so selfless was he that they only found out by chance comment that the man's wife was quite ill.

One of the party was a medic and insisted on checking her condition. On climbing up to the man's home they found the wife was in a bad way and had started to haemorrhage. The nearest hospital was a day's arduous journey away on the only available transport - a donkey.

The party pooled their money and hired a helicopter to have her airlifted to safety and thus saved her life. This group of various religions, and none, all had one thing in common: a kind response to kind treatment.

Were they part of a synchronised conspiracy of compassion? ♦

am very much enjoying the path of self-discovery. It is joyous and truly liberating to watch the layers of conditioning fall away bit by bit. Just being free to do as much as this Self can do enables one to do so much more and also it is true that we can only know no-self when we have discovered Self in all its complexities.

One strange thing I have discovered is that I don't really have to do anything beyond my daily sitting practice. The actual dropping away of old habits, behaviour patterns and thinking happen of their own accord. My greatest joy is being on my own individual path. I have that joy, warmth and knowledge of something beyond Self which is attainable for us all.

I wish the same for all beings and hope that in some small way what I have written from my own experience will be helpful to others. ♦

It is usual during meditation retreats to have alternate periods of sitting and walking. This enables you to retain concentration while at the same time stretching the legs and releasing any body tensions that have developed while sitting. Since instruction is not so detailed, the impression is sometimes given that walking is not as important as sitting, but it can be rewarding. The meditation object in this kind of practice is the actual posture, and the movement and contact of the feet on the ground; the attention is on the feet. I am therefore going to have to explain a bit about how to do the practice as well as talking about posture. There are three stages: standing, walking and turning. If practising indoors, it is usual to walk across the meditation room and then turn round and walk back. If you are outside, you will have to decide where your turning point will be.

- *Standing*

Stand in a relaxed manner facing into the room by the wall where the walking is to begin. Then take a few minutes to adjust the posture, being aware of the body at all times. The feet should be placed on the floor parallel with each other, about 10 inches apart, and the arms should be hanging loosely by your side. First of all adjust your balance to ensure that it is evenly placed between both feet; then between the heel and sole of each foot: the point of balance should be over the arch of the foot. Next pull up the thigh muscles so that the kneecaps rotate outwards. The secret to a good standing posture is in the position of the hips. While maintaining the correct balance on the feet, carefully adjust the pelvis until the spine feels erect without the stomach protruding or the shoulders slouching forward. For most people this will be obtained by slightly moving the hips backwards. Make sure that all the tension is released in the shoulders by letting the arms fall by your sides with the palms facing inwards and the hands relaxed. Then create space between your ear lobes and your shoulders and adjust your head if necessary so that it isn't thrown back or your chin protruding. If you have made all the correct adjustments there should be no tension in the body. Stay in this position for a few moments to get used to the feel of the posture. You will probably have to keep checking from foot to head since often every time you make an adjustment at one place something goes wrong elsewhere.

- *Walking*

In this meditation the mind has to be totally absorbed in what is going on. Before there is movement, therefore, be aware of the intention to walk and which foot is going to be the first to move. Transfer all your weight to the foot that is going to remain on the ground. Next raise the heel and then the sole of the other foot off the ground, becoming aware of the loss of contact with the floor.

Maintain awareness of the movement of the foot in the air as you lift it up, move it forward and then start to lower it towards the ground. Good walking practice dictates that the heel is placed on the ground first, then the sole, but whichever part of the foot you first put on the ground be aware of the moment of contact and then of the whole foot being placed on the ground. With both feet grounded, adjust your weight evenly between both feet before repeating the process with the other foot. Continue to walk across the room, making the position of the foot the

object of concentration, whether it is in the air or in contact with the floor. On reaching the other side of the room stand awarely for a moment before turning. The eyes should never be on the feet or wandering since this will distract the attention. Just cast them down and keep them focussed about three feet in

front of you. The same goes for the standing position as well. If your eyes wander (or even if you close them) you are liable to fall over!

- *Turning*

Again, before starting to turn be aware of the intention to turn and the direction in which you are going to turn. I always make a point of not having my back to the Buddha image. Turning is achieved by lifting and putting down at a slight angle first one foot then the other. The steps are very small and the foot is only raised an inch or two off the ground. When the rotation is complete and you are facing in the opposite direction, take a few moments to stand and be aware of your posture and adjust it if necessary.

When I first started walking meditation I found that the detailed process of walking and all the small movements that were required to walk fascinated me, as they did others. This isn't the object of the exercise; it doesn't maintain the necessary concentration for the retreat to be beneficial if you let your mind go wandering all over your body while moving.

- *'Fast' Walking*

You will find that by concentrating on the movement of the feet in such detail you will automatically walk very slowly. 'Fast' walking is usually employed if one is walking outdoors and it's only so in comparison to the method described above. It is still slow compared to normal walking. Otherwise, walk up and down as above; the difference is that you will maintain awareness only of which foot is in movement, left or right.

There is no specific instruction in the scriptures on how to practice walking meditation but the Buddha referred to it on several occasions. For certain kinds of people, commentaries say, this may become their regular practice. Maintaining proper awareness of it is even said to be a route towards enlightenment. ♦

WALKING MEDITATION

by ANN LOVELOCK

SANGHA NEWSLETTER

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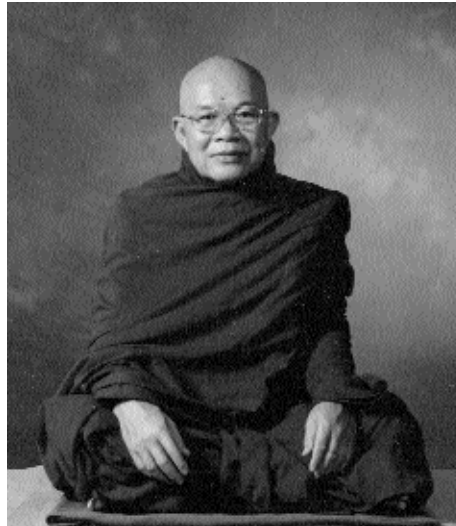
☸ **GENE NEWS**

Dr Rewata Dhamma and Ven. Nagasena moved out of the old Vihara in the middle of February, having stored everything they mean to keep in a variety of places, including a garden shed on the Pagoda site! At present they are staying at 48 Osler St, which is nearly opposite the Pagoda. The house is owned by our devotee Sunny, to whom we are very grateful for his generosity in allowing the monks to use so convenient a place until the new Vihara is completed. The monks can still be reached on the old phone number which they have taken with them.

Meanwhile Sasha and Elizabeth, the new owners of 47 Carlyle Road, are busy redecorating. They have been very generous in allowing not just our own devotees but those of the Soto Zen group to go on using the shrine room for meditation while the new Vihara is being completed. While living in Moseley they had already been running a base for meditation and spiritual healing known as the Garden Temple Adventure; this work they hope to continue in their new home, teaching the Soto Zen method of meditation.

Sasha may best be described as a spiritual wanderer. Originally a follower of Rajneesh and an Osho sanyasin still, he came to Birmingham in 1989 and then teamed up with Elizabeth, a Kleinian psychotherapist by training, who has lately become a Reiki Master too. She was then attending the FWBO centre, while Sasha had taken lay ordination (*jukai*) at Throssel Hole Priory. Both went on to take the Refuges from Chime Rimpoche and Sasha reconfirmed this by taking them with the Tai Situpa. In 1999 they added a third tradition to their portfolio by joining Sri Satya Sai Baba's Kundalini Foundation.

Signing the contract with them has taken much longer than we expected but at last the sale has gone through (although still with complications) and we have enough money to pay for completion of the new Vihara. Everything is going to plan there at the moment and the monks are hoping to move in before Buddha Day on 26 May. There are six bedrooms for monks, each with either en suite bathroom or shower. A further two rooms that can be used by lay visitors are reached by a separate staircase and are completely self-contained. The new shrine room downstairs is situated on the



A rare full length photograph of Dr Rewata Dhamma taken this year in Singapore.

reservoir side and should be a tranquil place to meditate. It is designed on a generous scale and is capable of holding some sixty people.

One of our activities now in jeopardy is the monthly children's Dhamma Class, since Ellen Parker has recently resigned as its teacher for personal reasons. We owe her many thanks for her diligent work over the last five years and hope this is not the last we shall see of her. There are currently five children attending and we are trying to make sure that the class continues. Would anyone interested in taking the work over please contact us?

Over Christmastime Ashins Ratapala and Gandhathara went to Singapore for the 10th anniversary of the Myanmar Vihara, where they were eventually joined by Dr Rewata Dhamma. Ratapala was back by the beginning of January, Gandhathara by the end of that month. Bhikkhu Nagasena meanwhile has continued teaching his Dhamma classes at the Aston Vihara and leads the Monday meditation class at our own. He also took part in the Buddhist Symposium that Ajahn Maha Laow organised at Birmingham University in March.

☸ **DR REWATA DHAMMA**

Bhante flew to California in December to conduct a 10-day Vipassana course at the Myanmar Vihara in Los Angeles, after which he visited other devotees in San Francisco. From there he went to Singapore for the 10th anniversary cele-

brations of the Myanmar Vihara. While there he also gave a talk on the basic doctrine of the Buddha to the Chinese devotees of the local Abhidhamma Study Group. In addition he took part in a signing ceremony along with Bhikkhu Bodhi, with whom he had jointly authored *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. 350 copies were sold at this event. The book first appeared in 1993 under the Buddhist Publication Society imprint. For a taste of its clear and concise exposition, take a look at the introduction, available on the Internet at www.geocities.com/ekchew.geo/abhiman.html

Back in England again, Bhante spoke to the Oxford University Buddhist Society on "What Buddhism Is" on 16 Jan. Next month he was in Belgium, leading a 5-day retreat for the Dhamma Group de Bruxelles. In Birmingham itself he has been attending regular seminars at the City Hospital as Patient Advocate. In February, discussion ranged round proper treatment of patients, including diet. There was also discussion of the new name West Birmingham & Sandwell NHS Trust for the three hospitals (one of which is what many of us old-timers still call Dudley Road) now operating as a group. A little later, Bhante attended the opening of the New Worcestershire Hospital, to which he presented chanting books and others for general reading for their inter-faith room.

Also on the inter-faith front, Bhante was at Birmingham Oratory for the Bicentenary of Cardinal Newman. This was attended by His Eminence Cormac Cardinal Murphy O'Connor of Westminster Cathedral as well, of course, as Birmingham's own Archbishop whom Bhante met just after his consecration last year. In mid-March he was at Central Mosque for a meeting of the city's faith communities. This is consequent on the post September 11 peace-making initiative convened there by the Orthodox Jewish Rabbi, the Precentor of Birmingham Cathedral and the Imam at Central Mosque.

In April Bhante will be teaching the Swiss Abhidhamma Group for three days, returning in time for the Sangha-dana that Goenka is offering at his centre in Herefordshire whilst in England. We too will also have the rare and fortunate privilege of hearing Goenkaji teach when he visits Birmingham on 15 April for a teaching at Birmingham University. During the few weeks after that Bhante will superintend the completion

of the Vihara and the move into it.

❁ DONATIONS TO
NEW
V

Although we have just enough to pay for the completion of the new building, we are in debt in certain directions and have still to furnish it. New donations large and small are therefore invited from devotees and supporters. Some may wish to donate particular items and we would welcome these. Please contact the monks on **0121 454 6591** before you do, however, as they have already been given certain domestic items. The family of U Khin, for example, has offered a complete set of crockery in his memory and also a cooker. Also promised are a microwave and large (caterer-style) thermos flasks. Among the other things we need are up to 10 beds, with mattresses; chests of drawers; dining tables and chairs; kitchen units; a deep freeze; a washing machine with tumble dryer; a vacuum cleaner; desks and a filing cabinet.

❁ DEVOTEE ACTIVITIES

Yann and Ann have been representing Buddhists at a number of official functions. January saw them at the Queen's Golden Jubilee Eid Milan Meena Bazaar, sponsored by the British Council of Pakistanis and Birmingham City Council at the I.C.C. This involved a joint exhibition of council initiatives along with ethnic foods and crafts, followed in the evening by a concert. Traditional Islamic music and Pakistani pop were both featured at this and it was attended by the Lord Lieutenant (representing the Royal Family) and the Pakistani Consul.

Later that month Yann, Ann and Ramona were guests at Holocaust Memorial Day in Victoria Square. Held on the 57th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, it commemorated the millions who have suffered and continue to suffer from genocide. The Mayor was there to make a statement before a crowd of all races and persuasions. Sir Bernard Zissman chaired the occasion and told us, 'Remember that each individual makes a difference; together we can make it by protesting against and calling a halt to this racial crime.' Roi Kwabena, Birmingham's poet laureate, was also present to read a poem he had specially written.

In February Yann joined an inter-faith discussion panel during a conference attended by 700 young people at St Chad's Cathedral. Later he was part of another panel which spent two hours discussing medical ethics with 2nd year students at Birmingham University. So interested were they in the subject that they were still discussing points among themselves as they left for other sessions. Yann is also Buddhist representative on the Birmingham SACRE panel, which advises on religious education in the city and meets three times a year.

He has himself been teaching about Buddhism at widely contrasting places. Among

them was the National Institute of Conductive Education, where he spoke to primary age children suffering from cerebral palsy; Bishop Grossteste College in Lincoln, where he spent two days lecturing to trainee teachers and also took meditation sessions; and Manresa Convent in Harborne. The Catholic nuns there (from India, Korea, Poland and the Netherlands) were studying inter-faith dialogue prior to taking their final vows. Afterwards their course leader, Sis. Sujata, drove with them to visit the Pagoda where they presented incense and took part in a puja. Just lately Yann spent most of one day teaching Primary and Junior classes during an inter-faith week at St Mary's Church of England School in Kingswinford.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

❁ SUFFERING: THE SYMPOSIUM

Ajahn Maha Laow studied for his doctorate at Birmingham University and since then has joined its Chaplaincy team. In March he arranged a successful Buddhist Symposium that he hopes will grow into a series. The event brought in an audience of some sixty, although only a third were actually students.

As cosmopolitan as the audience were the speakers, drawn from different Buddhist traditions and asked to address the subject of *How to deal with suffering in daily life*. Two of them were monks currently studying for their MA at the University: Thai-born Phra Titajaro and English-born Thich Thanh Y of the Pure Land tradition, who is currently living at the Birmingham Vietnamese Centre. They were joined by Rev. Lewin, head of the Edinburgh Soto Zen Centre, and our own Ven. Nagasena.

Rev. Lewin took a Scriptural saying as his starting point: '*Do not chase after entanglements nor stoically dwell in some inner void where suffering is denied*'. The meditative approach should be to acknowledge the suffering and then let it go. One must give oneself whole-heartedly to the action of the moment with acceptance of what is there. Phra Titajaro followed with a saying of his teacher's: '*The mind is master, the body is the servant that does its bidding*'. We should therefore meditate in order to become aware of why we do things and so avoid suffering.

Thich Thanh Y outlined the teaching of the Pure Land School. Its main emphasis is upon purification and its method of meditation is a means of getting in touch with innate Buddha-nature. For Ven. Nagasena, on the other hand, right awareness leads to an understanding of suffering's mental causation. By concentrating solely on this we prevent its continuation.

A few questions followed, kept short, I suspect, by anticipation of the excellent supper laid on afterwards. The contact with so many supporters of other groups, and also with

enthusiastic young students, was inspiring. Maha Laow has another meeting planned for next term.

U KHIN 1917-2001

As reported in our previous issue, our much loved and faithful Patron, U Khin, died last December. Pat Gray, his eldest daughter, gave an outline of her father's life at the funeral. At our request, she has kindly sent us her notes so that we can write an appreciation of our own.

U Khin was born in Burma in May 1917. After graduating from the University of Rangoon in 1938, he joined the Burmese Civil Service and during World War 2 served as a Commissioned Officer in the Burma Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. After Burma gained its independence he was sent to the U.S. on a state scholarship to study journalism and gained his MA in this from the University of Minnesota in 1950, following which he worked as a translator and broadcaster for Voice of America for a time.

From 1954 he was in Burma, serving as Information Officer at the Ministry of Information. Two years later he was made Deputy Director for Press and Public Relations and remained in this position until he left in 1966, when he started working for the BBC World Service in London. While there he also found time to study at the School of African and Oriental Studies, gaining an MA in the history of SE Asia in 1970. The following year he was recalled to Burma, where he worked as director of the Government Information Service. Retiring in 1977, he rejoined his family in London and worked once again for the BBC until 1982.

After his return here he became one of Dr Rewata Dhamma's supporters and was among those who planned the first Buddha Day that Bhante held in Birmingham. This was in 1978 during the brief period that Bhante was lodging in Handsworth and the event was attended by Kalu Rimpoche and a group of Tibetan monks, thrilling everybody. When the Vihara finally moved from 41 to 47 Carlyle Rd in 1981, U Khin became a founder Trustee and remained so until 1995, when he was made a Patron in gratitude for his services. In London he served as Patron to the Tisarana Buddhist Vihara in Twickenham and later to the Britain Burma Buddhist Vihara. He also was

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

15 April: A Teaching by Goenkaji: in Avon Room Birmingham University, at 7.00pm.
26 May: Buddha Day: beginning at 11.00 at the Pagoda.
30 June: 4th Anniversary of the Pagoda and Official Opening of the New Vihara: open day and bring and buy stalls from 10.30 am. A dialogue on how faiths can live together, led by members of Birmingham Council of Faiths, will follow the ceremony.