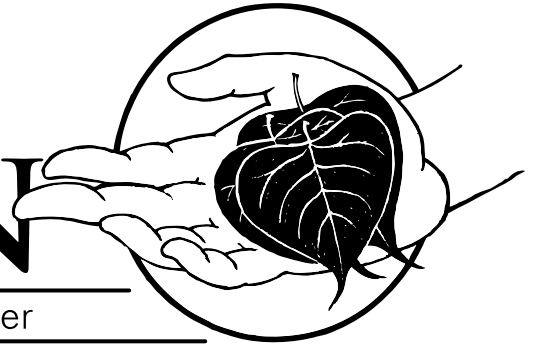


FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter



Winter 2010 • 2553

Volume 15, Number 1



L to R: Ajahn Mettā, Sister Sumedhā, Ajahn Ānandabodhī, Ajahn Santacittā at Montgomery Woods

SARANALOKA: The Light of Refuge

Seeds of a New Monastery

By Jeanie Daskais

New Year's Eve isn't a holiday on the Theravadan calendar, but a gathering in San Francisco that day and into the night celebrates more than the passage of time. December 31st is the opening night of Āloka Vihāra, the first Thai Forest Tradition monastery for women in North America.

Ajahn Ānandabodhī, Ajahn Mettā and Ajahn Santacittā, three senior nuns from Amaravati Monastery, along with Anagārikā Santussikā, will be the vihāra's first residents. They traveled to San Francisco from England in late fall, bearing

abundant blessings and the gift of a Buddha rupa for the new monastery from Ajahn Sumedho and the Amaravati Sangha. After a stay at Abhayagiri, Ajahns Ānandabodhī and Mettā accompanied Ajahn Amaro to teach the Thanksgiving Retreat at Angela Center, before settling into the San Francisco house with Ajahn Santacittā and Anagārikā Santussikā.

The vihāra will be in the Sunset District, at 1632 48th Avenue, in the same house where the three ajahns lived in January and February of 2009, until Saranaloka

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Contributors: *The Sangha, Ajahn Pasanno, Tan Nāniko, Jeanie Daskais and Mettikā.*

From the Monastery

Contact: The Monastery and the “Real World”



October 4th marked the end of the monastic ‘rains residence’ – the 3-month observance of stability set forth by the Buddha when monastics are enjoined to abstain from unnecessary travel and engagement. Traditionally during this time monastics give particular focus to their spiritual training, specifically the study of the Vinaya discipline and the giving of attention to communal practice and harmony. This update on the monastery happenings covers the second half of the ‘rains’ through to the end of the year, thus chronicling the intersection and exchange between these two worlds: the monastery and ‘the outside world’; the monastic community and the laity; seclusion and engagement.

Inter-Monastic Conversation

As a branch-monastery of Wat Pah Pong, Ajahn Chah’s home base of practice in Thailand, Abhayagiri is a grateful member of a much greater international network of forest monasteries. Accompanying this connection of lineage is an ongoing friendly affiliation and a refreshing tradition of inter-monastic visitation. It was in this spirit that Abhayagiri was able to host Ajahn Sona, the abbot of Birken Forest Monastery in British Columbia, for a one-week stay in early October following his term as in-rains residence ‘substitute-teacher’ at Bhante Gunaratana’s Bhavana Society in West Virginia. During his stay at Abhayagiri, he offered several public Dharma talks and warmly made himself available for questions and conversation. So too in this connection, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Yatiko accepted an invitation from Ajahn Viradhammo’s Tisarana Buddhist Monastery in Perth, Ontario to attend the October 31st ordination of Sumangalo Bhikkhu – Tisarana’s first ‘home-grown monk.’ Their many years of practice were much appreciated



Ajahn Mettā and Ajahn Amaro, at the Thanksgiving retreat, 2007

by the newly-founded and still small community.

Also, in mid-November, Ajahns Ānandabodhī and Mettā, two of the spiritual teachers of the newly emerging California Nuns’ Community to be based in Northern California, were able to come for a several-day visit to Abhayagiri. Such continued relations further strengthen the mutually-appreciated and mutually-respected link to this newly fledged community.

In addition to these short-term visits, the resident monastic population at Abhayagiri continues to fluctuate as ‘local’ monks return and ‘foreign’ monks settle in. Following Pavarana Day, the official end of the ‘rains,’ the monastery welcomed back Ajahn Sudanto and Ajahn Karunadhammo into its fold. The ajahns, who spent their ‘rains’ serving as mentors at Birken Monastery during Ajahn Sona’s hiatus, easefully re-acclimated themselves into the community here where both have spent the majority of their monastic careers. Tan Sampajāno, too, is welcomed back after spending the past year living at Wat Pah Pong and several branch-monasteries in North-East Thailand. New to Abhayagiri are

the Thai monk Ajahn Dto who will make Abhayagiri his home for the next few years and the Canadian-born Tan Pavaro – who was ordained as a bhikkhu by Ajahn Pasanno at Birken Monastery – who will be residing here for one year.

On August 2nd, the vast majority of resident monks and novices here travelled to Wat Buddhansorn in Fremont, CA to pay-respects to its abbot Luang Por Māha-Prasert. This formal homage, which has become an annual feature of the Abhayagiri calendar, is a continuation of a tradition from the time of the earliest Sangha of paying respects during the ‘rains residence’ to local venerable elders.

Upon invitation, both co-abbots, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro, have gone to visit branch monasteries in New Zealand and Thailand through December and January. During this time they will be attending Sangha meetings and the annual memorial gathering that occurs each year at Wat Pah Pong on January 16th, the anniversary of Luang Por Chah’s passing away.

Coupled with such emphasis on maintaining intra-lineage relations is Abhayagiri’s uniquely American engage-

ment with Buddhist monastics of other traditions. During the week of October 5th, five monastics from Abhayagiri, headed by Ajahn Amaro, participated in the 15th Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering at The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB). This year's theme was: 'Monasticism and the Environment: Non-Greed, Gratitude and Simplicity' and was attended by more than forty nuns and monks, representing many different Buddhist traditions. The event explored a variety of themes during the five days that the group was gathered; topics included: monastic responses to global warming, alternative technologies, genetic engineering, working with anxiety, cultivation of hope through education, and, lastly, the treatment of animals. On October 7th all of the attendees traveled in caravan to visit Abhayagiri. Along with the formal topics of discussion, this Monastic Gathering gave many opportunities for inter-lineage dialogues, as well as a chance for those monastics who live alone to enjoy the rare company of like-minded renunciants.

Soon after this event, on October 23rd, a group of five senior ajahns, with Ajahns Pasanno and Amaro at their head, travelled to CTTB to participate in their '12th Ordination Ceremony for the Transmission of the Complete Precepts' at which 3 new monks and 21 new nuns entered the world.



Tan Cunda, hard at work on the Kathina robe

Meeting the Lay Community

Several annual monastery events continued this fall at which the greater 'real world' is welcomed en masse into the more cloistered 'real world' that exists here in Redwood Valley, for the purpose of hearing the Dhamma and experiencing a life physically closer to nature. On the weekend of August 21st, fifteen teenagers with some seven attendant counsellors arrived at Abhayagiri for the fourteenth

'Spirit Rock Teen Weekend.' Spending two nights camped under the stars, many abstaining even from the thin shelter of a tent roof, these young people were able to experience one full daily cycle of monastery life: morning and evening chanting, meditation, communal work (lots of painting!), time for hearing the Dhamma and for asking questions, and a period of personal seclusion. During this latter aspect of their time at Abhayagiri, each teen was given their own spot in the forest away from any line-of-sight with other people and were allowed such space – unusual for most – for the span of several hours. Both abbots remarked on feeling hopeful that such enbrightened teens, who would voluntarily choose such a venture, existed in the world.

The last weekend in September occasioned the monastery's participation in the 8th annual 'Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage.' Ajahn Pasanno travelled inw caravan along the course of the pilgrimage, providing Dhamma-reflections through personal conversations and more formal group teachings to the over ninety assembled bicycle pilgrims, along with the thirty or so members of the support crew. The two-day, 140-mile event visited



The monastic community at Birken Monastery, for the Rains Retreat of 2009; from L to R – Tan Subhara, Tan Dhammavaro, Ajahn Sudanto, Tan Pavaro, Ajahn Karunadhammo, Tan Suvaco

(Continued on page 4)

From the Monastery (continued from page 3)

several Buddhist practice centers along its route; commencing at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin, sojourning in warm and generous welcomes of Dr Thynn Thynn, the founder and teacher at Sae Taw Win II, a Dhamma practice center near Sebastopol, and at The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in Ukiah. The pilgrimage reached its dénouement here at Abhayagiri, where a closing ceremony was held and the bicyclists were blessed – first by welcome blasts from the spray-nozzle of our garden hose (temperatures reached 106° F over the week-end), then under the shade of the canopy from the assembled Sangha chanting the parittas.

Just two weeks later, on October 11th, Abhayagiri hosted its largest ever annual observance of the Kathina festival. This is a ceremony, sanctioned by the Buddha, as a time of receiving robe-cloth from the lay community, and is thus a symbolic celebration of communal harmony and generosity. Ajahn Pasanno offered reflections in Thai and Ajahn Amaro in English to the over-300 gathered faithful representing most major Theravadan countries in Asia as well as many other nationalities. Smiles of gratitude were shared by monastics and laity alike.

As through the rest of the year, Abhayagiri continued the hosting of its regular ‘Upasika Days.’ These are occasions for members of the lay community to deepen their practice and strengthen their relationship to the monastery; through this season there have been varied foci for this event: in August, ‘The Buddhist Calendar’; in October it was ‘Jump-starting your Meditation Practice’; finally, for the year, it was ‘Dependent Origination in daily life,’ in December.

Beginning on August 5th, Ajahn Amaro in conjunction with Heather Sundberg, Betsy Rose and Gil Fronsdal, helped to lead the five-day Spirit Rock Family Retreat. The theme this year was ‘equanimity’; activities for the families included stories, skits, games, art, time on the land, a campfire, council practice, parent discussions, meditation for parents and children, and Dhamma talks.

Later that month Tassajara Zen



The Kathina ceremony at Abhayagiri, 2009

Mountain Center hosted Ajahn Amaro for a few days of teaching specifically for their resident community, thus maintaining a friendly connection with this other remote Buddhist refuge.

The last week in November occasioned the collaborative efforts of Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Ānandabodhī and Ajahn Mettā to lead the annual ‘Thanksgiving Retreat’ in Santa Rosa. The theme of this year’s ten-day residential retreat was ‘Fullness of Being.’ During this time also, Ajahn Amaro conducted several day-long practice sessions at locations outside the monastery: On September 27th at Spirit Rock, he led a meditation daylong named ‘Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness’ on the theme of ageing and sickness. On October 31st he discussed the nature of and path to Nibbāna at a Sati Center event in Redwood City; and on November 1st he and Sylvia Boorstein co-led a very successful and much-appreciated benefit for Yoga Mendocino – the local non-profit organization in Ukiah which hosts Abhayagiri’s monthly meditation class – on the topic ‘Center of Stillness – Heart of Action ~ Finding Stability in Turbulent Times.’

Ongoing teachings at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, the Lake County Yoga group, and the North Coast Sangha in Fort Bragg (which now meets at

Mettikā’s ‘Three Jewels Dharma Hall’) are recurring touch-points of outreach where our several ajahns offer teachings to groups of interested people.

The In-house Community

At the beginning of September the Abhayagiri community, in two sequential trips, was given the opportunity to travel to the High Sierras for one-week periods of camping and high-altitude meditation, affording an even greater degree of physical seclusion than is already existent within the monastery itself. This retreat time was made possible through the efforts of many, especially Robert Hohn and Debbie Stamp. The resounding felt sense was that the change of pace and distance from the many duties attendant upon residential upkeep, and other monastic responsibilities, were well worth the thin air, freezing temperatures and any perceived lack of ‘conveniences.’

As for those ‘many duties’... the monastery is happy to witness the Monks’ Utility Building continuing its gradual path towards completion. Construction will be carried on through the end of the calendar year and into 2010. Anyone wishing to view the progress of the building as it comes into being can see a photo gallery on the web at: <http://zen.abhayagiri.org>. 🙏



Ajahn Yatiko on almsround at the Abhayagiri Kathina



The 15th Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering, at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas



WMBG participants visit the new utility building at Abhayagiri



Small vehicles at rest, at the end of the 8th Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage



Some of the participants and counsellors of the Spirit Rock teen week-end

Settling the Mind

— From a talk given on June 30th 2009 and subsequently printed to coincide with Ajahn Pasanno's 60th birthday, in the booklet "Wisely Reflecting".

By Ajahn Pasanno

What are we doing when we sit down and cultivate our meditation practice? The most important piece is bringing mindfulness, awareness, and attention back to a simple object.

The mind loves its proliferations – the things it gets excited about, attracted to, wound up about. The mind's tendency is to move toward complication, to be endlessly attracted to anything other than simplicity. So the first step in meditation is putting attention onto something simple: the sensations within the body or the physicality of being in

the body. What is the feeling within the body? Is it relaxed or tense, spacious or tight, heavy or light, warm or cool? Pay attention to the posture so that there's a sense of balance – not leaning forward too much, not leaning backward too much, not leaning to the right or to the left – really trying to establish an upright posture. Pay attention to relaxing the body – sitting up straight, not ramrod straight but straight in terms of holding the body in an energetic and engaged way.

Sometimes in meditation there's a sense that we shouldn't really pay too much attention to the body, that we should forget the body and go to the mind. It's true to a certain extent that the mind is the important aspect. The mind is where we create our suffering. But the mind and body are intertwined; the feeling tone within the mind is conditioned and influenced by the body.

If we are sitting there slumped over, not really willing to put forth the effort to be in the body, then the mind becomes dull or listless. By engaging the body in an upright and balanced posture, the mind becomes bright and energetic. When the body settles in this way, we can sit for quite a long time and not feel a lot of discom-

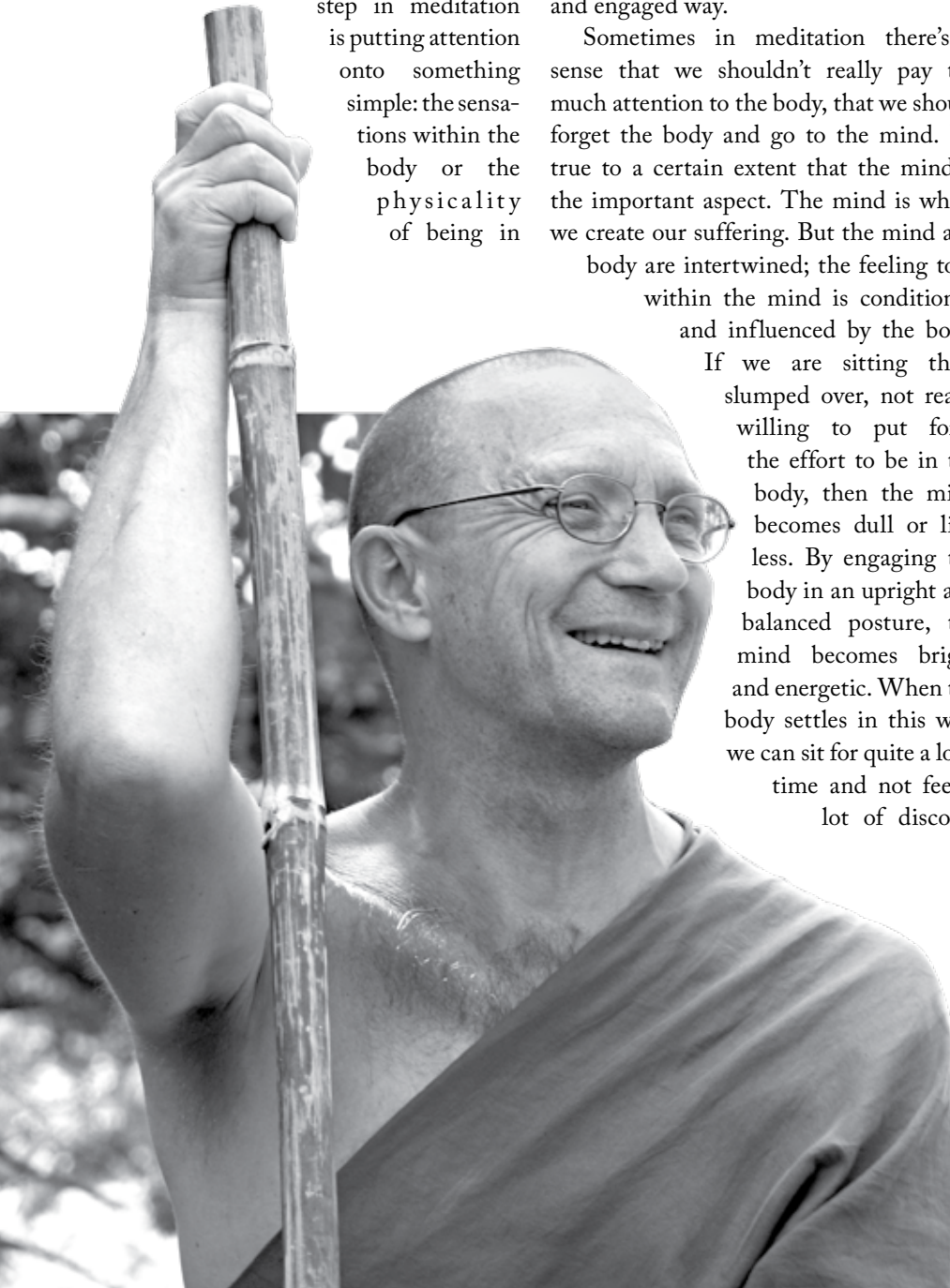
fort. Having a base of ease, energy, and engagement will support the practice and support the mind.

As we allow the body to settle, bring the attention to the sensation of the breath. Where do you experience it most prominently? Is it at the tip of the nose? Inside the nasal passages? At the back of the throat? In the chest? In the abdomen? There's not one 'correct' place to feel the breath. Pay attention to where it seems clearest. Then pay attention to the in-breath, allowing the breath to come in naturally, not forcing or controlling it, not making it even or long or short, but just paying attention. What's the sensation of the in-breath? Is it pleasant? Is it easeful? Is it cool? Is it warm? Does it feel constricted? Just pay attention. What does the in-breath feel like? Next, what does the out-breath feel like?

As you breathe, notice how the breath affects the rest of the body, how it affects the mind. How is the breath related to the feeling throughout the body? What does it feel like at the top of the head, in the face, neck, and shoulders? What does it feel like across the chest, or on the back, or on the different areas of the abdomen? What does it feel like in the legs? Because the breath affects the whole body, we can relax and energize the body and the mind with the breath. Generally, the in-breath has an energizing quality, and the out-breath a more a relaxing quality. Allow that relaxation and energy to move through the body as you experiment with the breath.

Once you've become more connected and centered within the breath, body, and mind, it's helpful to allow a more one-pointed focus to establish itself. What's a comfortable place to focus? It should be on something that feels interesting, rather than coming from an opinion of what is 'right.' Pay attention to what is actually interesting, then allow the mind to settle and abide in the sensation of the breath within that particular sphere of focus.

It will be different for everyone. Around the tip of the nose is interesting to me.



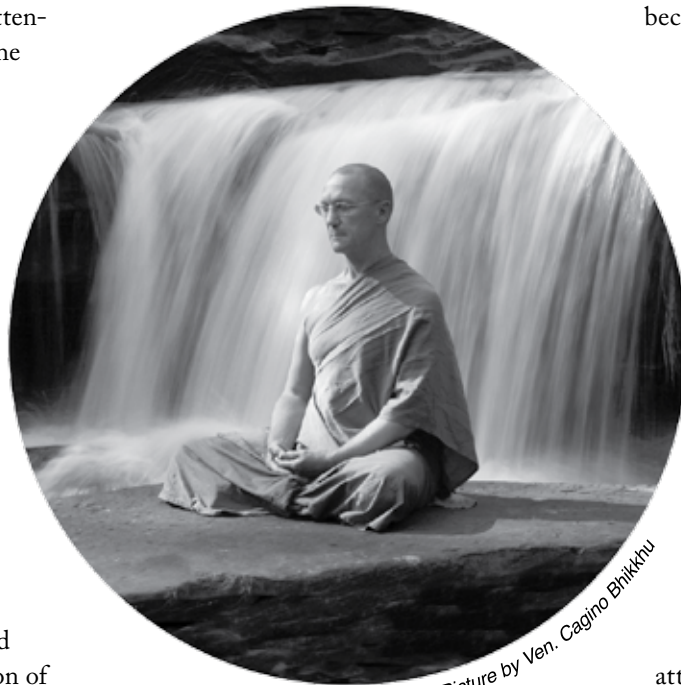
When I first started practicing, that area was way too close to where all my thinking was going on, so I paid attention much lower down. But these days, the tip of the nose is the most interesting place to me, and it tends to work. See what place works for you. Then allow the attention to settle there, to enter and abide in a quality of attending closely to the in-breath and the out-breath. You don't need to force it; just let the interest sustain itself. If the mind wanders, that's pretty ordinary – it's not a big deal, not a disaster, not a sign of failure as a meditator. All it is, is a wandering mind. Reestablish the attention; reconnect with the interest in the breath as it comes in and goes out.

Ajahn Chah used to caution against spending one's time pushing and pulling the mind around, chasing after it and pulling it back. The image he used was of running here, running there, pulling this, pulling that. When you lose focus, then just reestablish the attention. You don't have to run off here and run off there to track down a mind that's wandered. It hasn't really gone anywhere; it's still right here. As soon as you reestablish attention, that is where the mind is. Be interested in simply connecting with the sensation of the breath, with the presence of the body right now.

When the Buddha instructed Mahā Moggallāna, he gave meditation advice on dealing with hindrances like sloth and torpor, but he also emphasized the central aspect of Dhamma: "All Dhammas are not to be clung to" or "Nothing whatsoever should be adhered to." If one knows this much, one can understand the whole Dhamma. Whatever phenomenon arises in the mind, don't let the mind get stuck on it, cling to it, hold to it, get entangled in it. Recognize it, see it clearly, and then let it go.

When Ajahn Chah was teaching, he'd say that practice is extremely simple: "Knowing and letting go. Knowing and letting go." We can turn to that place of clarity and simplicity. Knowing what's

happening and then letting it go, releasing it. Of course, we don't often do that. We pick things up, we pile them on, we carry them around, we cling to them. The feeling of weight and burden on the mind is completely dependent on this picking up and holding on. Ajahn Chah once pointed to a big rock and asked, "Is this rock heavy?" His student said, "Wow, that's a big rock; it's really heavy!" Ajahn Chah replied, "As long as you don't pick it up, it's not heavy." Whether physically or



Picture by Ven. Cagino Bhikkhu

mentally, we are always picking something up. The essence of Dhamma practice is seeing clearly and not picking things up, not piling a burden onto the mind, onto the heart. Whether it's a particular duty, mood, or perception – do we agree or disagree with another person – don't pick it up, don't carry that person around. Come back to the quality of knowing and letting go.

This is where the breath is so useful. It's obviously not 'me or mine'; it's just a function of nature. Breathing in, breathing out. Connecting with the quality of attention to the breath, it is easier to pay attention to what clutters the mind. What makes things complicated? Be mindful of not just the simplicity of the breath going

in, the breath going out, but also of what the mind tends to do. What does it like to pick up and carry around, creating a burden for itself? See the tendencies of the mind. Are we adding anything, are we carrying anything, are we getting excited about something? Is it useful? Is it beneficial? Are we getting irritated or averse to something? Worried or fearful? See the force of desire that comes up.

The Buddha talks about three basic types of desire that cause suffering: sensual desire, or craving for pleasure or gratification; the desire for being, or wanting to become something; and the desire to not be, or wanting to get rid of something.





With the breath as a neutral foundation, a mirror for what the mind is cranking out, we can see the force of desire. We can't force the mind not to have its various desires, but by being able to see clearly and understand those desires, we can let go.

There are so many basic ways that desire functions in the human mind. With practice, we become more attentive and skilled at recognizing and not being entangled and pushed around by desire. We start seeing more clearly how desire works. For example, a company had a really bright idea to sell bread-making machines. They put a lot of work into manufacturing the machines, but nobody bought them. So a marketing company advised them to design another bread-making machine that was bigger and more expensive and then to advertise them both. It worked. As soon as they started selling the more expensive model, everyone got interested in the cheaper one: "Wow, this is a deal!" Now, we all probably know someone who owns a bread-making machine. We've probably got one at the monastery. The company learned to manipulate our desire. We have desires, and we often don't think about whether we really need to fulfill them – about whether

(Continued on page 13)

Also visit our online calendar at www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/days for the most up-to-date information.

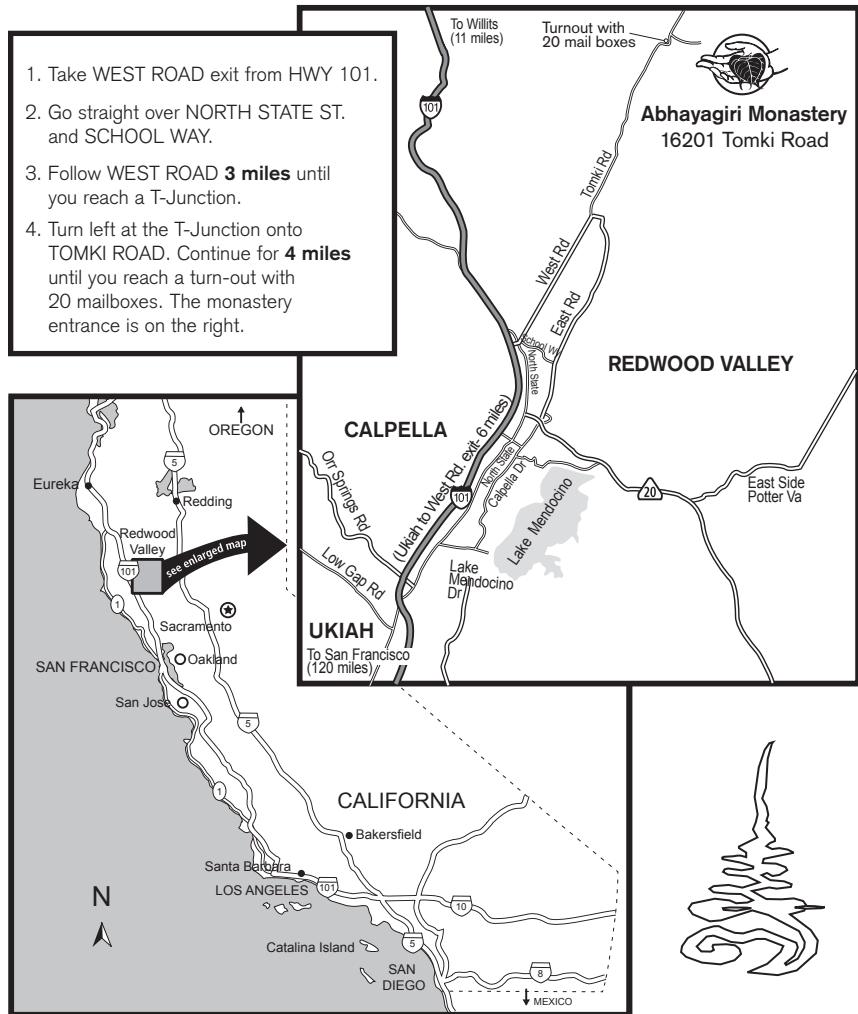
LUNAR OBSERVANCE DAYS

2553	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
	FRI 8	SUN 7	MON 8	WED 7	THU 6
	FRI 15	SAT 13	MON 15	TUE 13	THU 13
	SAT 23	SUN 21	TUE 23	WED 21	FRI 21
	SAT 30	SUN 28¹	TUE 30	WED 28	FRI 28²

1. Magha Puja 2. Vesakha Puja

DIRECTIONS TO ABHAYAGIRI

1. Take WEST ROAD exit from HWY 101.
 2. Go straight over NORTH STATE ST. and SCHOOL WAY.
 3. Follow WEST ROAD 3 miles until you reach a T-Junction.
 4. Turn left at the T-Junction onto TOMKI ROAD. Continue for 4 miles until you reach a turn-out with 20 mailboxes. The monastery entrance is on the right.



Jan

- 3 Abhayagiri community enters three-month Winter Retreat period, ending on March 31st.
- 5 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery led by nuns from Āloka Vihāra, San Francisco.
- 13 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA (with guest teacher).
- 16 Ajahn Chah Memorial Day.
- 25 Ajahns Pasanno & Amaro due to return from their travels.

Feb

- 2 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery led by nuns from Āloka Vihāra, San Francisco.
- 10 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA (with guest teacher).
- 28 Māgha Pūjā – full moon observance at Abhayagiri.

Mar

- 2 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery led by an Abhayagiri lay minister.
- 10 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA (with guest teacher).
- 31 Abhayagiri Winter Retreat ends.

Apr

- 4 Daylong meditation at Spirit Rock – with Ajahn Amaro.
- 6 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, with Ajahn Amaro.
- 11 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- 14 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA.
- 25 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
- 30-9 Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Punnadhammo & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia lead 10-day retreat at Insight Meditation Society, MA – Contact: www.dharma.org/ims/cm_contact

May

- 4 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, with Ajahn Pasanno.
- 9 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- 12 Ajahn Amaro gives a talk at CIMC, Cambridge, MA Contact: www.cimc.info
- 14-16 Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Punnadhammo & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia lead a study w-e at Barre Center for Buddhist Studies: ‘Upekkhā: Being at Peace in the World.’ Contact: www.dharma.org/bcb
- 18 Ajahn Amaro gives a series of talks at New York Insight – #1: ‘Faith or Belief?’ Contact: www.nyimc.org
- 19 Ajahn Amaro at New York Insight – #2: ‘Faith in What? And How?’
- 20 Ajahn Amaro at New York Insight – #3: ‘Balancing Faith and Wisdom’
- 21 Ajahn Amaro gives a talk at Vajra Yoga, New York City – Contact: www.vajrayoga.com
- 22 Ajahn Amaro daylong meditation at New York Insight – ‘The Wings of the Bird ~ understanding and actualizing the Five Spiritual Faculties’ – Contact: www.nyimc.org
- 23 Ajahn Amaro & Jill Satterfield – daylong meditation & hatha yoga at Vajra Yoga, New York City – Contact: www.vajrayoga.com
- 28 Visākha Pūjā – full moon observance at Abhayagiri.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR EVENTS

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continued
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 Bahn Bung Wai,
 Amper Warin,
 Ubon 34310

For a comprehensive directory of branch monasteries please visit www.forestsangha.org

ABHAYAGIRI BUDDHIST MONASTERY COMMUNITY LIST

Vassa (Rains Retreats/years as a monk) Updated Dec 15, 2009

Pasanno Bhikkhu	36	Sāmanera Kovilo
Amaro Bhikkhu	31	Sāmanera Ñānamedhī
Yatiko Bhikkhu	17	Sāmanera Pamutto
Sudanto Bhikkhu	15	
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	12	Anagārika Sean Fargo
Gunavuddho Bhikkhu	10	Anagārika Scott Spencer
Pavāro Bhikkhu	6	Anagārika Nate Bertram
Cāgānando Bhikkhu	5	
Sampajāno Bhikkhu	4	LONGTERM LAY RESIDENT
Cunda Bhikkhu	2	Upāsikā Debbie Stamp
Kaccāna Bhikkhu	1	Upāsikā Cyndia Biver
Thitapañño Bhikkhu	1	

The Tests & Treasures of Tudong

by Ven. Nāniko Bhikkhu

*“When there are two paths before you,
always choose the more difficult one.”*

—Tibetan proverb

I undertook the practice of walking tudong¹ in Chiang Mai province, Thailand, during the month of February and the first half of March 2009.

Originally, my intention was to go alone because I didn't know of any *tudong* monks to go with and 'learn the ropes.' It was my good fortune that I met up with Ajahn Tikkhaviro just days before I started walking, and that he agreed to let me accompany him. We spent about forty days on tudong together before I returned to Wat Pah Nanachat and he continued on to Chiang Rai, the northernmost province of Thailand.

Ajahn Tikkhaviro is a Filipino monk of ten years standing. He was ordained at Wat Pah Nanachat, the branch monastery established by Ajahn Chah for the training of his foreign students, and speaks fluent Thai and English. He has a stocky, muscular build, a lighthearted attitude towards life and a fair amount of tudong experience – about four years. He had been traveling around in the north,

only stopping during the four months of the rainy season to stay in some small monastery. He was on tudong himself when I met up with him.

The following is a journal entry covering a single day; my intention through this account is to relate some of the flavor of my first tudong experience.

25 February, 2009

We had stayed the night in a small village monastery with a *chedi*². It wasn't really a place for monks but more of a tourist destination. We went on almsround in the local town and we received plenty of food. As we walked a man began following us as he had noticed that we didn't accept offerings of money, and he was curious what monastery we were from. Before returning to have our meal, he caught up with us and we told him we weren't from the area but that we were on tudong and that we never received money, according to our standards of discipline. He was very inspired because monks who don't receive money were almost unheard of in the north.

The middle-aged monk living at the chedi was kind to us and, before we

started walking, he gave us packets of 'three-in-one,' a handy Nescafé/sugar/Coffee-mate mixture that is nowadays regarded as the ultimate tudong tonic. We also had *borapet* (a bitter medicinal vine which is a more classical and natural restorative) various roots for headaches and pain, ground coffee, green tea, and salt with us. Just before setting off, the monk told us "Be careful. Where you were a week ago is one hundred percent drug dealers. The place you're going to today is seventy percent drug dealers."

We had been in the mountains during the previous week but we had come down to the valley to explore. I remembered Ajahn Tikkhaviro's comments about all the fancy cars in the hill-tribe village that the monk was referring to. The danger is because sometimes the villagers will believe that visiting monks are spies for the government.

Our plan was to follow a dirt road up from the river valley of Amphur Pai into the mountains. After seven kilometers we would meet Mae Yen Waterfall then continue another four kilometers to a village called Baan Huay Mae Yen. I was happy that we were returning to



Monks on tudong in Chiang Mai province, Thailand Picture by Ven. Cagino Bhikkhu

the mountains because the valley was really hot and the forest surrounding the valley had all been burnt to make land for grazing cattle.

The road became a footpath as we meandered up Mae Yen creek. The walk was cool and pleasant and the trail was good. At one point I jumped across the water and missed the rock I was aiming for, slightly spraining my ankle but after about fifteen minutes the pain of the injury subsided.

We met up with two westerners on the trail. They knew the area and told us that we should turn left at a campsite about two hours walk ahead – that way we would avoid having to scale a rock-face. When we got to this place the left turn went away from the river and straight up a hill into a bamboo forest. Ajahn Tikkhaviro had reservations, since it was so steep, but we still got to the waterfall around 2:00 pm.

We made a fire, I got out my small kettle to start boiling water, then we went for a bath. The waterfall was about twenty meters high and very impressive. And cold! The water there comes from the higher mountains and reminded me of rivers in the mountains of California. After bathing we each had a couple three-in-ones and relaxed while chatting about tudong and Dhamma.

Ajahn Tikkhaviro liked to preach about tudong as a way of life – not becoming too extreme and doing yourself in through over-zealousness, then deciding that living in a monastery is better and never going on tudong again – having experienced that cycle himself, he had a ‘been there, done that’ attitude towards that approach. He said: “Ideally a tudong monk has no plans or commitments, he lives with uncertainty every day. Sometimes he sleeps under the stars, sometimes in a cave or a kuti. A tudong monk needs to be flexible and adaptable to the situations and people he meets. If he walks too far each day he’ll wear himself out and possibly fall ill. If he finds a good place he can stay there and practice for a few days or longer. He needs to cultivate great patience in dealing with cold, heat, food that is disagreeable, and people who may want to harm or take



On tudong in Chiang Mai province
Picture by Ven. Cagino Bhikkhu

advantage of him.”

We continued up-stream from the waterfall at about 3:30 pm, thinking the village wasn’t so far ahead and that we had plenty of time before dark. We felt sure we would get there before 5:00 pm. We reached a farm where there were no people around but many buffaloes bathing in the stream. We then followed an overgrown trail that started up a mountain and went away from the river to the right. Soon we were climbing higher and higher and the trail had disappeared. We then guessed that the village was probably on the other side of the mountain, so we thought we should try to wind around the face of it, but we just kept going up. It was really steep!

When we got to the top of one mountain we would scale another. Sometimes we met a trail but then it would peter out to nothing. At around 5:00 pm my ankle started to hurt again. We just kept going up. I was sweating a lot and my bag of belongings – comprising my alms-bowl, my third robe, mosquito net and other odds and ends – seemed to keep getting heavier. I was trying to conserve my water, only drinking about half a cup at a time.

At one point we came to a clear trail with a junction. We were heading east and a little bit north towards a mountain called Dooi Chang. At this point we realized we could either turn back and try another path or plunge down into dense vegetation towards what looked like a

road, very far away. Ajahn Tikkhaviro said “If we try going down, it’s suicide. We go back and look for another way.”

By 6:30 pm it was getting dark and we were lost. It was clear we would have to walk in the dark because we were really in the middle of nowhere, on top of some mountain ridge. I yelled out to check for signs of people but there was no response. My ankle was swelling and I was out of water, but Ajahn Tikkhaviro still had some. I was glad that I had new batteries for my headlamp, which would allow me to walk for many hours with a strong light.

Just before dark we climbed down a small rocky face and I lost my balance. I had no choice but to break my fall with my bad foot. All my weight landed on that ankle and I cried out in pain. After that I was limping. When it got dark we started scaling the steepest hill yet and there was no trail at all.

It was so sheer that if you were to fall backwards you could tumble all the way down. Also, the vegetation was taller than us in most places. I was glad I had a walking stick – it saved me many times here from not falling. I laughed to myself as I reflected that I would never choose to walk up a mountain like this, let alone with all my monastic possessions. In situations like this Ajahn Tikkhaviro would always say, in a very calm voice, “Yeah, tudong is like this sometimes.”

By then it was around 8:00 pm and we were still ascending. The hill seemed to go up forever – we had been climbing for over an hour. Then Ajahn Tikkhaviro’s sandals both broke, one after the other, which was unfortunate because there were many trees which dropped spikey seed-balls all over the ground. He said “This is the end of me.” Then, after another few minutes, a small twig went deep into the corner of his eye and I had to pull it out with my tweezers. His eye was very red, but not bleeding.

We reached a flat spot on the slope and stopped to rest. I had some really strong tape which I successfully used to fix Ajahn Tikkhaviro’s sandals but, even with this small relief of our predicament,

(Continued on page 15)

Foundation, sponsor of the nuns' trip here, can provide rural land for a permanent monastery, with room for lay women and men to stay and for women to train and ordain.

It seems both auspicious and fitting that Āloka Vihāra's opening is on the Full Moon Uposatha, an occasion for recommitment to the Triple Gem, and that that the celebration spans the end of the old year and the beginning of the new.

The new monastery has antecedents near in time and far. Perhaps its beginnings are in the time of the Buddha, who had many female monastic disciples, including many arahants. In ancient India, many nuns lived in independent women's communities. Or, perhaps it began with the first eight-precept anagārikā ordination of women by Ajahn Sumedho at Chithurst Monastery in England 30 years ago. Eventually, the Siladharā ordination, comprising ten precepts and more than 100 other training rules, was developed. Today there are two Siladharā communities in England, living side-by-side with the monks' communities at Chithurst and Amaravati.

Or perhaps it began with a conversation between vipassanā teacher Ruth Denison and Jill Boone, now President of Saranaloka Foundation, at Dhamma Dena, Ruth's center in Joshua Tree. Ruth and Jill shared a desire to see the nuns well-provided for and established in the United States, and they drafted plans for a non-profit to support them.

Thus, in 2004, Saranaloka Foundation was born. Saranaloka's mission is to provide support for the teaching of the Dhamma by nuns in the Thai Forest lineage of Ajahn Chah, to act as financial steward for the nuns, and to support the establishment of a permanent residential vihāra.

Since then, Saranaloka has brought nuns from Amaravati and Chithurst to the United States to lead retreats, daylongs and evening sitting groups. A devoted group of hundreds of supporters has grown around the country, including in the Bay Area, the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest, the Midwest, New York and New England.



Ajahn Mettā and Ajahn Ānandabodhī teaching in San Francisco, 2009

But the Siladharā had long been a familiar presence in the United States. Nuns have accompanied Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Amaro on almost all the retreats they have taught here since 1990, including those at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Angela Center in Santa Rosa, and the City Of Ten Thousand Buddhas, near Ukiah. Over the years, many individual nuns have visited, and some have come frequently, developing close and enduring relationships with many lay students and teachers and fellow monastics.

Meanwhile, as the Siladharā communities at Amaravati and Chithurst monasteries have grown, more and more women have desired to enter the holy life. But living space is limited, and the waitlist to become a novice can be years. Clearly, women need more places to train in the Ajahn Chah lineage.

Also, as the Siladharā community grew and developed, the nuns became interested in seeing how community life would unfold in a separate nuns' community, just as separate monks' communities have flourished around the world.

These trends in the United States and Europe converged about two years ago, when Jill Boone sent an e-mail to the nuns in England, reminding the senior nuns at Amaravati and Chithurst of Saranaloka's interest in starting a monastery for nuns in the United States.

Ajahns Ānandabodhī, Mettā and

Santacittā began to consider the possibility. Having each lived in the Sangha for more than 15 years, they were interested in taking a new step. They shared their thoughts and dreams, sensed the potential, and began to form a vision: a place where women could train as anagārikās and Siladharā together, in a community of women removed from the immediate presence and support of monks.

Their sisters supported the idea, and Ajahn Sumedho rejoiced at the possibility of establishing a monastery for nuns in America, where Abhayagiri was thriving. Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Pasanno warmly welcomed the addition of a 'sister' monastery and encouraged both the nuns and lay supporters to pursue their vision.

A series of supporters' meetings began during Ajahn Mettā's visit to California in 2007 to lead the Thanksgiving retreat with Ajahn Amaro. In the winter of 2008 Ajahn Ānandabodhī and Ajahn Santacittā spent two months traveling up and down the West Coast, visiting groups and meeting with supporters. It was clear that there was fertile ground for a new monastery. Both women and men appreciate women teachers, and women want female role models as well as the opportunity to undergo monastic training.

Until last year, the nuns had been fairly itinerant during their visits. In 2009, for the first time, Saranaloka leased a house and set up a temporary vihāra for January and February. With the nuns

staying in one place for an extended time, more people could get to know them and experience the flavor of monastic life, built around silence, contemplation, renunciation, and devotion.

Ajahn Ānandabodhī, Ajahn Mettā, Ajahn Santacittā and Sister Sumedhā lived in the house in the Sunset District, keeping the monastic precepts, offering pūjā, meditation guidance and Dhamma talks for lay people, observing the Uposatha (moon days) and going on almsround in the busy commercial district around 22nd Avenue and Irving Street. Golden Gate Park would do for a forest, and Ocean Beach for long walks and bonfires.

An energetic group of lay supporters coordinated rides and provided meals. So much dāna was offered that the extra was regularly passed on to local food banks. At evening pūjās and Dhamma talks, visitors from near and far overflowed the small shrine room.

Large numbers of people attended events outside the vihāra, too. More than 200 people attended a daylong at Spirit Rock on Valentine's Day. The nuns were invited to visit sanghas around the Bay Area, including San Francisco Insight, Insight Meditation Center, Coastside Vipassana, Santa Cruz Vipassana Center and others.

The nuns also established friendships with other Buddhist monastics. Several Bhutanese monks, in town for a show of Bhutanese art at the Asian Art Museum, visited the vihāra, as did Thai monks who had lived in San Francisco for many years.

When the board of Saranaloka held its annual meeting at the vihāra in mid-February, it was clear that the time was ripe. The board invited Ajahn Ānandabodhī, Ajahn Mettā and Ajahn Santacittā to return to the United States at the end of the year to help Saranaloka fulfill its founding mission.

The nuns returned to England to seek final permission from their community and to request the blessing of the Elders' Council, composed of the abbots, their assistants and the senior nuns of Amaravati and Chithurst monasteries. At their meeting in April 2009, the Elders agreed, and preparations for the opening of the vihāra at the cusp of the new year began.

A dedicated group of supporters went to work securing zafus, phone service and a lease for the vihāra, arranging the nuns' schedules and travel, posting news on the Saranaloka website, and tending to visas and health insurance.

And all continue to hold the vision of a permanent Āloka Vihāra on beautiful

rural land, large enough to accommodate a greater number of Siladharā and anagārikās, with quarters for visiting lay men and women to live for short or longer stays. Although the proposed monastery will be in the Bay Area, donations for land have come in already from around the nation and the world.

The opening celebration will begin with the meal offering at 11 a.m. on December 31st, followed by an afternoon retreat that continues through the night (bring a sleeping bag if you wish to stay over!). At 7 a.m. January 1st, there will be a communal breakfast.

Please visit the Saranaloka website, www.saranaloka.org, for more details of the December 31st vihāra opening, the vihāra daily and weekly schedule, and a calendar of events for the coming months. All are welcome. The website also has instructions for joining the Bay Area and national supporters' e-mail lists. 🙏

Settling the Mind (continued from page 7)

we actually want a bread-making machine, even if we're getting 'a deal.'

The same thing happens internally. There are so many examples of feelings of dissatisfaction or feelings of wanting that are not really known or seen or recognized simply as desire. As we pay attention to desire, externally our life may not become less complicated, but internally life can become more peaceful. By sustaining interest in something quite basic like the breath, we can explore and reflect on what's pushing the mind around, what desires are being stimulated. And as we pay attention, become more familiar, and understand the nature of desire, we can let go. Knowing and putting down, knowing and releasing, knowing and relinquishing. Maintain that theme as you use the breath. Become more present with the breath, more focused on a particular sensation within the breath, and the mind will settle and things will drop away. Give yourself that opportunity.

(Adapted from a talk given on June 30, 2009.) 🙏



The nuns on almsround in San Francisco

From Māra's Desk

Good Intentions, Views and Opinions

By *Mettikā Hoffman*

I am Māra, Master of Suffering, King of Deceit, Fear, Pride, Ego, Vanity, Shame, Delusion, in short, your ego's best friend. I've been very busy lately organizing, leading and co-teaching workshops with my devilish colleagues in demonic education via electronic connections.

Recently, I've also been reflecting on how easy it is to snare humanity in its foibles, to catch the untrained and undisciplined hearts and minds in habitual patterns of greed, anger, delusion, views, and opinions. I was opining that in the old days, 2500 years ago, my job was so much more challenging and interesting. Now it's the same old, same old, drop the bait, catch the fish, over and over. It does get deadening after a while. The thrill is gone.

It was no easy task to sneak into the minds and hearts of the Lord Buddha, monks, nuns and laity, and concentrated meditators. I almost had the Buddha under the Bodhi Tree but then he had to go to kvetching to the Earth Goddess for her to affirm his noble intentions. One time I even slipped into Mahā-Moggalāna's intestines but he caught me. "I see you Māra," he said, and when anyone uses those words, they are poison to my ears. I go scurrying off until the next time.

For some reason, I thought it would be a piece of cake to taunt the nuns, to try to unseat their resolve of seclusion. I had just the right 'bon mot' to whisper into each of their ears. To the young and beautiful one, Vijayā, I whispered, "You are so young and beautiful, and I too am a youth in my prime. Come, noble lady, let us rejoice with the music of a five-fold ensemble." Among other things she says to me, "Forms, sounds, tastes and odors, and delightful tactile objects – I offer them right back to you, for I, oh Māra do not need them." I was sad and disappointed and disappeared right there. I tried diligently with all the other nuns, Kisāgotamī, Somā, Ālavikā, and Uppalavannā, Vajirā, Cālā, Selā and

Upacālā, to name a few. I tried my best to fool them via their Achilles' heels but to no avail.

Then I went to Sīsupacālā, but she saw me instantly. I approached her and said, "Whose creed do you approve of bhikkhunī?" She said, "I don't approve of anyone's creed, friend."

"Under whom have you shaved your head?" I asked, "You appear to be an ascetic, yet you say you don't approve of any creed, so why wander around as if bewildered? In other groups the followers of those creeds place their confidence in views."

"I don't approve of their teachings; they are not skilled in the Dhamma. But there is one born in the Sakyan clan, the Enlightened One without an equal, Conqueror of all, Māra's subduer. He is one who everywhere is undefeated, everywhere freed and unattached; he is the One with vision who sees all." The nun Sīsupacālā knew me. Sad and disappointed, I (temporarily) died on the spot.

Now, in order to challenge myself, I have decided to work only with people who have undertaken the Precepts (at least the Five) who have made strong intentions to lead a more skillful and wholesome lives. Over the millennia, I have listened in and collected Buddhist practitioners' best intentions, written them on slips of paper, not unlike fortune cookie wisdom slips, and filled up garbage-sized bags with them. When feeling mean-spirited or bored I dump the slips on the floor and review them, then ponder creative ways to assist their creators in using those very intentions to pave their way into my domain.

The standard intentions are so predictable, such as: developing more patience, sending loving-kindness to difficult people, allowing people to be who they are without approval or disapproval, no more betting on the lottery, killing the carpenter-ants, slugs, snails, roachess, fleas, and aphids, no cheating on income tax, not

even one teeny toke, Margarita, or extra bite. The intention to be a better husband, partner, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, friend, mother, father, sister, brother, giving more of time, money, energy to the larger community, being kind and helpful to elders, supporting Noble Causes, listening when others speak, not moving during sitting meditation practice, learning the words of Pali, Tibetan, and Japanese chanting, meditating every day, supporting monks and nuns, and teachers, living a more simple life, causing less suffering to self and others, not being proud and demanding. All of these seem so noble and well-grounded, don't they? How could they lead to anything... how shall we say... unpleasant?

One of my personal favorites is being a fly in the ointment of people whose intentions are saving all sentient beings. The havoc I can create with just views and opinions about this grand topic is impressive – even though I say so myself – a little 'certainty-of-my-own-rightness' sets off skirmishes and battles royal that can keep living beings occupied for years.

Another favorite is those people who vow not to tell any more little white lies, not the BIG audacious ones but the little ones that make themselves look better and others look stupid – some of them even realize that it's actually these little 'reasonable' ones that lock them into my power ever more securely. Still, it is so hard for beings to give these up, especially with a touch of obfuscatory assistance from moi.

My Christian colleagues have a devil of a time arguing about the better road. They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions while the Buddhists say that 'intention' is the underlying causative factor of all action.

Either way, I'll see you on the road – where you may be heading on that is up to you.

Your Ego's Best Friend, Māra 🐉

still the hill relentlessly continued up. We were both exhausted but I thought that, maybe if we made it to the ridge, then we would meet a fire-break. This would then give us some hope as such open tracks usually met up with a road somewhere. Nevertheless, it was still completely uncertain as to where we were actually going.

I never panicked, and Ajahn Tikkhaviro was really calm, but I started thinking that this is true anicca, real uncertainty in life:— We didn't know what would happen or if we would walk all night, and there was no use fantasizing about it because that wasted vital energy. No use being afraid because fear can cause one to make hasty and unwise decisions. No use stopping and giving up, because then we would never get anywhere. My years of training in letting go were definitely coming into effect at this time.

At one point Ajahn Tikkhaviro said "Wait – we go this way."

"We just came from there," I said. It seemed like he was just turning around.

"No we didn't, this is a different way." It went up more. I was convinced we were just turning around, but we weren't. The mountains can be tricky like this. At 9:30 pm we finally met a fire-road on the ridge.

I was relieved, but we still hadn't seen a village and we really didn't know if we would get anywhere. We stopped on the side of the road and Ajahn Tikkhaviro shared the last of his water with me. We each got less than half a cup. "Now water is like gold" is all he said.

We were both so tired we considered just falling asleep right there with our bags still on our backs, but a wind was



picking up and it would have been cold. We thus continued plodding on along the dusty fire break, climbing and descending according to the contours of the hills.

We spotted some lights in the distance, on a different mountain, but the road seemed to head roughly in that direction. We realized it was where we had stayed before heading down into the river valley. Now, just a week later, we had returned to the same spot – the palace! The lights were over ten kilometers away.

During the previous week we had camped out in the backyard of the King of Thailand's Chiang Mai palace, which is only used for special occasions. Normally it stays empty and we had had it completely to ourselves (we couldn't go inside, of course). The yard was a beautifully tended garden with orchids and other colorful flowers which sent a subtle fragrance into the air.

There were three radio towers next to the palace – these were the lights we had seen. We kept walking and the lights got closer, then we saw more lights which looked like they were coming from a few houses. At 10:30 pm we found some abandoned buildings. A sign said that these were guest-rooms for firefighters, but there was no water. Then Ajahn Tikkhaviro stepped in a huge pile of human excrement. After all the difficulties of the day and our utter exhaustion, this was just too much. We laughed for a long long time.

Sometime after 11:00 pm we arrived at a campground and found that the house lights had been coming from this place. We had walked about ten kilometers since finding the fire-break and the palace was still a few kilometers away. The

campground looked like a government-owned place so we decided just to stay there; it was also the case that we were out of energy and couldn't have gone much further, even if we had wanted to. It turned out to be really pleasant and we had it to ourselves. There was water for drinking and bathing.

We bathed, drank our fill of water, then made a fire in a very large fire pit and drank hot three-in-one coffees.

I was filled with immense gratitude for Ajahn Tikkhaviro, and I can't imagine what would have happened if I had been on my own in this situation. I got the feeling that he'd been living a tudong lifestyle long enough that he was just taking everything in stride and not giving so much importance to whether a day was difficult or easy – it all can be used for the practice.

Just after midnight we set our ground-sheets down and lay on the tended lawn under the stars. The wind was whipping through the mountains so we found some rocks that provided some shelter for each of us. I took a Tylenol for the pain in my ankle then crawled under my makeshift blankets – my upper and outer robes plus mosquito net folded in half. I slept very comfortably that night.

Many days were like this. It would seem really difficult – when there wasn't enough water, or when I'd be dirty, tired and sweaty – but then, when I had bathed, when there was enough food again and a place to sleep, the difficulty would just be another memory. Thinking in this way helped me not to take these experiences so seriously. Everything that happens in life is just this way. This is the 'tudong meditation' – used for building wisdom and cultivating the art of letting go. 🙏

Notes:

1. Tudong – Term for Buddhist monks who have taken up a wandering lifestyle, with no fixed location except for the three months of the rainy season. The word is a Thai transliteration of the Pali 'dhutanga,' the literal translation of which is 'a means of shaking off.' It refers to the thirteen ascetic practices that were allowed by the Buddha – such as eating only one meal a day or living at the root of a tree – as well as to the monastics who follow those practices.

2. Chedi – A monument which usually contains bone relics of a great sage. 🙏



Fearless Mountain Production Team

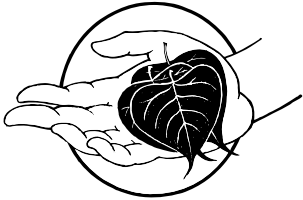
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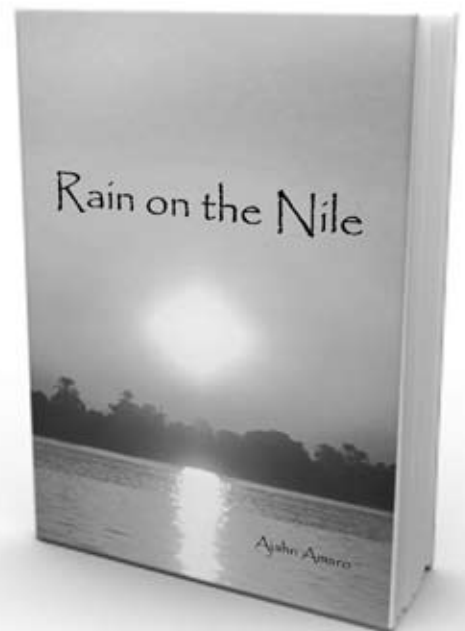
FEARLESS MOUNTAIN



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Rain on the Nile

"When Silent Rain was first compiled, back in 1993, part of the idea of producing such a varied collection of material – talks, poems, travelogues and artwork – was that it would then provide an easy source for smaller offprints over the years. However, up until now, no smaller booklets have been spawned from it. This present book, Rain on the Nile, is something of a remedy for that, being both an outcome of that original intention as well as an arena for the offering up of some more recent material – namely, the travelogue of a journey to Egypt made in December of 2006."



Copies of this book can be requested from the monastery at
Abhayagiri Publications, 16201 Tomki Road, Redwood Valley, CA 95470.

Alternatively it can be downloaded at
www.abhayagiri.org/main/book/1848

