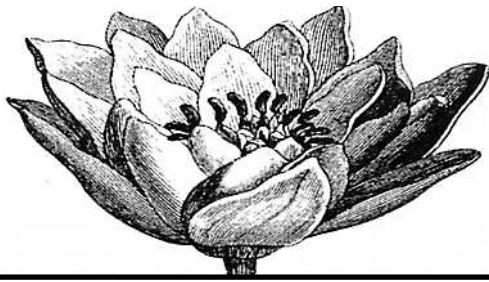


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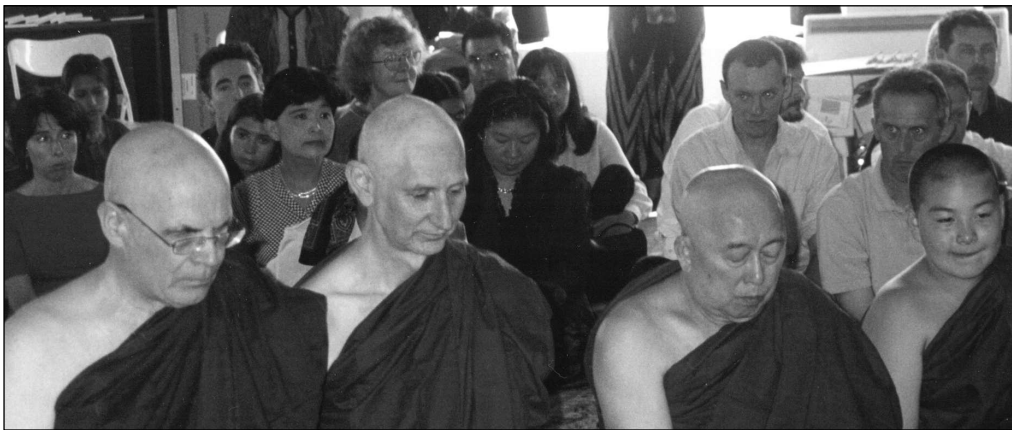
# lotus

The Lay Review and Newsletter of the  
Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

AUTUMN 2002

ISSUE No. 6

## A Week in the Life of a One-Week Monk



l. to r: Bhikkhus Badda, Nyanaloka and Indavamsa with Samanera Javana

The idea of being a bhikkhu for just one week had never occurred to me until hearing of the possibility a year ago. Thanks to the encouragement of Dr Rewata Dhamma and the generous sponsorship of Mrs Aye, this became a reality on August 24, 2002. Early meetings with my future instructor, Nagasena Bhikkhu, were very useful. My own efforts to memorise the Pali took me well into Edward Lear territory but I did at least gain more understanding of the ordination procedure.

My reason for asking for ordination was a personal need to reaffirm confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. 'The Three Jewels' is such an apt description of these precious constituents, so central to the life of a Buddhist. To become part of the robed Sangha, even for a short period, was a wonderful privilege I never expected to experience. But finally I and my fellow bhikkhus-to-be placed ourselves into the skilful hands of Ashin Ratapala for the head shaving. Relatives and friends helped to catch our shorn locks in towels and then scattered them around the feet of the garden rupa.

The symbolism of this was something that characterized the whole ordination ceremony, relaxed, unrehearsed, deeply meaningful. Inside the Pagoda, our preceptor, Dr Rewata Dhamma, and examiner, Bhikkhu Nagasena, led us gently through the ceremony.

And so, on that day we were born – three new bhikkhus and a samanera with bristling Velcro scalps. Aung Myin was given the name Indavamsa (Divine Ancestor), while his grandson, Jackie Jr., was called Javana (speedy). Yann Lovelock retained his former bhikkhu name of Nyanaloka (shining knowledge) and I was given the name Badda (good complexion). This invited inevitable name-conjuring such as The Good, The Bad and the Badda! In spite of its unspectacular meaning, I soon found myself warming to it.

To be able to live in the Vihara as one of the Sangha so soon after its opening felt tremendous. I shared a room with Nyanaloka and Kusananda, former Professor of Psychology and an old disciple of Dr Rewata Dhamma. Kusananda proved to be

cont'd on p.6

*It is good to see the Noble Ones; to live with them is always a pleasure.*

Dhammapada 206

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Photo credits: Linda Tomlinson



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Copy for the Winter issue should reach us by not later than 29 November.

## The Milk Fountain That Wasn't To Be: A Cautionary Tale

The following story is one that was related by the guest speaker at my school prize-giving many moons ago. At the time I didn't realise that it would be one of the best lessons I ever learnt at school. I have applied it many times and now once again it seems appropriate to retell the tale.

Once upon a time there was a small town where everybody worked hard so that it prospered. As an appreciation of the hard work, and to show visitors to the town how prosperous it had become, a beautiful fountain was built in the square. Like all the other townsfolk, Peter was proud of its achievement and spent many evenings chatting to friends while they watched sparkling water flow from the fountain.

One day the Mayor called a meeting. The mayor down the road was coming to visit and he would be shown the new fountain; now wouldn't it be a great surprise if instead of water, milk flowed from the fountain? In order to achieve this all that was required was that each person in the town brought one pint of milk and poured it into the fountain on the morning of the visit. Everybody agreed, but on the day Peter was busy and didn't have time; still, he thought, "I'm sure nobody will miss my pint of milk. There are so many people in the town that one pint won't make any difference," so he went to work as usual.

At midday the Mayor came to show the visiting guests the fountain and couldn't wait to see their faces, but when they arrived there was no milk, only water as usual. Everybody else had had the same thought - what difference will my pint of milk make?

Our new Vihara is a great resource. There have been lots of enquiries from the public after the local media coverage of the opening, wanting to know what courses are held; can they learn how to meditate; can they find out more about Buddhism? There is also a lot of energy and commitment there to provide for these needs. However, we can't do it if we can't pay the bills. We need a regular income of about £2,500 per month to meet running costs (fuel bills, water rates, etc) and to pay back the loans that were taken out in order to complete the building. If everybody reading this made a regular donation of £10 per month we could achieve that target. Now I appreciate that not everybody receiving *Lotus Review* is in a position to make a regular donation and that perhaps the Sangharama Monastery is not necessarily the main centre you choose to support. But I appeal to those of you that are able and wish to support the centre, please don't be too busy to complete the enclosed forms. Remember, lots of little donations of five, ten or even fifty pounds will soon add up. No sum is too small so long as it is a regular commitment.

The editor says she is embarrassed about using a dhamma publication for appeals and I certainly don't like making them either. However, we have a great resource, and we owe it to all who have had faith in the building of the pagoda and vihara to ensure that we now use it fully.

If there is any financial aspect you want to discuss with me, I can be contacted through the Vihara.

**Ann Lovelock (Treasurer)**

# Getting On Together

UPASAKA NYANALOKA whacks a few heads with the dictionary



Quorum just means 'of whom' in Latin. It entered English from the wording of a mediaeval commission appointing justices of the peace and eventually came to refer to the number of persons, belonging to any body whose presence is required in order that its business may be transacted. It was in much the same way that the religious term *sangha* gained its special meaning in Buddhism. It originally arose from the Vinaya requirement that all monks in a prescribed locality must be invited together to discuss monastic business in order for the decision reached to be valid. Its meaning in this context is more or less the same as quorum.

The original meaning of *sangha* is something like 'assembled together'. Combined with *satta*, as in the Punjabi *satsang* (referring to one of the Sikh ideals), it means what we understand by the word 'community'. In Buddhism the word has acquired a number of different meanings. As one of the three jewels in which we take refuge, it refers to the community of realised disciples; all those, robed or lay, who have become arahants or attained one of the lesser degrees of sainthood. More broadly, it refers to the robed community of the Buddha's disciples, which is its commonest meaning. More widely still, it covers the whole community of those who actively practise the Buddha's teaching, male and female devotees equally with monks and nuns. The newly opened Sangharama is a dwelling place (*arama*) for those in the robe; but Birmingham Buddhist Vihara Trust is run exclusively by the lay *sangha* since monks are forbidden to own property. Birmingham Buddhist Vihara as an organisation, however, is a co-operative venture in which the community of monks and devotees work and practise together.

In the monastic context the word 'community' gains a specialised meaning. To live 'in community' means much more than simply sharing the same premises. It implies that all there are working together for a common end and have each other's welfare at heart. A look at the Monks' Rule (*Patimokkha*) is instructive from this point of view. There are 227 rules, in fact, many of which circumscribe monastic behaviour so as to uphold the ideal of renunciation and make sure others are not offended or scandalised. A great many, however, concern consideration for others. Not to leave one's bedding where it may be tripped over, for instance; not to slurp one's soup loudly or, when

eating with the hand, to flap it around so others are spattered with particles of food; or when leaving the monastery grounds, to inform someone where you are going.

Sadly, the Vinaya commentaries make it plain that these ordinances came about as a result of the inconsiderateness of others. Monks do not automatically become saints by putting on the robe. On hearing of the Buddha's death, one of his Order went so far as to comment, 'Good, now we can do what we like without him interfering!' Rev. Master Daishin, Abbot of Throssel Hole, once told me that reading those commentaries in the light of his own experience had convinced him that human behaviour had changed very little in two and a half millennia. Just like the lay five precepts, however, the monks' rule is there to guide one's training. Living 'in community' is a valuable experience, qualitatively different from lay life. It gives one the inspiring vision of what it might be like if the teaching were more widely practised so as to weaken the force of the three poisons of greed, hatred and selfishness.

So far as lay behaviour goes, the Buddha also prescribed the promotion of social harmony. This is evident in the five precepts, particularly if one bears in mind that in India, then as now, it was the greater rather than the atomic family that had precedence. An offence against one person, such as in killing, harming or theft, therefore involved a much wider group than the individual principally affected. Guarding the senses, insofar as this has to do with sexual restraint, is a rule against breaking up social relationships – whether the person is married or unmarried. The same point underlies the prohibition of backbiting and telling tales in the fourth precept: that mars social harmony by setting one group against another.

Nowadays we hear more than enough about the rights of the individual, whereas to mention *duty* is to utter a four-letter word. The Buddha's advice on social relationships, however, reinforces his insistence on mutual dependence; rights are dependent on duties performed. The *Sigalovada Sutta* makes this very clear in its discussion of what is owed between the various parties in such relationships as Parent/Child, Husband/Wife, Teacher/Student, Religious Teacher/Devotee, Employer/Employee, and in the equal relationship between friends. The husband, for example, owes his wife courtesy, respect, faithfulness,

household trust and the means to adorn herself. She in turn runs the household capably and industriously, is hospitable but not wasteful and, of course, is faithful in her turn. The two sets of duties support each other. It is the same in the other relationships, in which providing for the welfare of the one party is answered by looking after the welfare of the other.

Social interaction is only one side of the Buddha's realisation of the interdependence of all being. The prohibition on killing does not stop short at humans but includes all that have five senses and a sense of self-preservation. The Buddha stopped short of imposing vegetarianism on the robed Sangha only because they were dependent on householders for their meals. They could, however, refuse anything killed specially for them, or to have it killed. Furthermore, butchery and fishing are regarded as a wrong means of livelihood. In the circumstances of the time, that brought monks a good deal closer to vegetarianism than is generally admitted. That the Buddha died of food poisoning after eating tainted meat should also be remembered. The Emperor Ashoka certainly understood the Buddha's tendency when he forbade the needless killing of animals and counselled restraint even for food purposes.

Maintaining ecological balance was not such a critical issue 2,500 years ago, but the foolishness of not doing so was understood even then. Erosion and depletion of breeding stock are not simply modern phenomena. The third precept against misusing the senses definitely commands us to put a rein on our appetite, on our greed and selfishness, for the good of the planet, whether we take that good as an ecological imperative or merely the wisdom of ensuring the continuation of our own species.

Let us always remember that Enlightenment entails the common mystical experience of oneness. Because of this the Buddha understood that he had reached the end of the rebirth process; he no longer thought of himself as separate. Following from this comes his vision of life and the reason that his teaching is so much of a piece. It grows out of his experience. We have only to follow in his footsteps to reach a similar realisation arising from our own.

Naturally, it would be a good idea if, even before that outcome, we tried as far as possible to live according to the Buddha's teaching; or rather to follow his training in social cohesion and ecological harmlessness. But of one thing we can be certain, wherever we find that those qualities are absent, then we know that the Buddha too is absent. ♦

## IN THE MOMENT

*fleeting pasts .... we consider  
remember or forget*

*present in process  
we bear witness  
accept or reject*

*approaching future  
naked aspirations or unfounded fears  
we embrace or resist*

*however we calculate  
our length of days on this plane  
regard for this moment:  
time an' destiny  
like circles without end or beginning  
and what of divine order?  
deemed possession of all power?*

*...as time stays not still  
ever rousing...nascent...changing  
effecting triumph...displeasure  
satisfaction...indifference...amusement*

*accept  
power of thought  
words, actions  
manifest  
as the golden disc of our skies  
illuminating our seasons  
or faraway stars  
stimulating our minds*

*meditation guides our lives.....  
there is no beginning  
no end*

**Roi Ankhkara Kwabena  
Birmingham Poet Laureate 2002**

The poem above was commissioned for the Opening of the Sangharama Monastery and read during the Civic Ceremony by the poet himself. It is to be the title poem of his forthcoming new collection.



## Smile. It can't be all that bad!

Sometimes things happen to us in our lives which curtail our activities. We find ourselves unable, for various reasons, to do things which hitherto were part and parcel of our everyday lives. Perhaps we are losing our sight or hearing or, maybe, age or some disability has caused us to give up activities which previously we had considered the most important things in our lives. Now what are we to do? Well, we could sit around and mope and regret or envelop ourselves in a cloud of sad nostalgia, longing for the return of those happier times but, as Buddhists, we know (or should know) this only increases our suffering and very likely the suffering of others.

I know that when these trials and tribulations strike it can be like the end of the world, but it is possible to reflect on them as an opportunity to concentrate our energies within this restriction and, in doing so, see them as something we can work with rather than a disaster. Maybe you find you can no longer sit for any length of time owing to physical ill health, or your practice has to be restricted because of family demands on your time - there is no need to enumerate all the possibilities, you have probably experienced some of them and can imagine others. What I am suggesting is that even the most extreme restrictions can, in reality, be very useful for us when the familiar pattern of our lives has to be changed. It is possible to make it into an opportunity for further development along the Path. In fact, working with our new enforced situation can be quite absorbing and, on reflection, will be seen to be an opportunity for gaining insight. In fact, what we first considered to be a stroke of bad luck could be a chance to move on and, providing we use the Buddha's teaching as our guide, we can't go far wrong.

So, come on, smile. It can't be all that bad.

*Bill*

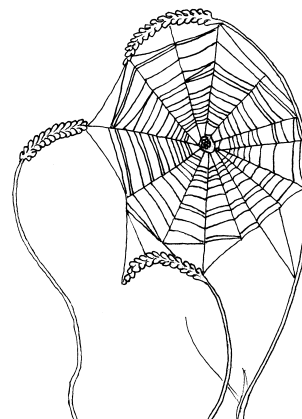
## A New Birth and Death Each Moment

*For me, Vipassana Meditation is like  
learning to drive  
think about it!*



*For me, Vipassana Meditation is like  
the sensations of labour in birth  
and as each contraction arises and intensifies  
anicca, anicca, anicca.*

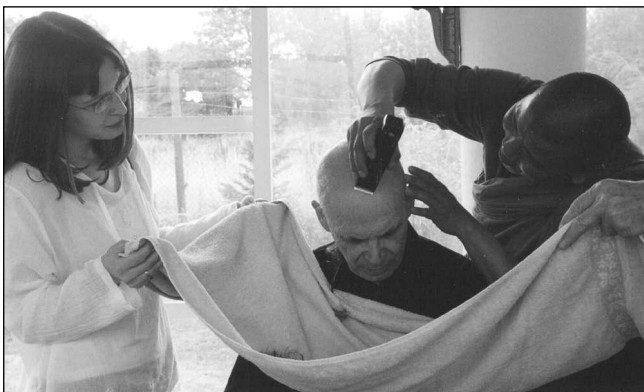
*Meditation is  
the secrets of the universe unfolding  
slowly, slowly  
within.*



**Dea Paradisos**

cont'd from p.1 a dynamic and compelling teacher of the Dhamma. He was great fun to be with, perching on the bed like a bird in flight to demonstrate how to put on the robes. Nyanaloka and I did a kind of Batman & Robin routine in imitation.

Hunger pangs kept me awake the first night. Fortunately this proved to be purely transitional and I quickly adapted to the changes in the eating and sleeping regime. We would rise between 5 and 5.30am, meditate for a period before chanting at 6.30, and have breakfast at 7. I would then spend the morning in the Pagoda sitting, walking and studying basic chants and trying to memorise and understand the meaning of each word. The Pagoda is so peaceful and resonant with positive energy.



There was often a counterpoint of sensory experience to observe, such as the morning cry of goose and gull against the whispering click of a neighbour's rosary, all underpinned by brilliant patinas of sunlight.

Lunch was at eleven. A layperson might feel bound to comment on the excellence of the food but, of course, bhikkhus are encouraged to meditate on food simply as a life-sustaining requisite. Every evening we would sit with our instructor for a reciprocal confession of general shortcomings and then meditate on the Four Requisites – food, robes, shelter and medicine. This would be followed by chanting, a guided meditation and finally Metta.

Leaving the monastery grounds was an odd experience. First we were instructed how to wear the upper robe for going out and Nyanaloka and I disappeared into cocoons of stretched and twisted cloth. And so mummy bound and outward bound we lurched. The people we met were friendly and polite on the first two outings. Our third trip was at a later time in the day when all of human life seemed scattered around the reservoir – interesting! And we were interesting to those we met. Some youths asked if we were from the Shaolin Temple; did we do Kung Fu? Others asked over their beer cans about the teaching. Some just stared. The staring I found difficult to cope with. I felt threatened, tense and conveniently trussed up for

muggers. Nagasena had spoken to me about how the cultivation of the four Brahma Viharas brings confidence. Now I could see the connection and how those attributes would not accommodate fear.

My mounting tension seemed to externalize and explode with the sound of screeching brakes. Suddenly the police were swarming everywhere around the water's edge and nearby streets. I never found out what it was all about. Maybe it was to remind us that Samsara was still as turbulent as ever. I have to say that Nyanaloka and Gosaka seemed quite unperturbed during the whole episode. In fact Nyanaloka insisted on making daily alms rounds and would go stalking off every morning - Have Bowl, Will Travel! One positive thing to emerge from our excursions is that Buddhism is as fascinating to people as ever.

In the afternoon some of us sat with Nagasena, to try and improve our chanting and for dhamma teaching. Part of the afternoon I would spend with Gosaka and Kumara for conversational English practice whilst Nyanaloka worked hard at editing Dr Rewata Dhamma's forthcoming book: *Under the Rose-Apple Tree* - well worth looking out for.

Early evenings I spent meditating in the Pagoda. It is an interesting exercise to sit alone in the failing light with the wind gently playing around the door. The Pagoda has a fantastic acoustic which makes sound scatter in all directions, teasing out all those bogeyman fears from the darkest corners of the mind. The hairs on my nape reflected the arising fear. For a few seconds, and only a few seconds, I was able to view these fears simply as arising phenomena and return to the breath. The Pagoda must be one of the most peaceful places on the planet and yet the human mind is still able to bring up disquieting constructs when sitting there. When I told Nagasena about it, he reminded me of the practice of meditating in cemeteries and how some monks would even live there for months.

As the week passed, putting on the robes became easier. Symbolising a noble undertaking of profound spiritual significance, they felt so good to wear. The idea of a bhikkhu for a week had seemed kind of fraudulent, but the others went out of their way to make us feel we belonged.

As Badda I enjoyed the company of the very helpful and knowledgeable Nyanaloka and the friendliness of Indavamsa and our Samanera Javana, but the dictates of anicca finally brought the week to a close. I was reluctant to surrender the robes and reluctant to resume my old identity, but sometimes the Dhamma is best served by fulfilling our lay commitments.

There is left a deep sense of gratitude and metta towards our teachers, the Sangha, to Mrs Aye and the Myanmar community, all of whom helped make possible this small insight into the life of a bhikkhu. ♦

The main aim of Insight Meditation is to realise the Four Noble Truths in order to attain the state of Enlightenment. It is developed through attaining the seven stages of purification, each of which has its corresponding level of insight. The meditator can ascertain his or her progress according to the level of insight experienced. These stages of purification are as follows.

#### *Purity of Morality*

Morality is the foundation of this practice. Without its development there is no way one can achieve the final goal of liberation. Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are basic practices for achieving moral purification. Traditionally, observance of the five or eight precepts is considered to be adequate for the lay person aiming to achieve the necessary purity prior to practising Insight Meditation. Self-control and disciplined behaviour perfect the higher morality of disciplining the mind.

#### *Purity of Mind*

After a few days of practice the mind becomes quieter, calmer and less liable to wander, and so it can be said that the process of purifying the mind has begun. In order to progress further, the meditator makes a great effort to develop awareness and concentration and strives to attain one of three types of concentration: Vipassana's moment by moment concentration, access concentration, or absorption. The three meditative factors in the Eightfold Path must be developed in order to purify the mind perpetually inclined towards sense objects. If one fails to be objectively aware when such an object arises at a sense door, then one inevitably reacts to it with either like or dislike. This brings about thoughts that cause the arising of impurities. Nevertheless, through intensive practice and effort to develop absolutely precise and objective concentration and awareness, one can dispel the hindrances and achieve purity of mind. Once this has been done, then one can begin to make progress in the development of insight.

#### *Purity of View*

Purity of view is achieved when one has overcome the false idea of a self or soul. Having established purity of mind, the meditator will carefully observe all the mental and material processes at each and every moment and understand the mind and body analytically. While concentrating on breathing, he or she is able to distinguish between the in-breath and the out-breath and become aware that the interval between the in-breath and its awareness, and the out-breath and its awareness, arise as different processes. In this way, the meditator comes to

recognise through direct experience that each mental and material state is a different process and through watching the breath reaches the same conclusion with respect to the other sense functions. For example, a visual object, seeing and awareness are all perceived as distinct factors in the visual process. By observing each of these, the meditator can analyse the mental and material states according to their true essential nature. This is called analytical knowledge of mind and body. When it reaches maturity, the meditator understands that there is no permanent essence present in any of the mental and material processes. This is called purity of view and is described by Buddhaghosa in *The Path of Purification* in the following way:

*No doer of the deeds is found, no being that may reap  
their fruits;*

*Empty phenomena roll on, this is the only rightful view.*

#### *Purity by Overcoming Doubt*

Purity by overcoming doubt is defined as that knowledge which arises through comprehending the conditions for the arising of mental and physical phenomena. One overcomes doubts such as "Have I been in the past? Shall I be in the future? Am I now? Am I not?" The understanding of the Law of Dependent Origination, of Karma and Re-birth, are also included here. As concentration and understanding develop, the meditator sees the Law of Cause and Effect operating as he observes the mental and material processes. For instance, when changing his or her sitting position the meditator realises that there is an intention to change the position that precedes the act. Likewise the intention to stretch a limb is recognised as preceding the act of stretching. Through this insight the meditator can make a distinction at each moment between cause and effect.

As time passes, the meditator comes to experience various painful feelings in the body. Just after awareness of one feeling arises, another feeling arises somewhere else. The meditator follows these feelings and focuses awareness on each. Although the meditator is engaged in watching feelings as they arise, only the initial phase of 'arising' is perceived and not the final phase of dissolution. Similarly, as mental images arise one is aware of their arising but not aware of the moment of their dissolution. In this way, the meditator understands clearly that all mental and material processes are conditioned and conditioning. Apart from these processes, there is no person or self who performs or governs the phenomenal world.

### *Purity by Insight of what is and is not the Path*

As the meditator continues to practise with perfect awareness and concentration, he or she becomes aware that every process of the mind and body being observed is subject to change. All of them are impermanent, all merely arise and then pass away. This knowledge is called the insight that observes, explores, and grasps impermanence. By realising that all mental and physical phenomena are impermanent, the meditator recognises that they are not worth cherishing and regards them as a form of suffering. He or she comprehends that they are absent of self and simply impersonal processes. He or she has clear awareness of the arising and passing of the mental and material processes at every moment. The comprehension that arises by means of direct experience is called insight by comprehension of phenomena.

As the meditator focuses attention on these psychophysical phenomena, the arising and dissolution of each process becomes obvious. This is insight of arising and passing away. As a result of insight, various phenomena arise in the mind; they may include brilliant light, strong mindfulness, strong or lucid awareness, firm faith, rapture, tranquillity of mind, sublime happiness that suffuses the body, vigour, equanimity. The danger here is that the meditator may feel a liking or subtle attachment to these phenomena. Initially, the meditator is delighted with these experiences and believes he or she has attained the goal. However, when these phenomena are seen in the light of objective awareness the meditator soon realises that they are mere phenomena, subject to change, and as such are corruptions of insight.

### *Purity by Knowledge and Vision of the Course of Practice*

As the meditator carries on with the practice, his or her observation of arising and passing away becomes sharper, stronger and more accurate. When the meditator's awareness reaches maturity, then he or she perceives only two factors in each moment, namely the object and awareness. While giving attention to these, he or she is aware of every factor's dissolution. Thus, when experiencing sensory phenomena, it is the dissolution and not the arising which becomes obvious. This experience is what is known as the arising of dissolution. With the development of this, awareness of fear arises in the wake of the constant and rapid dissolution of all processes. This is insight with the awareness of fearfulness. Perceiving the dissolution of all psychophysical phenomena, the meditator sees them as undesirable and harmful. This is the insight of misery. All such manifestations are seen as being insubstantial, devoid of pleasure and tiresome. This is the insight of disgust. These last three are combined as a single insight; some meditators may experience only one or two of them.

As the meditator experiences all the processes of mind and body and the concomitant fearfulness, misery, and disgust, the desire arises to renounce the mind/body complex. This is the insight of desire for deliverance. The

meditator then makes a strong determination and effort to develop awareness and wisdom. All the processes of physical and mental elements become calm and balanced and painful feelings disappear. Awareness now arises smoothly and spontaneously and equanimity is present and continues for a longer time than previously experienced. This is the insight of equanimity of formations.

When this insight reaches maturity, the meditator's awareness becomes sharp and occurs two or three times rapidly without the need to exert any special effort. This last stage is called insight leading to emergence or the insight of adaptation. The meditator ascends to this and then glimpses the special insight that precedes realisation of the noble path. The last of the insights that occur in the progression, it is called purity by insight and vision in the course of practice. Immediately afterwards, a kind of insight arises that falls, as it were, for the first time into Nibbana, which is void of formations since it is by definition the cessation of all formations. This is called maturity insight, the Pali term for which literally means 'the one who has become of the lineage'. In other words, by attaining this insight, the meditator has left behind the lineage of worldlings and embraced that of the Noble Ones.

### *Purity by Insight and Vision*

The moment of the arising of path insight is the last of the seven purifications. After the insight of adaptation and maturity insight, the path and fruition insights follow in succession. The path insight lasts no more than a fleeting moment and then the meditator realises the cessation of all conditioned processes. This is the insight of fruition and it is followed by two or three insights of retrospection in which the path of Insight is contemplated, as is the path of the Noble Ones. Path vision and fruition are experienced by the stream winner. In virtue of this accomplishment he or she has overcome the concept of an everlasting self, doubts about the path or teaching and adherence to wrong rites and rituals. The stream winner has become free from rebirth in any lower realm of existence.

A person who wishes to attain the higher stages of Enlightenment should strive ardently to develop insight, beginning with that of arising and dissolution, through which the meditator eradicates the remaining fetters of the defilements. The final stage one attains is that of the Arahant who has won the goal of deliverance from suffering and can never again be reborn.

I want to encourage you all to continue making an earnest effort so as to gain such insight and realise the path and its fruits. This is the path for your own liberation, this is the path for your own happiness and purification. May all of you be well and happy! May all of you experience the Nibbanic peace within!

(This is taken from the final section of Bhante's forthcoming book on meditation techniques, *Under the Rose-Apple Tree*.)

Once upon time, the king of Benares had a royal bull elephant who was kind, patient and harmless. Along with this gentle disposition, the sweetness of his expression had caused him to be affectionately nicknamed 'Ladyface'.

But then, one night, a gang of robbers took to meeting just outside the elephant shed. In the darkness they talked about their plans for robbing people. They spoke of beating and killing; they bragged of giving up ordinary goodness so as to have no pity on their victims. They used rough gutter-language, intended to scare people and show how tough they were.

Since the nights were quiet, Ladyface had no choice but to listen to this violent talk. Paying careful attention, he remembered it all, as elephants do. Having been brought up to obey and respect human beings, he mistook even such men as these for wise teachers.

After it had gone on for several nights, Ladyface decided that the correct thing to do was to become rough and cruel too. This usually happens to one who associates with those of a low-minded, cruel nature, especially one who is gentle and eager to please others. So when Ladyface's mahout came to see him early one morning as usual, the elephant, his mind filled with the night's robber-talk, suddenly attacked him. A 'mahout' is what the Indians call the special trainer and caretaker of a particular elephant and the two are usually very close. But now Ladyface picked him up in his trunk, squeezed the breath out of him and smashed him to the ground, killing him instantly. Then he picked up two other attendants, one after the other, and killed them just as ferociously.

Word spread quickly through the city that the once adored Ladyface had suddenly gone mad and become a frightening killer and the people ran to the king for help. It just so happened that His Majesty had an intelligent minister who was known for his understanding of animals. So the king had the man summoned and asked him to go and determine what sickness or other condition had caused his favourite elephant to become so insanely violent.

This minister was none other than the Bodhisatta - the Buddha to be. Arriving at the elephant shed, he spoke gentle, soothing words to Ladyface and calmed him down. On examining him, the minister found him in perfect physical health. As he spoke to the animal, he noticed that the elephant spread his ears and paid

close attention. It was almost as if the poor animal was starved for the sound of gentle words. So the understanding minister figured that the elephant must have been hearing violent words or seeing violent actions that had led him astray.

"Have you seen anyone hanging around this shed at any time?" he asked the guards. "Yes, minister,"

they replied, "for the last few evenings a gang of robbers has been meeting here. We were afraid to do anything, since they were such rough characters."

The minister returned immediately to the king. "My lord," he said, "your favourite elephant is in perfect physical health. I have discovered that it was by overhearing rough and vulgar talk over many nights that he has learned to be violent and cruel. Unwholesome associations often lead to unwholesome thoughts and actions."

"What is to be done?" asked the king.

"Well, my lord," the minister said, "now we must reverse the process. We must send wise men and monks of a high-minded, kind nature to spend just as many nights outside the elephant shed. There they should talk of the value of ordinary goodness and patience such as leads to compassion, loving-kindness and harmlessness."

So that's what was done. For several nights the kind, wise ones spoke of those wonderful qualities. They used only gentle and refined language, intended to bring peacefulness and comfort to others.

Lo and behold, hearing this pleasant conversation, Ladyface the bull elephant became even more tranquil than before! Seeing this total change, the minister reported to the king, "My lord, now Ladyface has become as gentle as a lamb."

The king exclaimed, "It is marvellous, minister, it is wonderful indeed that such a madly violent elephant can be changed by associating with wise men and monks! Just as if one were to place upright what had been overturned, or as if one were to reveal what was hidden, just as if one were to show the way to one who was lost, or to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes might see, so you have made this matter clear." And with that, he bestowed a lavish reward upon the minister in recompense for his wisdom. ♦

## LADYFACE



This Jataka Story is adapted from the Internet series. It and the accompanying illustration can be found on the American Sri Lankan Buddhist Association site [newyorkbuddhist.org/jataka.htm](http://newyorkbuddhist.org/jataka.htm)

# SANGHA NEWSLETTER

## Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

Spiritual Director: Aggamahapandita Bhaddanta Rewata Dhamma

### ✿ GENERAL NEWS

There are presently three new monks living at the Vihara besides Dr Rewata Dhamma, Nagasena Bhikkhu, Ashin Gandasara and Ashin Ratapala. Ashin Gosaka is a young monk from Yangon who has gained the highest Myanmar degree in Buddhist Studies, that of Dhammacariya. He will be staying with us for a year at first and is very diligently learning English. U Tiloka from the Myanmar Buddhist Temple in Singapore is spending the Rains Retreat here again. Then there is U Kumara, another learned monk from Yangon who is second only to Dr Rewata Dhamma in seniority. He is from a very busy monastery and is taking a break from his responsibilities until December.

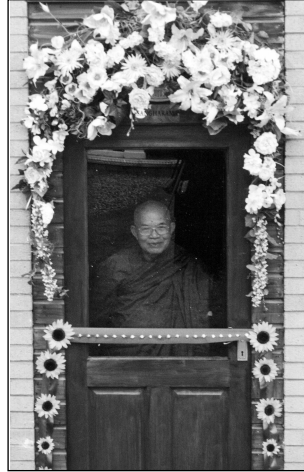
Over the summer holidays, Nagasena has not been teaching but has been working hard on our new website. During September he took part in two religious functions. He was at the civic commemoration of the September 11 events and chanted the fifth verse of the *Dhammapada* as a fitting message to all sides. Yann was there to read the English translation:

*Truly, hatred is not appeased by hatred in this world.*

*Hatred is appeased only by love. This is an ancient law.*

The sentiment seemed to be shared by all the other faith leaders present. Ten days later Nagasena took part in the Peace Vigil outside Carrs Lane Church organised by Sister Ann Buckeridge. Here he chanted the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*. In October he will be giving a talk at the University Buddhist Society. Then, at the end of the Rains Retreat, he hopes to pick up his degree from Sri Lanka, visit relatives in Bangladesh and attend a meeting of the World Sangha Council in Singapore.

Dr Rewata Dhamma has now taken up his role of international meditation teacher again. He began by leading a one-day retreat and giving a talk on Buddhism in Daily Life at the Sri Lankan Ketumatti Vihara in Manchester. Over the start of October he takes the annual week-long retreat organised by the Swiss Dhamma Group. In November he will take a four-day retreat jointly organised by Dutch and Belgian devotees in the southern



*At the Sangharama door*

Netherlands. In December he leads a Christmas to New Year retreat in Los Angeles.

Other meetings attended include one for faith leaders in the Lord Mayor's Parlour and another at St Chad's Cathedral. The latter was part of a regular series and this time concentrated on the vexed question of how representative are faith leaders of the communities in whose name they speak and what is the extent of their authority. In December he is due to give a talk to the University Buddhist Society. Also in his diary is the joint meeting of Trustees and Patrons with the Birmingham Council of Faiths Executive Committee and the next meeting of the West Midlands Buddhist Council.

### ✿ VIHARA

U Aung Myin, one of the Vihara's original Trustees and currently a Patron, celebrated his 70th birthday in July by giving a meal to the monks and making a donation towards our building expenses. Arriving with his whole family and various friends, he was joined by Mar Mar, Win Tin, Pye, Bill, Yann and Ann. Bhante gave a talk in which he explained that birthdays were not very significant in Buddhism since, as the Buddha said, we are born and die each moment – which would make rather

a lot to celebrate! While those in other religions do good deeds in order to please a god, Bhante continued, a Buddha cannot be pleased by us in that way. Our good deeds are done in order to purify our minds and so become like Him.

At the end of July we celebrated the 4th anniversary of the Pagoda in rather subdued style, since we were saving our main effort for the opening of the new monastery. That afternoon we hosted the traditional inter-faith dialogue organised by Birmingham Council of Faiths. This addressed the practical question of how faith communities can get on together in the city and was led by Richard Tetlow, Vicar of St John's, our neighbourhood church in Ladywood.

This took place on Dhammacakka Day, following which the monks vow to remain on site for the Rains Retreat. The building they moved into, while rather more than a shell, still had a long way to go before it could be considered as finished. With workmen putting in the final touches and furniture arriving piecemeal, it was an occasion for active rather than contemplative practice. All of the monks really put their backs into fixing the place up. Indeed, out of all the Theravadin monks in the city, ours were easily recognised by their paint-spattered robes and sandals.

By the evening of Saturday, 24 August, the new monastery was packed to bursting with visiting monks and lay people; other visitors filled Sunny's house, Mar Mar's and Mr Lal's.

*On the way to open the Sangharama*

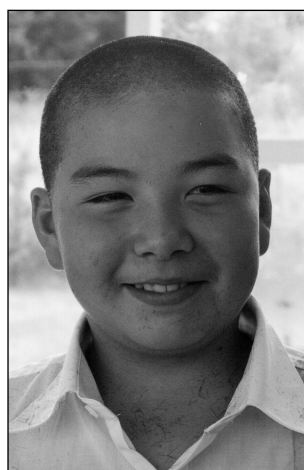




*U Chantha struts his stuff.*

That afternoon had seen four more take the robe. U Aung Myin was given the name Indavamsa while his grandson Jay-Jay took novice ordination as Javana. There were also two Brummies among them: our former Trustee Bryan Lester was ordained as Ven. Badda while Yann Lovelock became Nyanaloka Bhikkhu. Following the ordination ceremony the famous Myanmar dance troupe led by U Chantha entertained the audience with a selection of graceful and often satirical court dances. (Their programme was repeated the following afternoon as well.) Then in the evening a team of five Sri Lankan monks from Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester chanted Paritas in a style so distinctive and hypnotic that the time passed almost without our realising.

Sunday morning began with the religious ceremony of opening what is now called officially the Sangharama Monastery. At this there were about forty monks, a Russian anagarika, a female anagarika and a Zen lay minister, as well as over a hundred visitors. The cutting of the ribbon was with the same scissors as were used at the pagoda opening and performed by Ven. Vajranyana, flanked by Dr Rewata Dhamma and the Burmese Ambassador. Following dana and a communal meal, the monks filled an improvised stage and lay invitees of many faiths overflowed the marquee to hear a succession of speakers. These included for Buddhism Dr Vajranyana, Head of the London Buddhist Vihara; Rev.



*Speedy the Samanera*

Saido of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, incumbent at Telford Buddhist Priory; and H.E. the Ambassador of the Union of Myanmar, Dr Kyaw Win. For the Christians there were Monsignor Pat McKinney, Canon at St Chad's Cathedral, representing the Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham; the Very Rev. Gordon Mursell, Provost of the Anglican Cathedral; and Errol Sigamoney, a former refugee from South African apartheid, now Child Protection Officer for Walsall Council and Chair of Birmingham Council of Faiths.

Shi'a Muslims were represented by Mohammed Amin-Evans, a convert in charge of Information and Education at the El Mahdi Institute in Balsall Heath; for Sunni Muslims there was Choudhry Abdul Rasheed of the Central Mosque's management committee. Babaji Mohinder Singh, spiritual leader of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, spoke for the Sikhs while Nasreen Afran spoke on behalf of the Baha'i Spiritual Assembly.

The city was represented by Muhammad Afzal, Cabinet Member for Equalities & Human Resources on Birmingham City Council, and by the city's poet laureate, the former Trinidadian Senator Roi Kwabena, whose poem appears elsewhere in this issue. Nyanaloka Bhikkhu closed proceedings with a vote of thanks. Speakers were confined to five minutes each but in that short space inspired and encouraged us towards a spiritual unity of purpose.

The following Saturday saw all the monks from Wat Sanghathan in Handsworth Wood and Aston's Buddhavihara Temple arrive in a body to visit Ven. Rewata Dhamma. This was following a Thai custom of paying respect to senior monks in the area soon after the beginning of Vassa. Bhante pointed out to them that once one entered the robe there were no more national distinctions to be made, just as rivers become indistinguishable on entering the sea. On the other hand, certain lax customs tolerated in Eastern countries were liable to shock Western devotees. It was the duty of the

Sangha to live up to its highest ideals in the new country in which it found itself. Next day (not as a consequence, one hopes), Javana, Indavamsa and Badda reverted to lay life,

followed by Nyanaloka three days later.

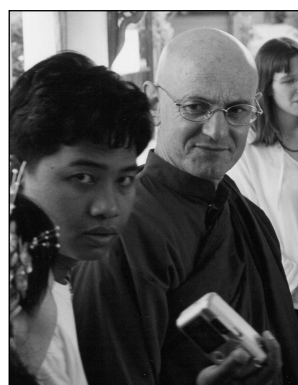
Yet another new face is to be found there, however. This is Thiha, whose Muslim name is Nemaullah, a 23 year-old visiting the country on a student visa to learn English.

#### ✿ ACTIVITIES

For a while meditation sessions were being held in the pagoda after the old shrine was moved there from Carlyle Road. That shrine is now in Sangharama, along with various other Buddharupas given as offerings, including a handsome Thai example brought by the monks on their Vassa visit. Advanced meditation sessions continue to take place there on Mondays under the direction of Nagasena Bhikkhu. At these there are also the occasional visiting speaker. Recently they have included Dr

Rewata Dhamma's old Czech disciple, now Ven. Kusalanda, and Nyanaloka Bhikkhu. The Thursday Beginners Class, led by Bill Strongman, is also well attended and lively discussion takes place at its meetings.

On October 5th we are having a distinguished visitor in the shape of the Lord Mayor of Birmingham,



*Bodhidhamma in characteristic pose.*

Cllr Mohammed Hussain. Unfortunately he had been away in Germany on the day of our opening, but next week he announced at a meeting of Birmingham Council of Faiths that he would welcome an invitation to a Buddhist Temple. Bhante was informed and promptly obliged. Now life is returning to something like normal, we are reinstating Devotees Day, which will take place on the first Sunday of each month. With seven monks to feed, this requires more organisation than in the past. The first takes place in October.

Looking ahead to the new year, we are planning to put on educational courses that will deal with Buddhist basics and subsequently consider the same topics at progressively deeper levels. We hope to reinstate the monthly Children's Dhamma Class by then as well. Also in the pipeline are lunch-time meditation sessions to cater for the large number of office workers in the vicinity.

A date for your diaries is Katthina Day, which will be held on November 3 this year. Further details will be sent out nearer the time. At the end of the month, the Vihara is hosting a foundation meeting of the West



Ann, Thanda San and Mar Mar

Midlands Buddhist Council. An initial meeting to look into the possibility of such a body was held at the end of August at Buddhavihara Temple. There was enough support then to justify taking it further. The basic idea is for a body to co-ordinate Buddhist activities throughout the West Midlands and foster good relations between the many different schools and organisations there, as well as to deal with enquiries concerning Buddhism from various Councils and agencies in the present climate of increasing multi-cultural awareness.

✿ **DEVOTEES**

All of the month of August was busy for the devotees who set to and helped with getting the monastery habitable and even adequately stocked. Right up to the last moment it was touch and go whether gas could be supplied for the cooker in time for the ceremony. Many thanks to everybody who helped in their

various ways to get us through that difficult time.

On Sunday, 11 August, there were also civic functions to attend. Bhante was joined by Yann and Ann at the Krishna Consciousness Movement's celebration of the Jagnath Festival. This involved hauling a 50-foot high chariot by hand through the streets of Birmingham. Although Bhante did not go quite so far as to lend a hand, Ann did, while Yann joined the Deputy Lord Mayor in sweeping the streets in front of it.

They were also scheduled as speakers in Victoria Square afterwards, but the event had started late and they had another engagement that afternoon. This was the annual Mass held in the Oratory (just round the corner from the old Vihara) on the anniversary of Cardinal Newman's death. The ultimate aim is to persuade the Vatican to declare Newman a saint. It was the first time members of other faiths had been invited to this. Besides Bhante, Yann and Ann, it was attended by Iranian and English clerics, both belonging to the Clifton Road Shi'a mosque in Balsall Heath. Rt Revd Cuthbert Johnson, Benedictine incumbent at Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight, gave an excellent sermon. He pointed out the very evident desire of the haters of religion to see those who profess faith falling short of their ideals. *'The world doesn't care about mediocre Christians, they aren't seen as a threat.'* What is needed is better knowledge of the faith rather than blind lip service so as to deepen it and improve behaviour. It is clear that even those chosen as role models by the majority, footballers and media personalities, are letting down people's expectations. Never was there a better time to return to devotion to the saints. The abbot's lesson applies equally well to us as Buddhists.

Ann and Yann attended the annual Inter-Faith Conference at Atlantic College next

weekend, along with Rev. Hogetsu (back from Ireland, where she is planning to set up a monastery on behalf of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives). Together they gave presentations and led meditation sessions. Then Yann and Sally Edwards of Aston Reinvestment Trust (which has been very supportive of the Vihara over the past year) spent much of the next week publicising the opening and calling on every press contact they could influence.

The first to respond was the *Birmingham Mail* which published a long article with photographs. Many of us found it snide, disrespectful and inaccurate. We were therefore relieved when the *Birmingham Post* asked us to check their long article first. BBC 2 were there on the day with their cameras and

Sharing merit in the Sangharama Shrine Room



broadcast coverage of the opening several times on Midlands Today. Saga Radio, Heart FM, BRMB and BBC WM all featured the event that Sunday. In addition, Saga Radio invited Nyanaloka onto a chat show a couple of days after he left the monastery. This resulted in several new people turning up for sessions.

At the AGM of Birmingham Council of Faiths (also attended by Ven. Nagasena and Sunny), Ann was re-elected Secretary, Yann as Publicity Officer and Ramona Kauth as Buddhist representative. Retiring as Chair on this occasion, Dh. Vajragupta now takes on the post of Advisory Chair. He was complimented at the meeting on his skilful and proactive leadership over the past year. In addition, Yann has been asked to act as a Trustee of the Roger Hooker Trust, which funds local activities to promote inter-faith dialogue, especially among young people. He was actually among the original founders of the Trust, along with Ramona, who remained on the board as Trustee once it was set up. ♦

**SANGHARAMA  
ACTIVITIES**

**Meditation:** *Advanced*, Mondays 7.30pm  
*Beginners*, Thursday 7pm.

**Zen Group:** First Friday in the month.

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

**Full Moon Days:** Chanting in the Pagoda, 7.30pm. (Mon., Oct. 21; Tues., Nov. 19, Thurs., Dec. 19).

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