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# lotus

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## Global Buddhism

**E**ven while he was on his deathbed, the Buddha continued giving his followers advice. He was already preparing himself for the final moment when he told his monks not to bother themselves about the disposal of his remains. These could safely be left to the devoted care of lay followers. His ashes might be housed in a stupa built in his honour and there 'people will make offerings of flowers or incense or scented powder, or will pay homage, or will feel reverence in their minds. To such people benefit and happiness will accrue for a long time.'

(*Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, 76)

The ashes were originally divided between eight stupas. Those built by his Sakyan relatives in Kapilavathu and by his royal patrons in Magadha remained undisturbed until modern times. Following investigation of the sites by archaeologists in the newly independent India, the remains discovered there were deposited in museums. The Sakyan relics are presently contained in a suitable casket and on show in Delhi Museum. To cater for the growth of Buddhism the Emperor Asoka is said to have had the remaining stupas opened and the ashes divided into smaller portions between many thousand stupas.

Asoka's activities on Buddhism's behalf included sending missionaries to surrounding countries, with the result that there was an

increased demand for relics of the Buddha and the growth of stories that the Buddha himself had travelled East and preached his message in the states involved. Rather than simply ashes and bits of charred bone, some relics became rather more specific. An eye-tooth of the Buddha was claimed at Kandy (Sri Lanka) from early times; another tooth was taken to Arakan, while some of the Buddha's hairs are said to be enshrined in Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda.



Now in these days of globalisation, relics are travelling even further afield. Amongst others Amaravati monastery has some; Dhammatalaka Peace Pagoda was built for relics once belonging to the royal family of Myanmar... and has recently been given some of Sariputta's into the bargain. Buddhavihara, yet another temple in Birmingham, has also recently acquired relics from Thailand and is enshrining them on its second anniversary.

One more sign of Buddhism's globalisation was the resolution by the United Nations Assembly on the very eve of the new Millennium to declare Buddha Day a day of international celebration for itself and all its agencies. In recognition of this, the Thai Supreme Patriarch had a golden memorial stupa made in 2000 and requested relics from the three main Theravadin countries – Sri Lanka, Myanmar and his own. These were then presented to the UN for eventual enshrinement in their

Whoso reveres those worthy of reverence, whether Buddhas or disciples, merit is theirs beyond measurement.

*Dhammapada* 195-6

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**WISH LIST**

Anyone wishing to donate any of the following should get in touch with the Vihara and speak either to Dr Rewata Dhamma or Bhante Nagasena.

- ▶ Photocopier
- ▶ Sony tape and transcription equipment to record dhamma talks.
- ▶ Guillotine
- ▶ Compost bin

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 the opinions expressed may be at variance with your own. Be mindful of this. Comment and criticism is always welcome and should be addressed to the Editor at the address given on p.12 Copy for the Autumn issue should reach us by not later than the end of August.

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Our thanks go to Dea Paradisos for her illustrations.

New York headquarters. In the meanwhile they are in the care of two Thai custodians, touring the world.

On Buddha Day, 2002, Secretary-General Kofi Annan acknowledged Buddhism's contribution to the world in these words:

*In this time of global uncertainty, the Buddha's vision of peace and of humanity's highest potentials may be more relevant than ever before. Indeed, if we want to have a chance of overcoming the many challenges that face us today – in the fields of peace and security, development and the protection of our global environment – we must think beyond our narrow, short-term interests and raise ourselves to a universal perspective from which the wellbeing of the broader human community appears as important as our own wellbeing. Each of us shares the hope of a more peaceful, equitable and sustainable future. Our actions – as individuals and as members of our communities – must be guided by that common dream.*

*On this day of Vesak, let us remember that whatever our origin, our race, our culture or our belief, we are not essentially different. Above all, we share the same home, a shrinking planet on which we are bound to live together. So let us work together towards the common good and the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of all the world's people.*

The rule for the exhibition of the UN Relics is that they may only visit any country once. We in Birmingham have the honour of hosting their visit to Britain; our pagoda has been given the responsibility of hosting the ceremony of veneration and those there have worked hard to see that the good news has been spread as widely as possible to all schools of Buddhism. That work brings its own reward and is shared by the many who have been assisting us in one way or another, a number that goes far beyond our own limited manpower.

As the Buddha pointed out, it is the state of mind in which one approaches the relics from which benefit is reaped. In the present circumstances, we should remember Kofi Annan's inspiring vision of the Buddha's teaching as something that brings people together in peace and harmony. Let us approach their coming with this in mind and rise above questions of school and of personal benefit. Let us work for the good of all in this instance and continue to do so in everything to which we put our hand for the benefit of Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. This, as the Buddha also pointed out in his final moments, is the true way to serve and honour him. May the veneration we feel inspire us to greater diligence in cultivating the wisdom and compassion of which our world stands so greatly in need.

Linda Tomlinson  
Yann Lovelock

# Knowing why you are here

Extracts from a talk given by Bhikkhu Nagasena.

I am always very happy to see you come to meditation. By coming you show you have the desire to practice. Perhaps you have heard that meditation helps rid you of anxiety, fear, stress, agitation or depression. I can confirm to you that it does help and, of course, you are welcome to come for this reason. But as your teacher I would like to point out that Vipassana has a greater objective and greater rewards. Vipassana enables you to understand the Buddha's teachings, and by doing so to see into the reality of all your experiences.

Let me give you an example of the limitations of using the practice just to alleviate stress and so on. Say I decide I want to go to London. This desire will have little effect if all I do is just want. I need to take action. I must find out how to get there, which is the best method of travel, how much it will cost, what are the traveling times, which is the quickest way? Without such action I may set off but go on a circuitous route and maybe never get there. Or I may eventually arrive but have wasted a lot of time and money along the way. It is the same with meditation practice – desire must be accompanied by both action and the wisdom to know what is right action.

Desire without wisdom is of no benefit on the spiritual path. Ignorance will never lead to achievement. So it is very important to understand what motive has brought you to this class. If you understand your motive, then wisdom will make clear to you what effort you need to take to reach your goal. You must decide how you want to use your life, which way you want to go. If you decide you want nothing more than to find a way to relax, this practice may be of some use to you, along with many other techniques available elsewhere, but I do not believe its benefit will be long term without spiritual aspiration and development. If your practice is motivated by a desire to dedicate your life to achieving enlightenment in this very life, then you should hold fast to this determination. Keep the desire for enlightenment in your mind always and make sure that all your actions are in accordance with this intention.

The range of actions we need to perform to attain enlightenment is vast, some are very difficult. In this class we chant the Metta Sutta, which is very meaningful to this subject. Amongst the methods of

attaining the state of peace is included the advice that "you should not always be busy". Always filling up your life with work and activities not only brings you stress, anxiety, exhaustion and depression but it deters the maintenance of the mindfulness you are trying to cultivate in your meditation. I have actually had people say to me that they have experienced the peace and calm that comes with practice but, unfortunately, when they are busy, with lots to do, lots of association with people, they lose this mindfulness and become agitated. They can see what slowing down can do but can't seem to manage it.

Simplicity is the answer, and it is a beautiful way to live. This is the way to develop a spiritual life. You do not need to give up the world. Even if you don't achieve enlightenment in this life you will be able to change it for the better. Go slowly, develop your mind, develop your understanding and wisdom, and I believe that you will find it possible to attain stream entry. This is the first stage of achievement along the path to enlightenment and I do not think it is very hard.

Do not imagine, however, that at this stage one eliminates the ego. We can reduce it only by continuing to develop knowledge, by understanding the law of cause and effect and especially by purifying the mind. And that is only going to be purified through meditation practice, right action, knowledge and mindfulness.

So, decide what is your reason for practice. Whatever your goal: relaxation or attainment of spiritual development, reduce your activities and practice well. As I said earlier, if you know you want to reach somewhere and you understand the best way to get there, then even if the journey is slow it will be sure and you will succeed. Always bear in mind why you are coming to this meditation centre. Are you interested in the Buddha's teaching? You may feel you are and like some aspects of the Dhamma but don't practice it. This is not the way to develop spiritually. You must develop understanding and right effort. Slowly, following the path step by step wisely and with right intention, you may find it very easy to attain the streamwinner's state, and maybe full enlightenment even in this lifetime, right here and now.

May all of you understand the Dhamma well. ❖

## IS JUST LOVING ICE CREAM ENOUGH?

Do you find practising metta bhavana difficult? A lot of us do, I'm sure, but why do you think that is? Is it because of the way that the loving-kindness meditation has been formalized as we are guided through the various stages of visualizing ourselves, our loved ones, all beings, etc? Maybe we feel a little insincere because we can't work up a natural and genuine love for all beings. There is some difficulty too with the word 'love'. We are reminded that our love for our children, parents, wives, husbands, etc. tends to fall short of the real thing because it is often tinged with greed and selfish attachment. And 'I love ice cream' – that's hardly metta, is it? So, contemplating all this, it is hardly surprising that some people are put off the practice permanently and feel that Buddhist loving-kindness belongs in a realm too high and rarified to be achieved by ordinary mortals like us.

We can make some progress towards understanding what true loving-kindness is if we ask for guidance from those in the robe and persist with our practice. It is possible for all of us to develop a deeper understanding of ourselves in relation to others and be more aware of our real motivation. There is a tendency sometimes for many of us, when we work hard at the practice of the Buddha-dhamma, to become a little insular and remote because, I suppose, the practice is such a personal thing and ultimately we have to strive alone toward our own salvation. But always remember there are the Sangha and our friends in the Dhamma who are ready and willing to help. Their kindness and compassion may not yet be perfected but it is well meant and spontaneously given.

*Even the most exalted states  
and most exceptional spiritual accomplishments  
are unimportant if we can't be happy  
in the most basic and ordinary ways,  
if we cannot touch another  
and the life we have been given with our hearts.*

Jack Kornfield

But, as we keep trying for perfection, it helps if one lightens the heart and lets go a little. Let's share a smile and laugh sometimes. Remember we are still in samsara together. One day, with practice, we will understand more about our motives and be purified, but until then I find comfort personally in being in the company of fellow sufferers who act spontaneously out of real concern and sympathy with our shared human frailty.

Bill



## AN EXPERIENCE OF MEDITATION

Malika Kottegoda

I took seriously to meditation after I retired. As my teacher Goenkaji said - "The time was ripe." Against general advice I went straight into a 10-day course with an open mind. That abrupt beginning altered my life. My priorities and outlook changed. I realised the triviality of material possessions and much more.

Continuous sitting without moving, overcoming hindrances such as drowsiness, restlessness and coping with silence, were some of the problems I faced at first. Within a few years I had done five 10-day courses and was thirsting for longer. I completed two 20-day courses during the next couple of years and felt ready to sit a 30-day course. But this was not a race - far from it! I was realising the impermanence of everything associated with life itself. Each course was an eye-opener as I experienced the benefits of applied concentration on the object.

I mentioned to my son one day that life was now more satisfying; that is, things just fell into place and I was becoming freer from day to day hindrances. But maybe this would be shortlived; how long would such a trouble-free period last? But it's almost 8 years on now and I find that petty differences and generating anger are things of the past. I know the truth of what is often said so glibly for the practice has grown into 'a way of life', concentration and moment to moment awareness have become a habit of mind. I have developed tolerance and a great deal of compassion. Developing equanimity is foremost.

For me, sitting a long course is the more beneficial as morality and the Noble Silence play a great part in the whole process. The sensations are sensational! Realising that life is fickle and can be relinquished in an instant makes one more determined to detach from anger, criticism, greed and craving. My only regret is that I did not start meditation earlier for it would have helped me in my working life. All one experiences is enriched by the practice.

I still lead a normal everyday life, but my daily prayer after a session of meditation is to find the strength to help fellow human beings in whatever act or form and show them that there is a ray of hope in every situation. Kindness, compassion and tolerance are the key words to strive to live by. ❖

*Thus have I heard.*

A man had been studying Buddhism for a few years and found it fascinating. But he really wanted to become enlightened very soon and was getting a bit impatient with himself. He had read in the *Satipatthana Sutta* that one could become enlightened after seven years, seven months, even seven days of practice. Had that happened with him? Ha ha!

One day he decided to set off for a Zen Buddhist Centre near to the Ironbridge Gorge. On his arrival he found the Abbot working in his garden. The man introduced himself as a sincere seeker of truth on the Buddhist Path who wanted to see if the Zen tradition could help him become enlightened. He said to the Abbot, "I understand you use koans and various other forms for sudden enlightenment." The Abbot looked at him with serene compassion and told him he was welcome and would he like some tea or food. He said 'No' and asked where he could find the library. The Abbot pointed it out and off the seeker went with great haste, so much so that the Abbot did not have a chance to tell him that the books had been moved into a storeroom while the walls were being emulsioned. When the man found himself in an empty room he thought, 'Aha! This is a koan. The bookless library. Very Zen.' He went to see the Abbot to ask what had happened to the books. The Abbot replied, "Books are alright. You can use them to gain intellectual knowledge and they can be entertaining, inspirational, even educational, but if you want to gain enlightenment you might as well hit yourself over the head with the *Dhammapada*.' 'Aha! Another Zen trick,' thought the man. The Abbot suggested that he bring balance by study and practice but the man thought, 'Well, I've tried that for a few years without much gain, but I do get his logic: start again with a different approach. I will begin with the *Dhammapada*, miss out the middle stuff and go straight to the dhamma.

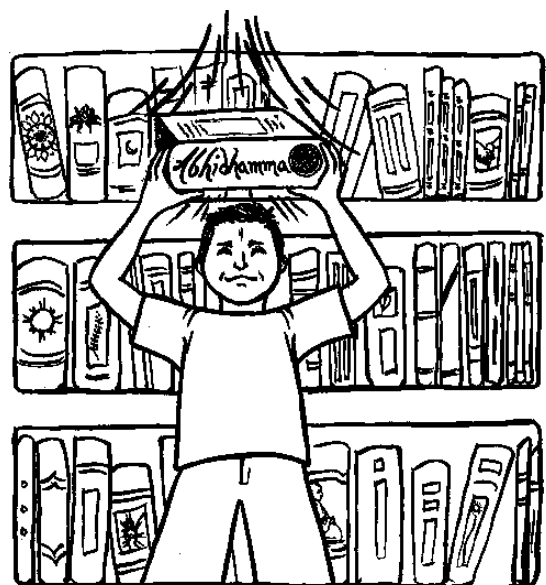
The next morning he went to the library at the FWBO centre in Moseley. He selected a copy of the *Dhammapada*, held it firmly in his right hand, carefully raised it then, remembering the words of the Zen Master, brought it swiftly down on his head. An Order member saw this and, very concerned for his well-being, asked him what he was doing. The man replied, 'I am trying for sudden enlightenment.' 'I see,' said the Order

member. 'You really cannot expect to become enlightened by hitting yourself over the head with this copy of the *Dhammapada*.' Gently and reassuringly, the Dhaarmacari took the book from him and, holding it lightly in the open palm of his right hand and moving his hand up and down slowly, he said, 'This is a paperback and weighs only a few ounces. Have you ever been to Amaravati? They have an extensive library with a large leather bound copy of the *Dhammapada* there which must weight a couple of kilos at least.'

## The Logic of the Deluded Mind

Tom Maxwell

The beauty of the Hemel Hempstead countryside went unnoticed as, with eyebrows tight and his hands gripped firmly on the steering wheel, the man made his way along the winding roads that led to the deathless place of peace that is Amaravati. He made straight for the library and to where the *Dhammapada* should be. Instead there was only a leather-bound *Dhammapada*-sized empty space. He couldn't believe his bad luck and turned away in frustration. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a large leather-bound copy of the *Abhidhamma*. Grabbing it, he started hitting himself over the head. The loud echo caught the attention of the Abbot who was passing under the window at the time. He entered the library and in his firm voice asked, "Would you please tell me why you are hitting yourself with that copy of the *Abhidhamma*?" The man responded with "Because the *Dhammapada* is missing." The Abbot considered this the strange logic of a deluded mind. ❖



# BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL EUROPE

(An abridged text of the speech of thanks by Ven. Dr. Ayu Kusala Ananda  
at the ordination of the Ayukusala Central European Sangha  
on 13 January 2003 at Mahasi Sasana Yeiktha, Yangon)

What we are experiencing today is a peak in the development of the European Sangha. After 35 years systematically preparing the conditions for this, I am indeed happy to have brought about higher ordination for four chosen European samaneras here in Myanmar. These new monks have for years studied the Dhamma as laymen; thereafter, as samaneras, they learned the monastic discipline in the forest monasteries of Sri Lanka. They come to Yangon for further training in order to get all necessary competence for their future work for the Dhamma in Europe.

There were European monks ordained in the traditional Theravada countries from the very start of the 20th Century. For example, my teacher Ven. Nyanaponika was ordained in Sri Lanka in 1937 and his teacher Ven Nyanatiloka was ordained in Myanmar in 1902. They were the only European monks to participate as full members of the 4th General Buddhist Council in 1954-1956. Many European monks have ordained for shorter periods. Nevertheless, what we are witnessing today is an event special in a particular way that I want to explain in more detail.

I first came across Mahasi Sayadaw's name 35 years ago in Bodhgaya. At the end of my meditation training there, in November 1967, my teacher Sri Anagarika Munindra gave me a book by the Sayadaw. It was partly in order to answer my questions about the origin of the meditation method in which I and a friend of mine had been instructed. In fact we had been taught two different methods, both leading to similar stages in the progress of insight. I was practising high concentration on breathing (anapana-jhana), which had been, till that time, my main practice. My friend was taught to observe the movements of the abdomen. Our teacher's analysis of the progress of insight on both these ways of meditation had impressed me so much that I wanted to go to study further with Mahasi Sayadaw in Myanmar. Instead Sri Munindra asked me to go to Europe and start

teaching the Mahasi method of Satipatthana-Vipassana there.

Starting from 1971, Ven Nyanaponika Mahathera and I taught the Mahasi method in short meditation courses every summer in Switzerland. As I was then working as a psychotherapist and a psychology professor at Berne University, most of our pupils were themselves doctors and psychologists. We were also considering what had to be done to create the necessary conditions for the prolonged sojourn of monks in Europe.

In 1975, after a longer meditation retreat with Ven Nyanaponika in Sri Lanka, I went to Yangon to see the Most Venerable U Sobhana, the Mahasi Sayadaw, for the first time. Before that I had visited Sri Munindra in Bodh-Gaya and he introduced me to another senior pupil of Mahasi Sayadaw then living in Benares, the Ven. Rewata Dhamma. Thus I have enjoyed since that time the support of three excellent disciples of Mahasi Sayadaw: Sri Munindra, Ven Nyanaponika, Ven Rewata Dhamma.

The Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw questioned me closely about my meditation experience during my retreats with Sri Munindra in 1967 and with Ven Nyanaponika in 1975. He listened intently to all that was translated for him sentence by sentence. He also answered my questions about the four types of combining samatha and vipassana, as cited in the Catuka-Nipata of the Anguttara-Nikaya. And I was very happy to hear the Most Venerable accept my invitation to come to Switzerland.

The time for that visit became ripe in 1979. I was informed that Mahasi Sayadaw had also accepted an invitation to America, financed by the pupils of Sri Munindra there. From America he would proceed to England and then to Switzerland.

With the help of Ven Nyanaponika, we contacted all the European Buddhist groups but



A WATERCOLOUR PORTRAIT OF VEN. KUSALANDA BY FLORIAN WILD, WHO DID THE PAINTING (INSTEAD OF TAKING NOTES) DURING A SEMINAR ON PSYCHOTOPE EXPLORATION -- TILOKA-VAVATTHANA", SEPTEMBER 2002 IN VIENNA, AUSTRIA

found none interested in Satipatthana-Vipassana meditation. Only some individuals invited Mahasi Sayadaw for short visits to the Netherlands, France and Italy. The Sayadaw's Swiss program included three main items: a two-week meditation course, a public meditation session and a lecture at the University of Zurich.

The Satipatthana-Vipassana course at Mont-Soleil in the Swiss Jura Mountains was the only one ever conducted by the Sayadaw in Europe. However, due to health problems that arose while visiting France, our teacher was delayed a few days. That is why the participants started their meditation under instruction from Dr Mirko Fryba. During the second week, the individual interviews were conducted by Mahasi Sayadaw and translated by U Rewata Dhamma. The group interviews were conducted by Venerable Sayadaw U Janaka and translated by Dr Fryba. This whole event was organized by the Dhamma Group of Switzerland, which I had founded in October 1977. Courses in the Mahasi tradition continued to be organized by this group till my leaving for Sri Lanka in 1983.

After the Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw's passing away, Venerable Sayadaw U Rewata Dhamma was the doyen of the Mahasi tradition in Europe. I stayed in contact with him during the 1980s while living near my other teacher, Ven Nyanaponika Mahathera, in Sri Lanka. In

Switzerland it seemed at first that the Mahasi tradition would continue without my further help and I therefore devoted my energies to preparing the conditions for the systematic training of European monks in Sri Lanka. When the Central European countries became liberated from Soviet rule, Ven Nyanaponika asked me to start Dhamma work in Czechoslovakia because I know the language. So I conducted the very first Satipatthana-Vipassana retreat in the Mahasi style near the Czech capital of Prague in November 1990.

Sayadaw Rewata Dhamma gave his full support to my work in Czechoslovakia. The result of this is now before your eyes. You see here five pupils of the Ayukusala Central European Sangha, four of them having just obtained higher ordination in the Mahasi Parampara today. Another four Czech and Slovak monks are at present living in Sri Lanka. All are under the protection of the International Buddhist Foundation, now based in Brno, which operates under the patronage of Aggamahapandita Bhaddanta Rewata Dhamma.

Allow me, in closing, to express my thanks to U Rewata Dhamma, for consenting to act as the Preceptor today. I must also mention the great contribution towards organizing our way, as well as preparing this auspicious event of Going Forth, given by Dr Mar Mar Lwin from Birmingham. Her sister Daw Phyu Phyu Maw has taken care of all here in Yangon on her behalf. Thus this family, headed by their father U Win Sein, deserves our great appreciation and gains great merit. Sadhu! ❖❖Sadhu, Sadhu! ❖

All the grounds for making merit leading to spontaneous arising in heavenly realms do not equal one-sixteenth of the release of awareness through loving-kindness. Good will -- surpassing them -- shines, blazes, and dazzles.

Just as the radiance of all the stars does not equal one-sixteenth of the radiance of the moon, even so, all the grounds for making merit do not equal one-sixteenth of the release of awareness through loving kindness. Good will -- surpassing them -- shines, blazes, and dazzles.

Just as in the last month of the autumn rains, when the sky is clear and cloudless, the sun on ascending shines, blazes, and dazzles, overpowering the space sunk in darkness, even so, all the grounds for making merit do not equal one-sixteenth of the release of awareness through loving kindness. Good will -- surpassing them -- shines, blazes, and dazzles.

Just as in the pre-dawn darkness the morning star shines, blazes, and dazzles, even so, all the grounds for making merit do not equal one-sixteenth of the release of awareness through loving kindness. Good will -- surpassing them -- shines, blazes, and dazzles.

**Itivuttaka, Group of Ones, #27**

# Living Lightly On The Earth

## Upasaka Nyanaloka considers a Buddhist approach to ecology



Although the interdependence of all things lies at the heart of Buddhist teaching, ecology as such is a modern formulation. We might certainly plead that it is a much needed restatement of the Buddhist vision in modern times, we might side with the poets (among them, the Buddha himself) and agree that truth gets lost in the words and therefore needs restating anew from age to age. It is still up to us, however, to prove our claim from traditional sources in order to carry everyone with us.

For such a position to be convincing we need to look at three areas. First we must prove from the Buddha's own words that an ecological vision is included in his teaching. Secondly, we must be able to point to areas of the training recommended by the Buddha where our ecological concern can be put into practice. Many would argue that, on the contrary, the Buddha's is a system of spiritual growth that trains us away from identification with the phenomenal world. In addition, then, we must look for similar interpretations of the Dhamma by earlier Buddhists. If we find that we are in fact following in the footsteps of others, then our case will be proved.

To begin, then, with the Buddha's own words, we find this in the Gradual Sayings:

*He who has understanding and great wisdom does not think of harming himself or another, nor of harming both alike. He rather thinks of his own welfare, of that of others, of that of both, and of the welfare of the whole world. In that way one shows understanding and great wisdom."*

*(Anguttara Nikaya, Fours, No. 18)*

In that the Buddha starts from the position of regarding all animate life as sacred, the phrase 'the whole world' must therefore be understood in its widest sense. He is pointing, as usual, to the ideal

towards which the training leads. Something of this can be read into the Buddha's consciously dedicating several days of gratitude to the Bodhi Tree under which his enlightenment experience took place. In Zen tradition much is made of the fact that most of the Sakyamuni's cardinal experiences took place under trees - his birth under a sal tree, his first jhanic experience of meditation under a roseapple, his enlightenment under a baobab, his passing away in a sal grove. A Buddhist's care, therefore, must extend beyond the animate. For this reason, their Zen version of the Boddhisatva Vow states that one will continue striving for the welfare of all beings until even the blades of grass are enlightened. This may not be understood literally, but it does indicate that a follower of the Way sees his training as encompassing care for the whole world.

This widening of the Buddhist reverence for life, expressed in the first rule of training to abstain from harm to any being, also manifests in the monastic rule that prohibits destroying trees or seeds or causing them to be destroyed. It arose from the Jain understanding of the chain of life, extending from the mineral through the vegetable to the animate. In the case of this prohibition, it is generally understood that the Buddha did not wish his followers to cause offence to those with differing beliefs. Its result, however, has been a more thoughtful approach to the environment generally. In Thailand, it is true, the dye for monastic robes (in the forest tradition at least) was obtained by boiling the roots of the jack tree. Now that the existence of tropical forests there is threatened, however, this practice has been forbidden by the monastic authorities. Even long-standing tradition, so dear to Theravadin monasticism, can be overturned when a threat to the environment is perceived.

One of the keys to ecological action is found in the second factor of the Eightfold Path, namely Right Motivation (Intention or Thought). These are factors of wisdom, to be cultivated for their own sake but also strengthened by the practice of bodily

and mental discipline - the threefold grouping of Sila, Samadhi and Pañña. Right Motivation comprises harmless (ahimsa), compassion (karuna) and renunciation (nekhamma). The renunciation demanded need not be that of going into homelessness. But even if we retain our homes, the training asks us to make do with the minimum. Craving for more is the cause of suffering, and if that craving results in a major threat to the planet, then we should remember that it is our duty to cause no harm and to be compassionate. All these things hang together.

We see from the above that care for the animate sphere, simply because all things are interdependent, entails care in our handling of the inanimate. This is reinforced by the third precept by which we engage not to misuse the senses. Traditionally this has been limited to the sexual sphere; the precept's rewording in retreat situations is *abrahmacariya*, the keeping of absolute chastity. Normally one vows 'not to misuse the senses' (*kamesu miccacara*), bearing in mind the Buddha's saying that nothing stimulates each of a man's senses so much as the sight, sound, touch, etc of a woman, nor a woman's than that of a man. Undoubtedly this is so but it is capable of a wider interpretation. Each of these rules is there to train us towards an ideal of conduct. Mere chastity is only the beginning; total control of our appetites, of our craving, is the end in view. The third precept is therefore our ecological charter. It asks us to take only so much as we really need. To waste the planet's finite resources and thereby imperil all of life for the sake of selfish greed is an act of criminal thoughtlessness.

Finally we should bear in mind that the Emperor Asoka certainly interpreted the Buddha's Dhamma as having care for the environment. The first Rock Edict (see *Lotus 7*) not only prohibits animal sacrifices but also the killing of animals for festival meals; in addition the king takes the lead in limiting his own use of meat with the aim of giving it up altogether. In the second edict he explains that he has encouraged the cultivation of medicinal plants for the use of humans and animals. In addition he had wells dug and trees planted along the roads for the welfare of both. This stops short of an ecological vision, of course, but the need for such care was not so pressing in Asoka's day. In any case, his concern was the application of Dhamma to governance; his focus would naturally be different from that of a religious teacher.

The presentation above was given as part of a recent seminar on developing green awareness in faith traditions. The others participating included a

Quaker, a Jew, a Sikh and a Muslim. All took the approach of finding sanction from their scriptures and from traditional practice. It was heartening to find such unanimity. Naturally new developments call forth new responses, but in this case the testimony of all seemed to be that they were returning to teachings which had ceased to be emphasised under the onslaught of modern materialism. In earlier days, when the limitation of resources was assumed as a matter of course, more care was taken to conserve them. For our own sake, and for the sake of all life, we need to bring that state of mind to the forefront of our practice once again. ❖



### ... the mosquito, the spider and me

Harmlessness towards all living beings is my practice. At times this is easier than others. I have trouble with slugs, for example, but am doing better with spiders. However, it came as a shock when I found my practice transcending even my own expectations.

I was on a Goenka retreat in Hereford last autumn. I had my own room with shower and toilet en suite. As the days passed and the solitude and quiet slowed me down, I realized that the resident spider no longer bothered me (will it walk over my face when I sleep?) but was a welcome being sharing space with me! But that was as nothing compared to my reaction to the mosquitoes.

Having been bitten quite a few times, I became conscious of their presence in my room, particularly one who seemed to have remained unmoving on one tile in the shower for days. My curiosity as to how long he could survive in one spot, and my worry that I might find him dead from starvation, caused me to think about his diet.

Getting into bed that night and, as usual, pulling the duvet high above my body, neck and face to protect me from insect marauders, I knew I just couldn't leave it. What to do? Finally I placed one naked arm over the duvet and went to sleep! In the morning he'd gone. My arm was still over the covers – unpunctured.

Coincidence - or reciprocity of compassion? We'll have to see what the annual mosquito invasion brings this summer, shan't we!

Linda

# Booze and the Bodhisattva

Once upon a time, when Brahmadata was king, the future Buddha was born into a family more than a little well off. And like many another prudent man of wealth, he added riches to riches until he became the wealthiest in Varanasi.

Now in the city of that time there also happened to be a gang of drunkards. All they ever thought about was finding ways to get alcohol - the drug they thought they couldn't live without - and most of their ruses were dishonest. Though all things are subject to change, the ways of such folk change the least! One day, when they had run out of money as usual, they hatched a scheme to rob the richest man in the city. What they didn't realise was that this particular man was the reborn Bodhisattva, who wouldn't be so easy to fool!

They decided to make a Mickey Finn, which is liquor with a sleeping drug secretly added to it. Their plan was to get the richest man to drink this concoction. Then when he fell asleep they would rob him of everything, even the costly clothes he wore. So they set up a temporary roadside bar such as you see on the pavements of Eastern cities. Then they mixed a sleeping draught into their last remaining liquor, decanted it into a tempting looking bottle and waited for their victim to appear.

By and by the rich man passed on his way to the palace. One of the wily villains called out to him, "Honourable sir, why not start your day right by having a drink with us? And the first

one is on the house!" Then he poured out a glass ready. But the Enlightenment Being did not drink any form of alcohol. Nevertheless, he wondered why these drunkards were being so generous with their favourite drug. It just wasn't like them at all.



Realising it must be some kind of trick, he decided to pay them back in their own coin and teach them a lesson. So he said, "It would be an insult to appear before the king in a drunken state, or with even the slightest smell of liquor on my breath. Be so kind as to wait for me here, generous gentlemen. I'll call by again on my way back."

The drunkards were disappointed. They would not be able to drink again as soon as they wanted. But there was nothing else for it but to be patient and wait. By the time the rich man returned the alcoholics were well nigh desperate for a drink.

"Honourable sir," they greeted him, "Now is the time to celebrate your visit to the king. Have a taste of this fine liquor. Remember, the first one is free!"

But the rich man just kept looking at the bottle and glass.

They were exactly as they had been that morning. "If it's as good as you say it is," he exclaimed, "you would have tasted some by now. In fact, you couldn't help but drink it all! I'm no fool. There's something wrong with your liquor, and I don't mean to find out what it is."

So saying, the wise man went soberly on his way, leaving the gang of baffled drunkards to their plotting and scheming. Steer clear of what is harmful to you, he thought to himself, and it's more than a hangover you'll escape! ❖

# SANGHA NEWSLETTER

## Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

Spiritual Director: Aggamahapandita Bhaddanta Rewata Dhamma

### ✿ GENERAL NEWS

Our focus on meditation continues. The Thursday session for beginners is doing particularly well with 10-15 every evening, ably led by Nagasena Bhikkhu and Bill Strongman. The monthly meditation retreats are also well attended. These have included a one-day retreat led by Bhikkhu Nagasena in April and a weekend retreat this June led by Ven. Bodhidhamma. There have also been a number of Swiss ladies taking individual retreats combined with Abhidhamma instruction from Dr Rewata Dhamma. At present we have Elizabeth, whose whole family has been studying with Bhante for some twenty years; she has also been responsible for organising his regular Swiss seminars at Dicken.

Linda and Pamela have been carrying on their work of reorganising the library. Mrs Khin has recently added to the office equipment there by contributing a new computer which her son-in-law, our Trustee Leslie Gray, has set up and put on-line for us. We have also had a shredder and laminator contributed recently by other Burmese donors. Yet another, U Zaw Lwin from Cologne, has contributed the expenses for a new porch at the Sangharama's front door to match that on the pagoda opposite, as well as for a rain porch at the back door.

At the end of May it was our pleasure to host a meeting between the Buddhist community and the new Anglican Bishop, John Sentamu. Besides Theravadins there were representatives from the Sakya, Kagyu and Zen communities as well as the WBO. The Bishop, accompanied by his interfaith adviser, Chris Hewer, was shown round the Pagoda and monastery before an open discussion over tea. Another distinguished and more permanent visitor will be our new incumbent, Ven. Uttaranayana, who is expected in the first week of July.

Meanwhile Nagasena has been earning himself lots of merit at all the Buddha Day celebrations he has attended. These included two held by Sai Baba groups in Birmingham, at which he gave short talks, as well as one in Redbridge Vihara, preceded by a morning's meditation that he led. He was also present at the Thai New Year celebrations held in Brindley Place and has

continued to give courses at Wat Buddha-vihara. These are coming to an end in July, however. In their place he has made an arrangement with Dr David Cheetham of Birmingham University to lead a pilot course in Buddhist Studies this September at our Vihara.

### ✿ VEN. REWATA DHAMMA

Among the places abroad that Bhante has been visiting have been Switzerland, where he gave an Abhidhamma course at Dicken, and Milan, where he went to venerate the UN Buddha relics on their Italian visit. Over a thousand Italians came to pay their respects on this occasion as well as a hundred Sri Lankans. Bhante remarked how much more attracted Italians are to the devotional side of Buddhism as compared to us phlegmatic Brits! Bhante's host in Milan was Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, whom he knew for some ten years when both were living in Varanasi. Gangchen is from a long line of healing lamas and in the last ten years has set up a universal peace centre for tantric healing in Milan and has taken Italian nationality. While staying there, Bhante gave two short talks on the five precepts to its devotees. In the past month he has also been to Ven. Mettavihari's centre in Amsterdam, where he led a retreat and gave teaching.

At home Bhante was one of the few faith leaders who attended the 10th anniversary AGM of the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education, which was held in the Conference Centre at Birmingham Rep. There he was welcomed by Executive members Dh. Adiccabandhu from Blackburn and Yann Lovelock. As one of the organisers, Yann had to stay at his post but Bhante bore off Adiccabandhu to see the pagoda during the lunch hour.

### ✿ EVENTS PAST & TO COME

The main event this quarter has been the celebration of Buddha Day on 18 May, which was well attended as usual. Among those we welcomed were Lama Rabsang, Dh's Padmavajri and Vipalakirti, Tony and Rana Lister of Birmingham Sakya Ling, a party from Telford Priory, Chris Hewer, William and Margaret Ozanne and Amit

Deshpande, a regional organiser for the Sai Baba Organisation. Other Hindus, Sikhs and even Pagans were also present. At the beginning of proceedings special Wesak letters were read from the UN, The Pontifical Council and Birmingham Churches Together. These we could receive without a feeling of guilt since this year the West Midlands Buddhist Council had got in first with an Easter letter to the Christians!

As at last year's event, the two keynote speakers were of English origin. Rev. Saido Kennaway considered the Buddha's ordinary humanity and the everyday problems with which He had to cope, while Upasaka Nyanaloka spoke about the practice as social action. These were followed by Nagasena Bhikkhu, who pointed out that the Buddha's realisation was the result of personal effort and exhorted us to follow His example. Finally Dr Rewata Dhamma spoke of the universality of Buddhist practice as living in social harmony without discrimination. He then went on to itemise aspects of that training.

A more recent event has been the International Cuisine and Loft Clearance Fair held in mid June in the Pagoda grounds. This was in response to the decision by Birmingham Faith Leaders' Meeting to dedicate the whole of June to raising money for Iraqi children on behalf of UNICEF. Under the title of Winning the Peace, the campaign was launched at the Children's Hospital early one morning with the faith leaders in attendance. John Beard and Nagasena represented Buddhists in the absence of Dr Rewata Dhamma. The decision to hold the event was taken at a special meeting of the West Midlands Buddhist Council. With John Beard as overall organiser, it raised just over £460.

WMBC were also invited at the same time to help with the forthcoming visit of the UN Buddha Relics to our Pagoda on 12-13 July. This happily coincides with our 5th anniversary as well as the actual full moon date of the Buddha's first sermon. Naturally we are excited and a little bit overwhelmed at the prospect of yet another major national event to be held here and feel great gratitude to all the other Buddhists in Birmingham and elsewhere who are helping us bear the load.

This is a rare blessing, an unrepeatable experience and an opportunity not to be missed, bringing untold merit for lives to come. Pat Grey, Ann Lovelock, Ellen Parker and Linda Tomlinson are certainly taking advantage of this by seeking temporary samaneri ordination on 12th July. This will take place at 10am in the Sangharama.

#### ✿ PAGODA

In May we held a colourful wedding blessing for Sandipka Chandorai and her husband Neil, who first met while at school. Monks from our and the Jetavana Vihara did the chanting while Nyanaloka got the couple to promise each other to keep the duties prescribed to husband and wife by the Buddha in the Singala Sutta and afterwards gave a brief teaching on these.

Visitors to the Pagoda have been very varied this quarter. They have included the Birmingham Blind Historic Group who had a fine time feeling the various artefacts there, listening to gongs and bells, sniffing incense and even, for those only partially sighted, looking closely at colourful items. Other visitors included Hagley Women's Focus, the Catholic Twilight Course and Pines Special Needs School.

Two groups of trainee teachers have come from Newman College, mature theological students from Queens College, and students of religion from Bath University. These were accompanied by some of their lecturers, including Ven. Dr Mahinda Deegalle, a Sri Lankan monk who was given a special tour of the Vihara too. School groups have included Sturminster Newton (Dorset), Adams Grammar

(Newport, Shrops), Bleak House (Sandwell), King Edward VI Girls Grammar (Handsworth) and St Augustines RC High School (Redditch). Some of these have been very large parties split between two groups. The younger among them have appreciated Pye's wishing bower, the fish pond with its blue frog, Kuan Yin's detachable hand and the Burmese bell that resonates for 105 seconds.

While you're visiting, go round to the meditation garden at the back and admire the fine job John Beard and Tom Maxwell have made of building a suitable canopied shrine for the statue of Kuan Yin. But if you look up at the spire you'll have seen that it requires rather more than a lick of paint. That is soon to change, however. Our near neighbours on Soho Road at the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sawak Jatha have kindly offered to do the regilding for us. We have therefore sent Bhikkhu Nagasena to Myanmar to pick up the materials and the work is expected to be completed well before the Buddha Relics arrive.

#### ✿ DEVOTEE NEWS

During Dh. Sunanda's two-month absence in the US, Yann was deputising for him at Winson Green prison. He has also given three talks. One was for BBC WM's Sunday morning programme on how family values are not always as positive as one might think. At Queens College he shared a session with Dr Jabaal Buaben (originally from Ghana); both had to comment on their response, from the viewpoint of their faiths, to Jesus' declaration 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. Then at Woodbrooke Quaker

Study Centre Yann spoke at Birmingham Council of Faiths' green seminar on the Buddhist approach to ecology.

Ann's chance to meet Dr Buaben came when she was invited to chair a meeting of Sacred Space at the Muath Centre in Bordesley Green. He was speaking on Faith in the Age of Globalisation and Post-Modernism after the meal they all shared together. She and Yann also went to meet Leicester Council of Faiths as part of a Kairos visit and were present at the annual meal given at Police Headquarters for the city's diplomatic community, joined this year by faith representatives too.

Finally, Ann and John Beard were the Buddhist delegates at the launch of the West Midlands Faith Forum. Yann and Ramona took part in an earlier consultation for this and Yann was featured speaking on the introductory video show at the launch.

#### ✿ BIRMINGHAM INTER-FAITH PEACE WALK

The event this year starts from New Life Wesleyan Church, on the corner of Booth Street and Holyhead Road, at 8.45 on Saturday, 5 July. Proceeding by way of Jetavana Vihara and with other stops at various gurdwaras, mandirs, mosques and churches, not to mention the Jain Ashram, the day should be over by 6.00 p.m. This is a popular event well supported by a large number of faiths and people are free to join in and drop out wherever they like. For a map of the route and further information contact Sr Ann Buckeridge on 0121 554 3156. ❖

## SANGHARAMA ACTIVITIES

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

**Retreats:** 2nd weekend of each month.

**10-day retreat:** by Aggamahapandita Bhaddanta Rewata Dhamma:  
*Practical Insight into the Three Characteristics of Being* - 15/24 August.

**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.  
(July 13 (Dhammcakka Day), Aug.12, Sept.10 ).

**Veneration of the UN Buddha Relics and Pagoda's Fifth Anniversary:** July 12/13.

**Nuns' Ordination :** 12 July, 10am in the Sangharama

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