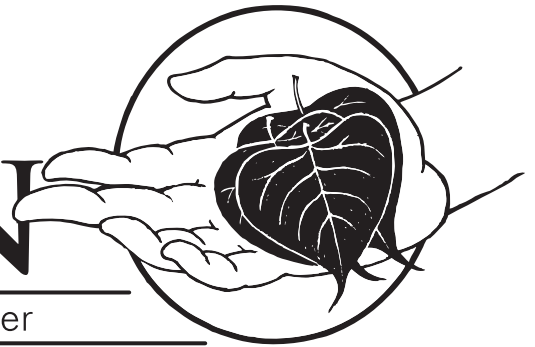


FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter



Winter 2011 • 2554

Volume 16, Number 1



Ajahn Pasanno chats with participants in the Spirit Rock Teen Weekend.

Spiritual Friendship

A Saturday night Dhamma talk given by Ajahn Pasanno on April 10, 2010

Recently, I came across a sutta (MN 97, the Dhanañjani Sutta) that illustrates the themes of *kalyānamitta* (spiritual friendship) and making choices. The sutta begins with Sāriputta walking with a group of monks in the hills south of Rājagaha. He had been away from the main community of monks for some time and a monk who had spent the Rains Retreat in Rājagaha at the Bamboo Grove came down to that region and met with Sāriputta. Because the Buddha had been living in the Bamboo Grove, Sāriputta asks the monk,

“How is the Buddha—is he well and strong?”

“Yes, the Buddha is well and strong.”

“How is the Sangha faring?”

“The Sangha is faring well. It’s well and strong.”

Sāriputta then asks after a layperson that he had known: “How is the brahman Dhanañjani?”

The monk replies, “The brahman Dhanañjani is well and strong.”

“Is he diligent?”

“Oh, how can he be diligent? He has been dishonest and corrupt within society. He has been cheating the king and using his influence with the king to plunder the lay community. His wife—who was a woman of faith and came from a clan that was established in faith—has passed away, and he has now married someone else who doesn’t have faith and comes from a clan

who doesn’t have faith.”

And Sāriputta says, “Hmm... okay. Well, maybe when I get back to Rājagaha, I’ll have to talk with him.”

That incident highlights one aspect of *kalyānamitta*—how Sāriputta, a fully enlightened Arahant—asks questions on a very conventional level. Just because he’s an Arahant, it doesn’t mean he speaks only in transcendent modes. He speaks on a human level. The Buddha is his teacher and the Sangha is a community he has many close relationships with. When the Buddha states that spiritual friendship is the whole of the holy life, it’s not just a theory; that’s how it’s lived, even among the members of the Sangha who have done their work, who are completely liberated. When someone like Sāriputta, whom the Buddha declared as foremost in wisdom, recognizes the importance of spiritual friendship, then for the rest of us it’s a very good reminder of how essential that quality is.

The sutta goes on with Sāriputta wandering by stages back to Rājagaha and staying at the Bamboo Grove. When he’s there, he takes the opportunity to visit the brahman Dhanañjani. He asks him,

“How are you—are you well?”

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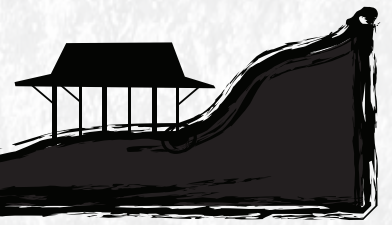
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Contributors: *The Sangha, Luang Por Liam Thitadhammo, Thāniyo Bhikkhu, Tan Pavaro, Tan Thitapañño, and Mettikā Hoffman.*

From the Monastery

Summer 2010



Since the summer of 2010, the structure of Abhayagiri has evolved with many residents taking on new roles. Emblematic of the emerging new roles was the cooperative teaching effort by Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Yatiko, Ajahn Karunadhammo and Debbie Stamp for the annual nine day Thanksgiving Retreat which took place in Santa Rosa, California during late November. Indeed, all four of them have accepted an increasing number of solo teaching engagements outside of the monastery since the departure of former co-abbot Ajahn Amaro.

In August, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Gunavuddho attended the yearly Family Camp at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. One month later Ajahn Pasanno led his first daylong retreat at Spirit Rock, recollecting the teachings of his mentor, Ajahn Chah. Ajahn Yatiko and Ajahn Karunadhammo have also offered teachings at a variety of places throughout northern California, as well as at the monastery. For instance, they co-led an afternoon of body contemplation

featuring an engaging slideshow complete with commentary.

A Few Notables Occurrences

The steady flow of formal teachings and practice at the monastery has been accompanied by a consistent stream of work projects and construction. Since the last update, the exterior of the Dhamma Hall was remodeled, with the residents and visitors at the Monastery working together to give the building a fresh caulking and painting. Furthermore, the continued support of the greater community has allowed the construction of three new cabins, planned for completion by the end of 2010. The residents are pleased that one of the new cabins will be inhabited by long-time community member Debbie Stamp, who continues to support Abhayagiri, especially in the areas of stewardship and financial administration.

The monastics are grateful that the extended community continues to provide steady support in spite of difficult economic times. Such support

continues to manifest in many forms including a delightful visit from Patrick Anderson. Patrick, formerly Piyasilo Bhikkhu, lived as a monk for nine years in Thailand and currently lives in North Dakota, making his living in the field of health and wellness. During his five days at the monastery, Patrick generously provided guidance on maintaining healthy posture, daily exercises for strength and flexibility and general advice for preventing injury and maintaining a healthy body as a support for a healthy mind. Another notable event occurred in August when flames broke out along the perimeter of the Monastery property. Fortunately, the fire did not result in any injuries or significant property damage due to the presence of an enthusiastic and well-prepared local firefighting squad including two helicopters.

Pali, the Patimokkha and the Life of a Bhikkhu

Even amidst change, growth and Abhayagiri's first fire scare, the community continues to focus on nourishing the foundations of the spiritual life through meditation and study. Several residents have been exploring learning Pali, the original scriptural language of Theravāda Buddhism. Learning Pali helps one understand the Buddha's teachings more clearly by providing more precise transmissions of the teachings than English translations. Enthusiasm for the Pali language takes a variety of forms. For example, many of the monks at Abhayagiri are able to recite the Patimokkha from memory in this ancient language. The 227 Patimokkha rules are the basic protocols of training for a Theravāda Buddhist monk, which include maintaining celibacy, not handling money and abstaining from eating after mid-day. The words of the Patimokkha are chanted every fortnight in the original Pali at Abhayagiri,



Teen Weekend at Abhayagiri



The last hill of the Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage



Rain on Kathina day did not dampen peoples' spirits.



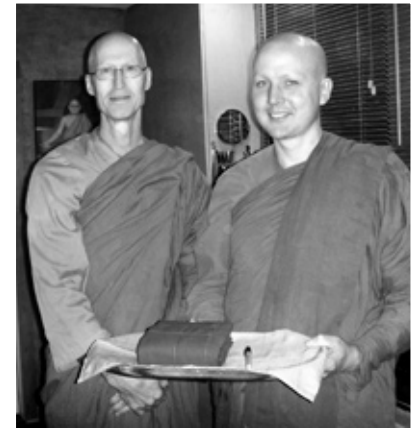
Volunteer firefighters and a helicopter put out a small fire that started on the road.



Farewell to Ajahn Amaro



Monastic Retreat in Santa Rosa



The finished Kathina robe

as well as at Theravāda monasteries in Southeast Asia and throughout the world; the recitation takes about 50 minutes.

Learning this language takes commitment and at times a group effort. A number of younger monastics have devoted themselves to learning Pali together. They meet regularly at the Bhikkhu Commons to discuss Pali and educate themselves on the fundamentals of the language. Other community members are also involved in an effort to create new chants by taking inspiring verses in Pali and pairing them with smooth English translations.

Looking Forward

In July two of Abhayagiri's most influential members departed to contribute elsewhere: Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Sudanto. Ajahn Sudanto currently oversees the development of a new monastery in the Pacific Northwest. For a look at the unfolding of this fledgling community, see the article on the Pacific Hermitage included in this issue of the newsletter. Meanwhile Ajahn Amaro, who was co-abbot of Abhayagiri for 14 years, is now abbot of Amaravati Monastery in England, the largest Western branch monastery of the Ajahn Chah tradition. Although steering such a large and diverse community comes with its challenges, many people have expressed their appreciation for his efforts. Ajahn Amaro has placed particular emphasis on building community, meeting individually with each member of the extensive resident community.

Ajahn Amaro was in many ways the public presence of the Monastery. Thus, his departure provides an opportunity to recollect the role of the Monastery in the greater world. In this modern era, monastics connect with the greater world in a variety of ways. Such contacts are made through the dhamma talks and articles freely available on the website, the books sent out upon request to prisoners across the country and by hosting various annual events such as the Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage and Spirit Rock Teen Weekend. This kind of community service can also be an integral part of the holy life. As Ajahn Pasanno recently said, "Generosity can be your foundation, the spring from which all good things come." 🙏

Walking with Awareness-

A Guide to Walking Meditation

Written by Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo

Translated by Thāniyo Bhikkhu

Walking – Something we Should Know how to do.

Walking *jong-grom* is a way to practise meditation while walking up and down. Cultivating this will bring happiness and serenity to our practice.

When walking meditation, we should move unhurriedly, with a peaceful and relaxed attitude, and a smile on our face. Walking, we have all the time in the world, and nothing else whatsoever that we have to do.

With every step, we let our worries and concerns fall away. We should take every single step in this way, for the sake of abiding in serene happiness.

This is not beyond our capability. Every one of us can do it, for we all truly wish to dwell in serene happiness.

Walking with Ease

In our daily lives, the steps we take are laden with our anxieties and concerns – weighed down with fear. You could say our lives are built up on months and years of worry. That is why we cannot take our steps with ease.

This world is full of beauty, with many lovely and captivating paths to choose from. There are paths scented with the fragrance of blossoms, and arrayed with tasteful selections of colour.

But we pass by unaware, not pausing to admire our surroundings, with the faltering steps of one ill-at-ease.

Walking *jong-grom* involves re-training the way we walk – so that we learn to move with ease.

When I was new to this training of Dhamma-Vinaya, I initially walked without confidence, without steadiness. In the beginning we are all like this. But then, after not so many weeks, we are able to walk assuredly and steadily; clear, bright and calm – quite naturally.

Our lives are often haphazard and

chaotic. We are continually rushed and under pressure due to this matter or that. We feel that we have to dash about constantly. But just where is it that we are rushing to? This is a question we tend not to ask ourselves.

Walking *jong-grom* is like taking a stroll. We don't need to set any definite goal, or time-limit. We walk meditation just to walk meditation. The point is just to walk, without any goal to be reached. Walking meditation is not a method – it is an aim. Each step that we take is our life.

Each step is serene happiness. That is the reason we don't walk in a hurry. That is the reason we step with measured dignity. There's nowhere we must get to, no goal to pull us forward. In this way, we walk mindfully, with contentment on our face.

We walk meditation to cast away our worries, once and for all.

Suppose that we had the eyes of the Buddha, we could see the footsteps of others impressed in the ground – engraved records of their worries and sadness. We would take note of these marks as we passed by, as a scientist observes micro-organisms through a microscope.



The secret of walking *jong-grom* is to walk in a manner that will imprint nothing but peaceful happiness with each step. To walk like this, we must learn how to throw off all of our sadness and worries, without exception.

Walking in a Place Free From Dust

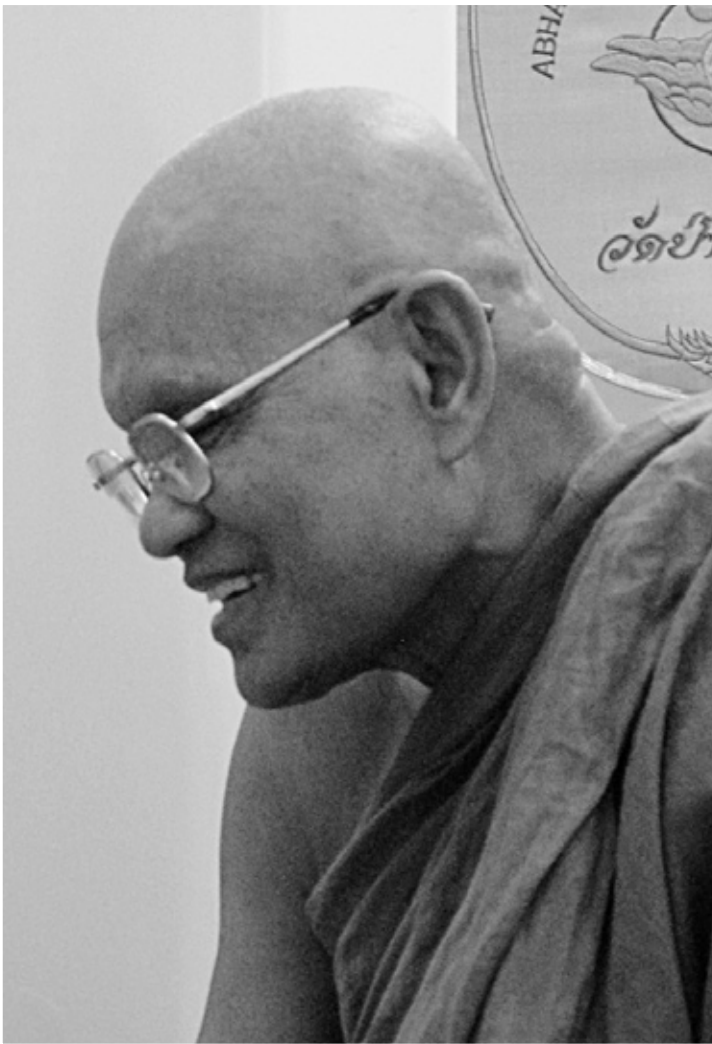
We must walk in the way of one with no worries. This means to walk in a place of purity. In such a place, there is striking beauty, peace, and immense happiness.

Should you find yourself in such a place, in what manner would you walk? Can you really be sure that you would not leave impressions of the worry and sadness of the world, there in your footprints, in that pure place? If we bring sadness and worries, and print them into the ground, we will leave the earth tainted and blemished with traces of our gloom. If we are to live in this world serenely and happily, it is essential that we walk with peace and ease right from this moment on.

If we are able to step on the surface of this earth with happiness and serenity, then there is no need at all to travel to the land of the Buddha. Both that which is mundane and that which is pure are born right here in this heart of ours. In any moment that we are free, peaceful and happy, the mundane is pure, and purity is mundane. There is nowhere at all that we need to go, and no need to depend upon the footsteps of the historical Buddha.

The moment we realise that the mundane and the pure truly are born from the heart, we are filled with happiness. We are happy because we know that there is both dust and freedom from that dust. Should we open our eyes and stride, mindful, serene and happy, we will walk in that place of purity. This will be our inspiration to walk *jong-grom* every day.

(Continued on page 6)



Luang Por Liem's visit

The photographs on pages 4, 5, and 15 were taken during Luang Por Liem's visit to the West Coast in 2009.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

Ajahn Anek and Ajahn Pasanno

COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:

(Right to left) Ajahn Anek, Luang Por Liem, and Ajahn Pasanno

Ajahn Liem receives visitors at Abhayagiri. *Photo: Ajahn Amaro*

Abhayagiri trail *Photo: Sean Fargo*

Luang Por Liem, Ajahn Anek, and Ajahn Kevali visit the Pacific Northwest.



The Way we Walk Through Life

When walking meditation, please walk in a natural way. No need to keep the hands together at the chest, or maintain a rigorous posture. Choose a quiet and peaceful walking path in the forest, in a public park, on the bank of a river, or in a monastery or meditation centre.

You can practise at any time. Should anyone see you, they'll know you are walking jong-grom, and they won't disturb you. Anytime you encounter someone during your meditation, simply make a brief sign of respect, joining your hands and raising them to the chest, then carry on walking.

I used to walk jong-grom in the early morning and the evening, when I lived in the forest. The forest animals, my neighbouring friends, would come and call out when they saw me walking. They weren't familiar with the movements of one walking at ease, peaceful and quiet. But, if I were to walk rapidly, they would simply think, 'That's something normal', and pay no further attention.

Most of us these days go through life, whether we are walking, standing, sitting, or looking at all the different things in the world and its various living beings, as if we are sleepwalking. We have no idea what we are doing, or in which direction we are headed. Our awakening will depend on whether we are able to walk with mindfulness. The future of all living beings on earth truly depends on the way that we take each step we take.

"One who traces the footsteps of his heart
Will escape from Mara's snare."

Walking for Awakening

Walking jong-grom can open our eyes and ears to the wonders of the universe, and change the world into a place of peace and joy. It can help us to end suffering, sorrow, sadness and worries, and bring us the happiness of peace. In the same way, it can enable us to see the suffering in life. If we can't see that which arises before and all around us, how can we expect to see our own nature?

Seeing our own nature is not likely to come about through closing our eyes. On the contrary, we must open our eyes and awaken to the true nature of the way things really are in the world.

Opening our eyes will enable us to see nature within ourselves, and our own inner Buddha-nature: awakening. The hardships of poverty and the allure of wealth: even the power that these things can hold over us can not separate us from our own essential nature.

Walking paths shaded with leafy trees, and others with lovely coverings of fallen leaves, these are the jong-grom paths that lie ahead of us. We should take full joy in these meditation paths. They won't lead us astray. While walking, we will observe and take note, awakening to the true suffering of the world.

Every walkway in this world can be a walking meditation path for us. As we awaken, we will not hesitate to walk upon these paths at all.

Doesn't our anguish in life merely arise from doubts, hesitation, and worry? Awakening to the suffering of our fellow beings, we feel nothing for one another but kindness and compassion, just like a Bodhisattva.

Breathing with Mindfulness

Breathing with mindfulness is different to ordinary breathing. To breathe with mindfulness means that as we breathe, we know that we're breathing. When we breathe in long, we know – we are breathing in long. When we breathe in short, we know – we are breathing in short. When we breathe in a subtle breath, we know – we are breathing in a subtle breath. How can we focus on breathing and walking at the same time?

One way is to combine the breathing and the walking together using a counting technique. We can count the number of steps we take. Or, to put it another way, we can measure the length of our breath according to the number of steps: how many steps do we take as we are breathing in? And how many steps do we take as we are breathing out?

Do this for some time – for a number of weeks. Give it a try – test it out. Slow down your steps, but not too much, and breathe normally. Don't try to lengthen your breathing. Try this out for a period, then begin to take note: as you breathe in, how many steps are there?

Using this method, our attention is on our breathing and our walking at the same time, and we develop a close connection to the peacefulness and clarity of our walking and our breathing. This increases our attentiveness, peacefulness, serenity and happiness. It calms and refines the objects of our attention.

This is awakening.
This is knowledge.
And this is wisdom. 🙏

A View from Middle Age

By Tan Pavaro

Nothing unusual is happening. I remind myself of this while contemplating the perplexity I've experienced during this attempt to share something from my rich, but stubbornly inchoate, impressions of the past year. The arid results of these writing labors have been humbling. Fortunately, a grateful heart has its own distinct agency.

After visiting Abhayagiri for a month in late 2008, in December of 2009 I left Birken Forest Monastery in Canada—my monastic “home” during the first eight years of training—and arrived back in northern California for an extended stay. During the previous year the prospect of returning had delighted me. (Wonderful community; living around my preceptor, Ajahn Pasanno; getting to know Ajahn Amaro a little better; the post-Wan Phra saunas). As a majjhima bhikkhu (in the “middle” years as a monk, between five and ten Rains), I discerned that training with other teachers and approaches to practice and living in the midst of other community dynamics, would mature my understanding of the holy life. Time to stretch the wings and broaden the stance. Or as Ajahn Jayasaro had remarked: “By all means, get out and visit other monasteries, Pavaro; the majjhima years are your selfish years.” The signs were encouraging.

It's a commonplace observation that we sometimes fear the very changes we seek. Yet my earlier exposure to the place known as “Abhayagiri” and the people who inhabit it undoubtedly softened the re-entry into what is by so many measures a different environment from Birken. Let me count the ways: different teachers, different *kor wat* (monastery etiquette) and daily schedule, different chanting, much larger Sangha, different relations with the lay community, different climate, much larger property, different forest and terrain, in a different country. It's an incomplete list.

Needing modest limits to express something of my appreciation for the generous tenor of Sangha life during my stay, a single recollection comes to mind.

At the end of the winter retreat three junior members of the monastic

community (one samanera and two anagarikas) announced their intentions to leave the training. What might have been interpreted as a loss or failure by the community was met with respectful care. Brief ceremonies were held. The abbots thanked each for their commitment to the monastery and acknowledged the value of what they had accomplished, both practically and spiritually. During the time the three men readied themselves to return to their lay lives, people found occasions to offer well-wishing and regard. While participating in this, my attention was repeatedly struck by the fertility of transitions to forgive and honor, to encourage and clarify. The men had entered monastic life sincerely, given their honest efforts, and, it seemed to me, departed standing a little more squarely and maturely in their lives. My impression is that each of them felt somehow transformed, and blessed.

Over the next months leading into and through the Vassa period, I received all the everyday, extraordinary benefits of life at Abhayagiri. Readers of this newsletter are likely aware that several momentous changes took place. Eventually I too needed to take my leave.

After leading a retreat in Alberta I flew to southern BC for time with family, especially to see my dear father (aged 97) and step-mother. As always, this last visit involved an extended dose of TV “viewing,” volume up. (Is there a suitable verb for “trying without success to ignore?”) A flight to Vancouver was needed to connect at last with Ajahn Sona, Birken's abbot, and the other monastics. They had driven to the city to attend a Kathina celebration. Our reunion and the return to Birken was filled with buoyant humor and mutual interest.

It is now a late November morning at Birken. Ajahn Sona left a week ago to lead a retreat near Ottawa. Our heating system, massively overhauled during the summer and the subject of daily tinkering and puzzlement ever since, continues not to work like the monks-in-the-know would have hoped. One of them is presently on the phone speaking with admirable







technical acumen and diplomacy, to the plumber who designed and installed it. I've just started up the wood stoves to generate more warmth in the main building. We have a monk down with the flu. Several guests are inside, meditating in toques and blankets. Outside, another monk, equipped with a cane for his injured knee, is supervising a pair of sturdy guests as they chain up the big tires on our tractor. The weight of the chains and the dense cold make it awkward work. This afternoon I'll be able to plow the seven kilometer gravel road that winds up to the property. As mealtime draws near, I survey the deepening snow and falling temperatures with a mixture of alert familiarity and, well...I admit to some disappointment.

There's nothing unusual in any of this. Conditions are changing; nothing resolves or remains. Transitions don't just “occur” in our lives, as things to be observed at a distance—they comprise our lives. As for me, in a week I should be flying to Thailand for a year of training. The arrangements have been made; generous plans are in place.

Feeling so much in transition myself at present, I suppose the dislocated quality of these reflections has been unavoidable. I might have hoped for a more coherent expression of gratitude. Wisdom resides well beneath even the most elegant of our ideas. Dhamma reminds me of an awakened capacity to consent to uncertainty. These are just words, but something in this gracious possibility continues to encourage me deeply; it is a blessing and a refuge that helps to sustain my bhikkhu life. I love it even while not knowing what will become of it. And I have the wisdom and kindness of my teachers and so many friends to thank for it all. 🙏

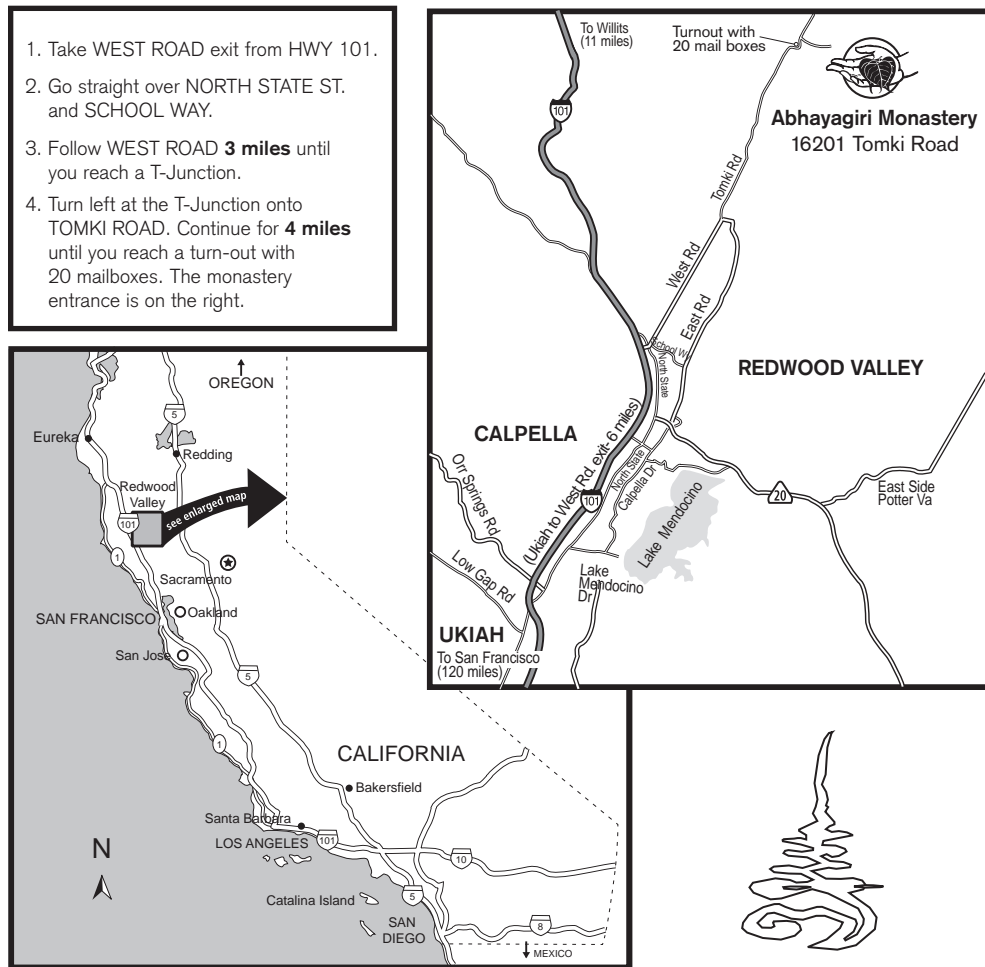
LUNAR OBSERVANCE DAYS

2554	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
	TUE 4	THU 3	FRI 4	SUN 3	MON 2
	WED 12	FRI 11	SAT 12	MON 11	TUE 10
	WED 19	FRI 18 ¹	SAT 19	MON 18	TUE 17 ²
	THU 27	SAT 26	SUN 27	TUE 26	WED 25

1. Māgha Pūjā 2. Visākha Pūjā

DIRECTIONS TO ABHAYAGIRI

- Take WEST ROAD exit from HWY 101.
- Go straight over NORTH STATE ST. and SCHOOL WAY.
- Follow WEST ROAD **3 miles** until you reach a T-Junction.
- 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.



Abhayagiri Monastery
16201 Tomki Road

REDWOOD VALLEY

CALPELLA

UKIAH

CALIFORNIA

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR EVENTS

- NORTH AMERICA**
- Āloka Vihāra**
1632 48th Ave.,
San Francisco, CA 94122
- Sitavana Birken Forest Monastery**
PO Box 5, Knutsford, B.C.
Canada V0E 2A0
+1 (778) 785-6059
email: meditate@birken.ca
(preferred method of contact)
- Tisarana Buddhist Monastery**
1356 Powers Road, RR #3
Perth, Ontario K7H 3C5
Tel: +1 (613) 264 8208
www.tisarana.ca
Stewards: Tisarana Buddhist Monastery
- Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
Institute for World Religions**
2304 McKinley Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94703
Tel. (510) 848 3440
Fax. (510) 548 4551
www.drba.org
- Portland Friends of the Dhamma**
1422 SE Tacoma St., 2nd Floor
Portland, OR 97202
sakula@notjustus.com
- Spirit Rock Meditation Center**
5000 Sir Francis Drake Blvd.
Woodacre, CA
Tel. (415) 488 0164
Fax. (415) 488 1025
www.spiritrock.org
- Yoga Mendocino**
206 Mason St.
Ukiah, CA 95482
Tel. (707) 462 2580
www.yogamendocino.org
- THAILAND**
- Wat Pah Nanachat**
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubun 34310
- UNITED KINGDOM**
- Amaravati Buddhist Monastery**
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ.
Tel. +44 (0) 144 284 2455
Fax: +44 (0) 144 284 3721
www.amaravati.org
- Cittaviveka
Chithurst Buddhist Monastery**
Chithurst, Petersfield,
Hampshire GU31 5EU.
Tel. +44 (0) 1730 814 986
Fax. +44 (0) 1730 817 334
www.cittaviveka.org
- Aruna Ratanagiri
Harnham Buddhist Monastery**
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Northumberland NE20 0HF.
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Fax. +44 (0) 1661 881 019
www.ratanagiri.org
- NEW ZEALAND**
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Monastery**
17 Rakau Grove
Stokes Valley,
Lower Hutt 5019
Tel. +64 (0) 4 5637 193
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz
- Vimutti Monastery**
PO Box 7
Bombay, 2343
Tel. +64 (0) 9 236 6816
www.vimutti.org.nz
- AUSTRALIA**
- Bodhivana Monastery**
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East Warburton,
Victoria 3799.
Tel. +61 (0) 3 5966 5999
Fax. +61 (0) 3 5966 5998

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 December 2010

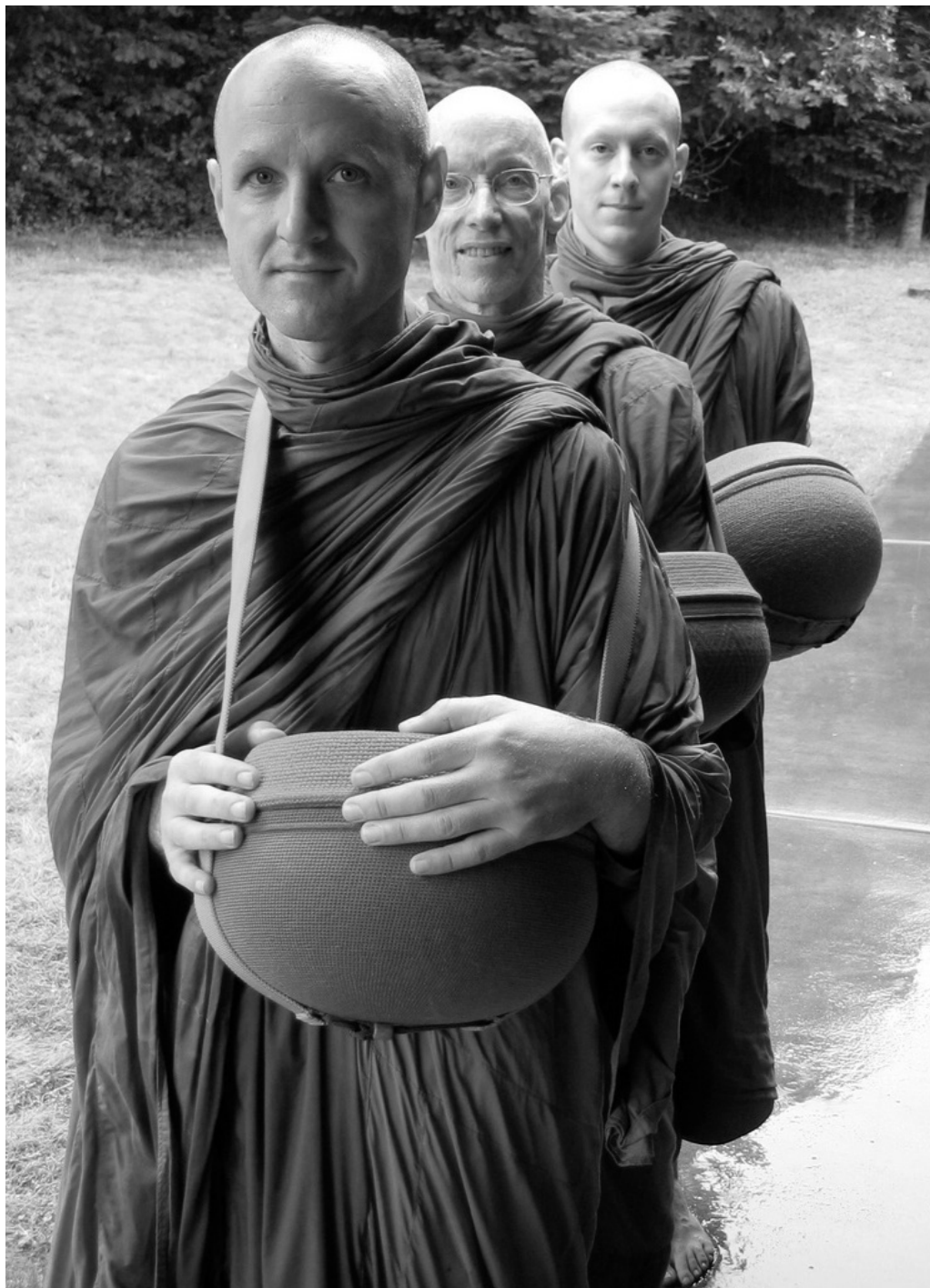
Pasanno Bhikkhu	37
Yatiko Bhikkhu	18
Pesalo Bhikkhu	15
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	13
Gunavuddho Bhikkhu	11
Thitābho Bhikkhu	4
Kassapo Bhikkhu	4
Cunda Bhikkhu	3
Kaccāna Bhikkhu	2
Thitapañño Bhikkhu	2
Kovilo Bhikkhu	1
Pamutto Bhikkhu	1
Brother Samatā (visiting)	
Sāmanera Suddhāso	
Anagārika Bryan Johnson	
Anagārika Kevin Merfeld	
LONGTERM LAY RESIDENT	
Upāsikā Debbie Stamp	
AT PACIFIC HERMITAGE (hermitage.abhayagiri.org)	
Sudanto Bhikkhu	16
Cāgānando Bhikkhu	6
Anagārika Joe Ginsberg	

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

Jan	3	Abhayagiri community enters three-month Winter Retreat period, ending on March 31.
	4	Ajahn Anandabodhi leads monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
	16	Ajahn Chah Memorial Day
Feb	1	Reverend Heng Sure leads monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
	18	Māgha Pūjā – ‘Sangha Day’ observance at Abhayagiri
Mar	1	Santideva (Fred Kral) and Kathryn Guta lead monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
	31	Abhayagiri Winter Retreat period ends
Apr	4	Dhamma talk at Three Jewels Dharma Hall, Fort Bragg, CA – Contact: <i>Mettika Hoffman</i> (707) 964-4606
	5	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
	10	Community work day at Abhayagiri
	13	Meditation and Dhamma talk at Yoga Mendocino (Yomo), Ukiah, CA – Contact: www.yogamendocino.org
	13-17	Meditation Retreat led by Ajahn Yatiko and Ajahn Karunadhammo at the Pine Lake Retreat Center, Westfield, WI – For more information and registration contact <i>Madison Vipassana</i> at http://madisonmeditation.org/
May	3	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
	8	Community work day at Abhayagiri
	11	Meditation and Dhamma talk at Yoga Mendocino (Yomo), Ukiah, CA – Contact: www.yogamendocino.org
	17	Visākha Pūjā – ‘Buddha Day’ observance at Abhayagiri
June	6	Dhamma talk at Three Jewels Dharma Hall, Fort Bragg, CA – Contact: <i>Mettika Hoffman</i> (707) 964-4606
	7	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
	8	Meditation and Dhamma talk at Yoga Mendocino (Yomo), Ukiah, CA – Contact: www.yogamendocino.org
	12	Community work day at Abhayagiri
	17	Ajahn Chah’s Birthday

Check the online calendar at www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/days for updates on events.

- Every Saturday evening at Abhayagiri**
Chanting, meditation & Dhamma talk, beginning at 7:30 pm.
- Every Lunar Quarter at Abhayagiri (see calendar on this page)**
Chanting, meditation, Precepts, Dhamma talk, and late night vigil, beginning at 7:30 pm.
- Second Sunday of each month at Abhayagiri (April through December)**
Community work day, 8:00 am–4:00 pm.
- First Tuesday of the month in Berkeley, CA**
5:00-6:00 pm, Informal tea gathering. 7:30-9:30 pm, Meditation, Precepts & Dhamma talk by monastic at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, 2304 McKinley.
- Second Wednesday of each month at Yoga Mendocino**
7:30 pm–9:00 pm: Meditation and Dhamma talk by Theravāda monastic. During the months of Jan, Feb, Mar, the evening will be led by an Upasika.
- Every Tuesday and Friday at Portland Friends of the Dhamma**
7:00 pm–9:00 pm: Meditation and Dhamma discussion with lay practitioners.



Residents of the Pacific Hermitage walk almsround four times a week.

A Glimpse of the Pacific Hermitage, Abhayagiri's First Branch Monastery

By Tan Thitapañño

"Oh my gosh, they're right here!" a friendly woman at the Yoga Samadhi Center in White Salmon, Washington, recounts her reaction upon first seeing monks in the area. "I hadn't seen a robe for so many years." Some 15 years ago she spent time meditating in Thailand, an environment where monastics with shaved heads and

saffron robes are a welcome and common sight. But how would three monks fare in the Pacific Northwest without handling money, using a car or even storing food past mid-day? At the end of October, Ajahn Pasanno and four junior monastics headed 13 hours north for a friendly trip to touch base with the Pacific Hermitage,

Abhayagiri's first branch monastery.

A little more than three months prior, Ajahn Sudanto, Tan Cāgānando and Tan Thitābho quietly began carving out simple lives in a rural log cabin near White Salmon, Washington, accompanied by many hopes and aspirations, but no guarantees. "We had no idea how we would be received," says Ajahn Sudanto, the senior monk at the Hermitage. Indeed, when people in modern America encounter monks living a traditional monastic lifestyle, the reactions evoked vary from, "Wow, that's so inspiring!" to "Why can't the monks just take care of themselves?"

Given the potential for suspicion and misunderstandings to arise, how could the monks of the Hermitage connect with people in a friendly, peaceful, and non-threatening way? "One thing that's been really helpful is going on alms round everyday," says Ajahn Sudanto. And when you live at 174 Tunnel Road, alms round to the towns of Bingen and White Salmon below is not a simple matter. Four days a week the monks walk the long eight-mile circuit down to these two towns. On these days the route can take up to four hours, including hiking down and then back up an incline of approximately 2,000 feet.

Yet, their efforts have certainly been appreciated. The visiting monastics from Abhayagiri were impressed by the spirit of cooperation that has emerged between the monks and the greater community. Ajahn Pasanno noted during his visit to the Hermitage that there seems to be a spiritual yearning among many in the area: "Even in a town of just some 2,200 people, there is real interest in people to draw close to something that is good, that is peaceful. It's extraordinarily heartening." Indeed, it seems many people in this modern age are





The main Hermitage building



Receiving a meal in White Salmon City Park

seeking a source of inner nourishment greater than what a stable job, good health insurance and a safe home can provide. As Ajahn Sudanto has noted, “In a culture where there is so much concern for building up one’s security and wealth, the way monks live – without money and with little security – provides an opportunity for connection and community.”

As three monks living alone without a car, without money and without even stored food, the daily need for nourishment means that the morning is a time of interaction with the greater community. In addition to making offerings to the monks during their alms round, many people have brought cooked meals directly to the monastery. These interactions are just part of a larger connection of generosity between the monks and the extended community. Dale Peters, a resident of nearby Parkland, Oregon, appreciates the symbiotic relationship that has developed between the monks and the community: “The community helps support [the monks], and the monks offer ongoing teachings to give back to the community. It’s really been pretty amazing.”

Indeed, the monks at the Hermitage

are encouraged by the enthusiastic response to their endeavors to make the Buddha’s teachings available. The first public event in White Salmon, an introduction to Buddhist practice and meditation, drew 60 people. Furthermore, such positive receptions have led the monks to offer a similar event on a monthly basis, as well as an evening of meditation, teaching and discussion every Tuesday. And yet, if the glowing reports of the Pacific Hermitage seem too good to be true, it can be useful to keep in mind that the success thus far is result of a great deal of foresight and dedication by many parties, both past and present.

“We do work when there’s work to do. And there’s always work to do... so we work everyday,” says Tan Cāganando.

During its first few months, building a firm foundation for the Hermitage has required a great deal of dedication, and not just from the three resident monks. Many people from the area have come forward to offer support. For example, at the end of November, Members of the Portland Friends of the Dhamma led a traditional gathering to make offerings of cloth and other supplies. The event drew seventy people, who came from the local town, the Portland area and even throughout the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, seen in a larger perspective, the Hermitage is the product of years of sustained effort by the greater Abhayagiri community to work-out the nitty-gritty details and daunting complexities of non-profit guidelines, zoning laws, organizational bylaws and last but not least, figuring out how to take care of the rent and utility bills when the residents are not permitted to handle money.

What does the future hold for the Pacific Hermitage? There are plenty of challenges ahead including

making it through the first winter in this rugged climate. Indeed, even before the official start of winter, the snow at the Hermitage is beginning to pile up, making travel to and from the property quite challenging. Given these conditions, Tan Thitābho, a junior monk currently residing at the Hermitage, is exchanging places in late December with Anagārika Joe Ginsberg who is currently in training at Abhayagiri. Since anagārikas’ precepts allow them to cook and store food, Joe’s presence at the Hermitage will ensure that the monks are looked after even when inclement weather makes travel dangerous or impossible. Thus, with the support of an anagārika during the snowy season and a solid groundwork for the Hermitage having been laid, it is hoped that this winter will be an opportunity to turn further inward and nourish the spiritual aspirations for which this budding spiritual community exists.

For a further look and continued updates on this budding community, visit pacifichermitage.org. The Blog section includes many photos and a link to an interesting article about the monks published in the local newspaper. 🙏



Almsround in the snow



Kuti under construction

Of course, Dhanañjani says, “I’m well.”

Sāriputta just asks innocent questions: “And are you diligent, brahman?” in the sense of, “Are you keeping up with your practice, are you maintaining your training?”

“Oh, how can I be diligent? I’ve got to look after my parents, my wife and my children. I’ve got to look after my family, friends and workers. I’ve got to perform all of the functions of my duties toward the king, and then I have to maintain my own physical body, so it’s difficult to be diligent.”

Then Sāriputta asks a question again: “If one is neglectful of the Dhamma, is not living in accordance with the Dhamma and is living unskillfully, when one dies and is faced with the wardens of hell, and you try to tell them, ‘It’s because of my parents that I’ve been living unrighteously and have not been living in accordance with the Dhamma,’ what do you think they’d say to that?”

“Well, I don’t think that would make much of an impression with them.”

“And what if your parents tried to convince the wardens of hell that you’ve been living unrighteously and not in accordance with the Dhamma because you’ve been looking after them?”

“I don’t think they’d listen to me.”

Then Sāriputta goes through the whole list of people after the parents and asks the same questions—your wife and children, circle of family and relatives, workers and associates, the king, and your body. Of course it’s all the same answer. These are not convincing arguments when it comes down to the particulars, especially if one takes it as a reflection upon the impersonal nature of *kamma*. When one comes to the end of one’s life, that *kamma* is still ripening in a particular fashion, despite the different excuses and rationalizations. And saying, “I was too busy to be doing this or doing that, I was too busy to practice, I was too busy to be keeping the precepts, I was too busy to develop—it doesn’t wash. One of the chants that the Buddha has us use as a daily reflection is, “I’m of the nature to age, I’ve not gone beyond aging, I’m of the nature to sicken, I’ve not gone beyond sickness, I’m of the nature to die, I’ve not gone beyond dying. All that is mine that is beloved and pleasing will become otherwise and will become separated from me.” The last part, on *kamma*, says, “I’m the owner of my *kamma*, heir to my *kamma*, born of my *kamma*, related to my *kamma*, abide supported by my *kamma*. Whatever *kamma* I shall do, for good or for evil, of that I will be the heir.” So that is the fundamental truth

of nature—that we receive the fruits of our actions, and it’s our actions of body, speech and mind that designate our well-being or our suffering, that designate our rebirth as well as the quality of being from moment to moment. This is just a fundamental principle of nature, despite the various excuses or rationalizations that we come up with.

Sāriputta’s way of teaching is quite interesting to me because he doesn’t just go to the brahman’s house and upbraid him. He just asks questions. Of course, they are skillfully placed questions, very pointed questions, and the brahman has a foundation in faith. Sāriputta wouldn’t ask after him if he hadn’t had a good association with him and if Dhanañjani didn’t have a fairly good foundation in his perspective, views, beliefs and training. Sāriputta is concerned for him, which is another aspect of *kalyānamitta*. Asking questions is like holding up a mirror; the brahman answers very honestly, and he reveals the truth to himself.

Then Sāriputta continues: “Brahman, which is better, a person who looks after his parents in an unrighteous way, not according to Dhamma, or one who looks after his parents in a righteous way and in accordance with Dhamma?” The brahman answers, “Well, it’s a better person who looks after his parents in a righteous way and in accordance with Dhamma.” Sāriputta then says, “There are ways to live that are blameless; one can avoid what is unskillful and unwholesome, still do one’s duty and also bring benefits and blessings into one’s own life and into the life of one’s parents.” Then he goes through the whole list of people again. And Sāriputta leaves it there. He doesn’t push the brahman at all; he just leaves the brahman to figure it out for himself. One assumes that the brahman took it seriously and changed his ways.

The sutta continues on at a later time when the brahman becomes ill. He sends one of his servants to inform Sāriputta that the brahman Dhanañjani is ill, afflicted, in great pain, and may not live much longer and to request Sāriputta to visit him, which Sāriputta does. He arrives and asks the brahman quite directly, “How are you faring? Are you in comfort or in discomfort? Are your painful feelings increasing or



Ajahn Pasanno receives almsfood at the Spirit Rock Family Camp

Spiritual Friendship... (continued from page 12)

decreasing? Are you able to bear this?" And the brahman answers, "Basically, I'm doing awful. It's getting more painful and more uncomfortable. I don't think I'm going to survive this." Again, as a kalyānamitta, as a good spiritual friend, when somebody is sick, one goes to visit them to give them encouragement and support but also to be quite direct and open.

Sometimes, somebody can be on his or her deathbed and looking awful, and the relatives show up from time to time and say, "Oh, you're looking good today," and so on. They try to keep the banter upbeat and get out as quickly as possible. I don't think that's particularly helpful. Instead, to actually say, "Yes, you're in a lot of pain and discomfort, this disease is progressing like this and that, and are you able to deal with it? How can you work with it?"—that's honesty as to the reality of the situation, which is something that we generally avoid in society. It doesn't even matter whether it's American society or Asian society—there's a willingness to live in denial of old age, sickness, and death. It's a common thread that goes through the human condition.

There's something really refreshing about the Buddha's teachings, as he looks quite directly at things—at aging, sickness, death, and suffering in different ways, in terms of being in a difficult situation, being blamed or criticized, or feeling overwhelmed. When one is willing to look directly at the feeling or the situation, the circumstances, and the way the mind responds—the more directly one is able to look at them, the less threatening and difficult they actually are. Or looking at one's own defilements, one's own greed, desire, lust, aversions, irritations, fears, views and opinions—if one is able to look directly at them, they tend to have less power. It's when we skip over them or aren't willing to look that they're too intimidating, too threatening. That's where the actual strength of the Dhamma comes from—from our willingness and ability to apply mindfulness and awareness at the very root of the experience, at its arising, at its establishing, to be really present. So that's what Sāriputta is doing by being quite forthright

and saying, "What's the experience? How are you doing, really?"

Then Sāriputta asks, "Well, which is more desirable, the hell realms or an animal rebirth?" And the brahman replies, "An animal rebirth." "And which is more desirable, the animal realm or the realm of ghosts?" "Actually the realm of ghosts is better." Then Sāriputta goes through the ascending cosmology of Buddhism in Indian culture, recognizing the desirability of the human birth, the deva realms and then the realm of the Brahma Gods. Sāriputta thinks to himself, "These brahmins hold rebirth in the Brahma realms

and union with Brahma as the highest rebirth." He asks, "Do you want to know the way to union with the Brahma Gods?", and of course, the brahman says yes. Sāriputta then teaches the *brahmavihāras*: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—how to develop them and establish the mind in these refined qualities. Then the brahman passes away and is reborn in a Brahma realm.

Again, it's interesting how Sāriputta teaches in terms of questions and making choices, because often the choices that we make are not very conscious. By asking questions, one starts to recognize, "I've got a choice whether I let my mind go towards wholesome or unwholesome states." And whether one believes in the cosmological structure of the universe or one perceives it in psychological terms, we still choose how we direct the mind. Do we let the mind go towards suffering and misery, which is equated to a hell realm? Do we let our minds be overwhelmed by the base qualities of fear and desire, which



Ajahn Pasanno hosts teatime in a Berkeley park.



Ajahn Santicittā and Sister Sumedha joined us for Kathina.

is more like an animal realm? Do we get caught up in *asura* states of mind, which are indulging in anger and ill will, seeking power, and functioning from fear? Do we make choices going toward the human realm, establishing the human qualities of empathy, responsibility and effort? Or do we direct attention to the heavenly realms of bliss and unalloyed happiness?

These can be depicted and conceived of as psychological states or as actual realms. But however one conceives them, they're still choices that we make. Do we take responsibility for those choices or do we just drift into the choices out of habit and conditioning? Are we blindly led by others? Even if we're taking responsibility for them—are those choices wisely informed? Are they clearly considered? By seeing those aspects of making choices, we realize that our lives are confronted with making choices all the time. The result of the choices that we make has implications. When we choose to get angry and upset at something, it has a result personally and it

(Continued on page 15)

From Māra's Desk - Lifetime Genuine Guarantees

By Cindy Mettikā Hoffman

Sitting here at my desk, looking out over the vast domain of worldlings, I see them worrying and fretting about their monetary and mental insecurities. I am Mara, King of Death, deceit, deception, fear, pride, ego and vanity which bind people to the wheel of life and death because of greed, hatred and delusion. I've just returned from tinkering with the elements of earth, air, water, and fire as well as electricity, wind, fault lines, magma, lava, tidal waves, thunder, and lightning causing great destruction throughout the world: a giant oil spill here, a hurricane there, yet more earthquakes, planetary warming, Tsunamis, coal mine cave-ins, forest fires, and twisters. In these past disasters, I made sure that it was not only the nobodies on this planet whose lives were devastated. I also gave the rich somebodies their fair share of sorrow, grief, pain, lamentation, and loss.

Greed and fear are two fabulously intertwined qualities that add bloated wealth to the coffers of insurance companies. This is lucrative for me as I am president, CEO, board member, and financial advisor for all insurance companies. Let me name just a few that you dear worldlings may be aware of or subscribe to: insurances for hospital stays-health-life-jobs-retirement-fire-flood-earthquake-boats-cars-trucks-hurricane damage, jewelry, art collections, furniture, robberies, old age, assisted living, bodily parts. My insurance companies get outrageously rich because of peoples' fears of impermanence, instability, and life as a crap shoot. They will, if they can, pay whatever it is that might give them so-called assurances with insurances, that man made and natural disasters, as well as sickness, old age, and perhaps even death will not happen to them. I even created the science of cryogenics to preserve the dead in a form of permanent frozen animation so that when future technology is there, these beings can continue living. Not too many bought that load of dung. It was the important billionaires living in fear and

dread that they would never have enough and wanted more who paid a fortune to be dead in some frozen hell realm.

Then there are the housing models based upon the principles of royalty with their castles, moats, and swordsmen. These structures are now called gated communities. The rich believe they can insulate themselves from the unsavory characters of the world. A guard sits in the guard house and looks at the credentials of all who enter this rarefied domain. If you do not pass muster, then you are not allowed entry. If you do pass muster then the party you wish to see is called on the phone and with their permission you are allowed entry.

I wholeheartedly support the NRA as some of my most lucrative enterprises are the companies that own, manufacture and sell guns, rifles, shotguns, machine guns, deadly gases, poisonous chemicals, armaments, weapons of mass destruction, bombs, rockets, drones, land mines, and surface to air missiles to name a few. I sell armaments all over the world, to any country, racist group, sociopath, or political faction that has money. As one of those monks, Ajahn Sumedho, commented, the first thing the untrained mind wants to do is kill the thing that causes stress. Little do armament procurers, dealers, and suppliers know that there is a special hell realm reserved for them. They think they can make their billions off of massacres and slaughters and bloodshed in the streets and countries. They conveniently ignore the law of cause and effect.

One time not so long ago, in Cambodia, in the time of the Khmer Rouge regime and massacres, everyone was forbidden to assemble in the name of the Buddha to meditate or chant in public under the threat of being shot dead. One by one the people started assembling and chanting the words of the Metta Sutta. The armed military was there in a flash and when it came time for them to shoot, not one of them would or could. Over one hundred

thousand people gathered and chanted. They overcame the fear of death chanting this most blessed and beloved of chants. The military police and armed forces remembered their roots and could not kill. BAH. foiled again. I was powerless.

Sometimes, when I want a deep belly laugh, I monitor calls from my insurance company trainees, especially the companies that sell insurance for bodily parts. Several years ago, a person had gotten home from work who was tired, hungry, with many chores to do. This worldling answered the phone and a young woman with a slow Southern drawl inquired if there was interest in buying insurance for bodily parts. The worldling asked: "do you mean your insurance company would pay if I lost an ear lobe, an eyebrow or a middle finger?" The trainee said "Yes Ma'am." The trainee was asked to hold on for a minute while this insurance option was considered. The trainee was asked how much her insurance company paid if the potential insured lost her rear end. There was a long silence and then both the worldling and the insurance trainee roared with laughter for a long long time. I must say that I too guffawed with them.

I sell all types of devices in the market place to protect you and your possessions. There are pepper sprays, whistles, bells, and stiletto knives, car alarms, safes, house alarms, motion detectors, fire alarms, security numbers to get into your home linked straight to the Police Department, windows wired with alarms, and fences topped with razor edged barbed wire.

As I have said innumerable times, it is patently absurd that you fall for my tricks and delusions of protection from sickness, frailty, death, old age, vulnerability and uncertainty. Hocus Pocus Diamond Okus is my mantra. Worldlings fail to see the hook in the bait. Just take "medical insurance" as an example. The endless pages of clauses and negations are enough to cause rocket scientists to go numb when reading the fine print. My companies play

Spiritual Friendship... (continued from page 13)

has a result for the people around us. When we're able to restrain ourselves and make a choice to train ourselves in particular ways, particularly towards that which is virtuous and peaceful, it has results and implications. We need to recognize that we're making these choices all the time.

As the sutta finishes, the Buddha is in the Bamboo Grove teaching and says to the community "Sāriputta has let this brahman be reborn in a Brahma realm and has shown him the inferior path of the Brahma world." We see the Buddha's ability to know the mind of his disciples and to recognize that if the brahman Dhanañjani had been encouraged to reflect on the Four Noble Truths or some particular essential teaching, he could possibly have realized stream entry. But Sāriputta hadn't taken it to that level. When Sāriputta comes back, the Buddha relates that to him; it was a bit of a rebuke and an encouragement that if there is the opportunity to bring somebody to an understanding of the Dhamma rather than a lesser spiritual attainment, that's the duty of a kalyānamitta. One reads the sutta and here's the Buddha knowing the thoughts, mind, and states of mind of other beings, even while he's sitting and giving teachings. It's 2500 years ago and

it's utterly fantastic. Is it possible? These are abilities that come with a purified mind.

I think of Ajahn Mun's biography, when Ajahn Mun is sitting in his cave in Saraburi and he turns his attention to his friend Chao Khun Upali. He recognizes that Chao Khun Upali is reflecting on dependent origination and is tripping himself up with a particular perspective on it. The next time Ajahn Mun sees his friend in Bangkok, he says, "On such and such a day..." and lays out what had happened. Chao Khun Upali says, "That was exactly it," and Ajahn Mun gives him a teaching on the nuances of dependent origination. And just thinking of dependent origination reminds me of when Ajahn Chah was sick. By that point he wasn't able to help himself or to speak. A monk came and sat in meditation to see how Ajahn Chah was doing. He came out of his meditation and said, "You don't have to worry about Ajahn Chah; his mind is really bright. But he likes reflecting on dependent origination, so it'd be nice for you to chant the Vipassanā Bhūmi." It's a chant on the basis of insight and dependent origination forms a part of it. The monk said that he'd really appreciate that. And we did—we ended up going every week and chanting for many years.

So these teachings are illustrations of kalyānamitta. Sāriputta acts as a spiritual friend by encouraging the brahman not to be dishonest and corrupt and to instead live a skillful life. The refinements of insight and encouragement towards awakening all rely on spiritual friendship. But in the end, they also rely on the individual to make skillful choices and to take responsibility for those choices. 🙏



Ajahn Anek and his attendant, Tan Cunda

From Mara's Desk... (continued from page 14)

switch and bait, high risk pools, common conditions and illnesses not covered, half day hospital stays for traumatic surgeries. You want so much to believe—you pay your money and you get what you need. Too bad chumps! 🙏

Fearless Mountain Production Team

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Jebbie Lavoie for design and layout, along with editorial assistance by Hisayo Suzuki.



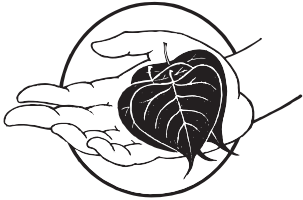
(Right to left): Ajahn Anek, Luang Por Liem, Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Pasanno at Abhayagiri

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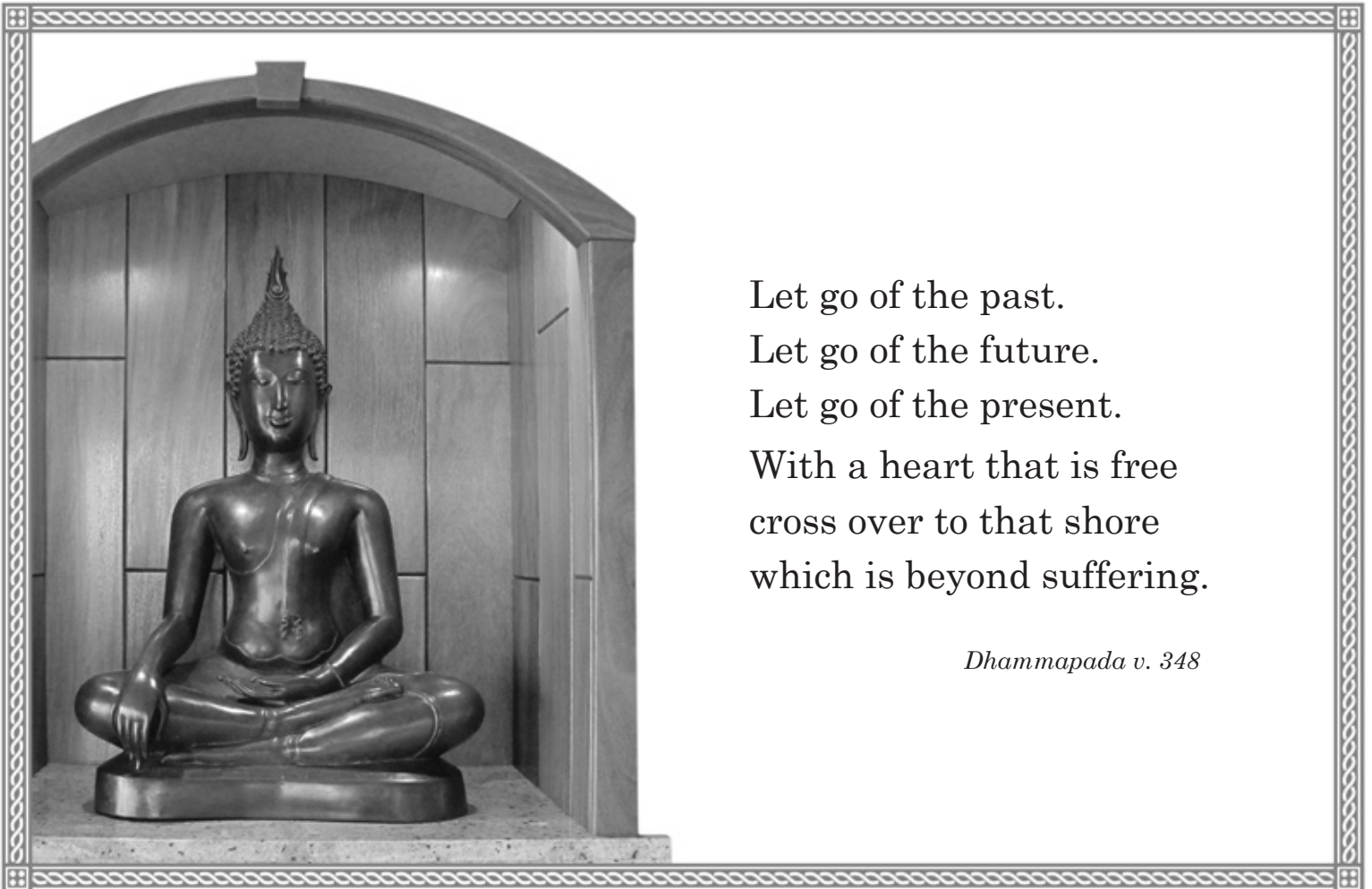
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Let go of the past.
Let go of the future.
Let go of the present.
With a heart that is free
cross over to that shore
which is beyond suffering.

Dhammapada v. 348