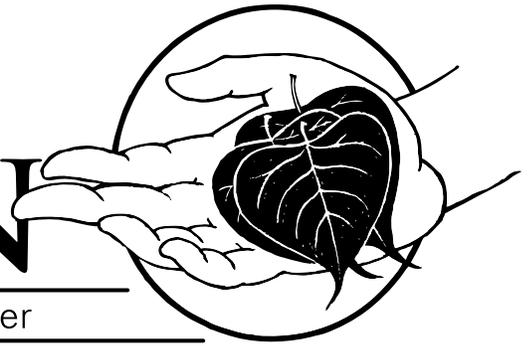


# FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter



Spring 2010•2553

Volume 15, Number 2

## There are These Roots of Trees...

by Nick Scott

I had no idea how I'd get to Dtao Dum Forest Monastery. I just had to trust that, it being Thailand and Buddhism, somehow it would happen. When it did I got only half an hour's notice by phone to have my bag packed and be outside the house in Bangkok where I was staying. My lift, a white mini-bus packed with a vast assortment of flowers and Buddhist offerings, was there before me and waiting in the front passenger seat was a small lady in her 60's dressed in white. The phone call had told me she was called Tiwapon. As she had no English I found out nothing more; she simply made room amidst the offerings and sacks of flowers in the back and indicated for me to get in. Then we set off through the early morning's already crowded streets for the freeway heading west to Kanchanaburi.

Three hours later we were bumping down a track to a farm compound where two young guys stood waiting by a fully laden four-wheel drive pick-up. As we pulled up Tiwapon turned and shouted something in Thai and, to my surprise, a sleepy female voice replied from beneath the offerings. A younger woman in white sat up from the back seat and clambered out to direct the transfer of the mini-van's contents to festoon the laden pick up. The two young guys, each now holding a large machete, then clambered on top; the young woman got behind the wheel; I was given a seat inside and Tiwapon got in, cradling a special cardboard box. This had already been the cause of several stops as we passed through Kanchanaburi. At each a lady had scurried from within a small shop or house to touch the offered box and mumble a prayer. The

mini-bus then left to return to Bangkok and we headed west towards the hills rising out of the plain.

We were soon driving on dirt tracks through a dry rural landscape with small farms and high sandstone crags covered in forest. The farms petered out and the forest, of bare deciduous trees and bamboo, closed in. The track became steadily more uneven, the potholes and ruts larger but our lady driver was not phased. She hardly slowed for any of it, including having to bank the vehicle over till it seemed it would topple. When forced to stop by a fallen tree or bamboo, the two lads would be shouted for, and they would run forward to hack at it and drag it out of the way. After two hours of this we passed through a checkpoint manned by a lonely forest guard at the boundary of Sai Yok National Park and then later another checkpoint in an even more remote spot. We were climbing by now, there was less bamboo and the deciduous trees were giving way to evergreen ones. The forest was changing from the winter dry deciduous forest of much of Thailand, to the rain forest of the mountainous border with Burma.

As dusk gathered we arrived in a valley of steep-sided hills covered in green forest with a few buildings in the bottom. Tiwapon went off somewhere and came back with a mosquito net. She led me up steps into a wooden *sālā* with open sides and a small Buddha image at one end. She showed me to a trunk with bedding in it and indicated some rolled mats. Then she left and I was alone for the night amidst the droning cicadas and the other loud noises of a rain-forest at night.

(Continued on page 11)



Photo by Ajahn Amaro

### INSIDE:

<i>From the Monastery</i>	Pg 2
<i>Kālāma Sutta</i>	Pg 4
<i>Pali Tipitaka Offering</i>	Pg 6
<i>Calendar</i>	Pg 8 & 9
<i>Ajahn Amaro moving to...</i>	Pg 10

Contributors: *The Sangha, Ajahn Amaro, Nick Scott and E. Corcoran.*

# From the Monastery

## Spring 2010



The year 2009 ended with Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro attending to various business in Thailand, New Zealand and Australia. These engagements included Ajahn Pasanno leading retreats and giving many talks, as well as attending some meetings and renewing numerous old friendships. Of particular note was Ajahn Pasanno's invitation to attend a Tipitaka offering ceremony at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, presided over by HRH Princess Chulabhorn and attended by, amongst others, monks of the Burmese Sangha who had learned and could recite the entire Tipitaka by heart. This is the full body of scripture from which Buddhism as it is known in the world originates. This ceremony was later followed up in March by the same group, Dhamma Society's World Tipitaka Project, coming to Abhayagiri and offering us a complete set of the Pali Canon in Roman script. We were honoured to be the first monastery to be presented with this wonderful resource for our community. (See companion piece on Newsletter page 6)

Here at Abhayagiri, during the absence of the co-abbots, the community continued under the combined administrative leadership of Ajahn Yatiko, Ajahn Sudanto and Ajahn Karunadhammo. The three ajahns not only directed the



Ven. Pa Auk Sayadaw on almsround in Ukiah with monks from Abhayagiri

completion of the year-end work projects, but also led the community into our annual three-month winter retreat, providing daily Dhamma readings and reflections on the themes of mindfulness of breathing, contemplation of the body, and recollection of death.

At the end of November we had the honor of a visit from Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw, a highly respected Burmese meditation master. He spent three days here, speaking on Dhamma with the resident community and was particularly delighted to be able to take part in our weekly alms-round down the length of State Street in Ukiah.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, the Sangha and lay community here dedicated our efforts to practicing in line with the teachings of the Buddha in the memory of our teacher, Luang Por Chah, who passed away on this date in 1992. Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro, along with 1000

other monastics and several thousand lay people, took part in the ceremonies on this day at Wat Nong Pah Pong. There, and at branch monasteries worldwide, the community of Luang Por Chah's disciples observe the 16<sup>th</sup> of January in this manner every year. Through performing this duty of recollecting the life and teachings of Luang Por Chah, and following in his style of practice, feelings of contentment and gratitude are nurtured and the quality of communal harmony strengthened.

Having returned from their two months of overseas travel in late January, the co-abbots resumed the teaching role and continued to offer daily Dhamma themes from the suttas. As this is being composed (late February 2010), the group practice format has been expanded to its maximum spaciousness for the support of physical seclusion. As Ajahn Pasanno remarked when announcing this open daily format: "Well, there's the meal... that's pretty much the only structured activity for the next period."

The construction work on the new buildings in the forest continued full-tilt, the community having agreed that the contractors should work through the



The newly-offered Tipitaka at Abhayagiri, March 13th, 2010

entire winter to aim at completing the formidable new Monks' Utility Building by the beginning of June. At the time of writing the main body of the MUB has been completed, comprising of rooms for sewing, washing and dying robes, showers and toilets, a meeting room, a kitchenette and ample storage space below. The heating for the building is being provided by a high-efficiency wood-burner, using fallen timber from the Abhayagiri forest. This heating system is augmented by a passive solar array on the roof, while the electrical needs are provided by the off-grid solar supply. Once this facility is up and running it will be of great benefit in that it will enable the monastic community to carry out all these practical functions while remaining up in the secluded forest area of the monastery, rather than down in the busier cloister around the house and the Dhamma Hall.

The winter retreat support crew, an assembly of lay men and women, including Julianne Rhodes, Danny Bernstein, Robert Cusick, Cittasubhā, Bryan Johnson, Kevin Merfeld, Jeed Peterson and Kay Prairungrueng, have been bearing the weight of preparing meals and tea, and many other practical details that allow the resident monastics to devote themselves more fully to areas of mental development (cittabhavana). We are fortunate indeed to have had such good support, while particular thanks go to long-term lay resident Hitesī (Cyndia Biver) who has been performing the duties of Casa Serena caretaker as well as those of kitchen manager for the duration of the retreat. Anumodana!

Our longest-term lay resident, Debbie Stamp, is delighting in solitude for the remainder of the winter retreat, having accompanied Ajahn Pasanno's mother, Rhoda Perry, for several weeks of the ajahns' travels in Thailand. Ajahn Karunadhammo and Tan Caganando have split the important job of retreat team coordinator between the two of them. Ajahn Sudanto performed many integral tasks relating to the ongoing building project; while, prior to the retreat, Ajahn Gunavuddho prepared thousands of discs of various Dhamma teachings for free distribution which have been sent to many

locations, especially Ālokā Vihāra – the new nuns' monastery in San Francisco.

Following a meeting of the Sangha here, upon the return of the co-abbots from Thailand, Ajahn Amaro announced that he had received an invitation from Luang Por Sumedho to take on the duties of abbot of Amaravati Monastery in England, it being Luang Por's wish to step down from a role he has held for several decades. After presenting the Abhayagiri Sangha with this news and inviting discussion on the matter, Ajahn Amaro received our unanimous "Sadhu!"

The plan at this time is for Ajahn Amaro to move to Amaravati sometime in July, and to enter the Rains Retreat there. Luang Por Sumedho also intends to stay there for this three-month period, to effect a smooth handover, and then to set off for



Jorge fills the seams over the deck with caulk.



The MUB and its solar power panels, as in February 2010

destinations as yet joyfully unknown. (*See companion piece on Newsletter page 10*)

At the same meeting Ajahn Pasanno expressed his wish that the plan should go forward for Ajahn Sudanto and a couple of other monastics to take up the invitation of the Sanghata Foundation (a group of lay students associated with Portland Friends of the Dhamma) to establish a branch of Abhayagiri in the Portland, Oregon area. This also received the full support of the community. There has been sincere interest and a lot of hard work on the part of the lay community in Portland in preparing the foundations to establish a monastic residence in their area and, to that end, both Ajahn Sudanto and Ajahn Karunadhammo recently went on a

tour of several properties that were being considered as possible locations.

The start of the new year also saw the official opening of the Ālokā Vihāra, the San Francisco monastic residence of the nuns from our monasteries in England. (See articles in the previous Fearless Mountain Newsletter, for Winter 2010) We wish to extend our best wishes and support for their project.

May this small report from the Monastery give rise to feelings of being connected to the wholesome activities that are the normal duties of living in a monastic form, quite secluded from worldly concerns, inclining towards a peaceful, cool heart. May you be well. 🙏

# Explaining Buddhism Doesn't Have to Be a 'Kālāmaty'

by E. Corcoran

The justly famous Kālāma Sutta (Anguttara Nikāya 3.65 – its proper name is the Kesamutti or Kesaputti Sutta) is especially useful in interreligious dialogue and for explaining Buddhism to non-Buddhists, tasks that can be fraught with difficulty. In the sutta the Buddha offers a way out of the faith/reason debate: he distills, for the benefit of a group of laypeople who have never met him, a universal, undogmatic approach to basic morality and spirituality that neither violates reason nor requires the acceptance of unsubstantiated claims.

He does this in a context that bears some obvious parallels to the current situation in the world. Late Iron Age India was, like the modern world, undergoing rapid and wide-scale cultural change precipitated by a long period of technological innovation. Traditional ways of life were being disrupted by new tools. Diverse peoples were being thrown into close contact with one another, encountering challenges to customary beliefs and practices. The old ways were breaking down. A bewildering variety of solutions to this crisis were being proposed by all sorts of teachers and thinkers – as is the case today. The question that the Kālāmas ask the Buddha is thus a question that is on a lot of modern minds, and may be the first question asked by a non-Buddhist: how do you know your religion is right?

*"There are some monks and brahmins, venerable sir, who visit Kesaputta. They expound and explain only their own doctrines; the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Some other monks and brahmins too, venerable sir, come to Kesaputta. They also expound and explain only their own doctrines; the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Venerable sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them. Which of these reverend monks and brahmins spoke the truth and which falsehood?"*

The Buddha's response merits careful attention in its every part. He begins:

*"It is proper for you, Kālāmas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful."*

What he does as the very first part of

his answer is establish a relationship with the Kālāmas not of authority, opposition, or condescension but of compassion and understanding. He acknowledges as genuine the state the questioners find themselves in, and then suggests that it is the causal aspect of their situation that deserves attention: their doubt is caused by doubtful things. This first statement is in fact the full answer given in miniature: the compassionate application of one's knowledge of causality.

The Buddha then proceeds to remove the causes of doubt:

---

*"Come, Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.'"*

---

*"Come, Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.'"*

These causes of doubt are precisely the sorts of things that lead inevitably to dispute, religious or otherwise. Impressive or authoritative people, things heard, read, believed, assumed, thought out: none of these are guarantees of truth, and none will ever find universal acceptance, so there's no need to get entangled in debates

about them.

Note that reason, as well as faith, is rejected as a criterion for truth. This can be easily misunderstood or overlooked. There is a species of quote attributed to the Buddha floating about on the Internet that appears to be a distortion of this passage. One common version, which you can get on fridge magnets, runs: "Believe nothing, no matter who has said it, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and common sense." This spurious quote is clearly a mangling of the Buddha's statement, a mangling that manages almost completely to reverse his meaning and support currently popular prejudices in favor of the primacy of individual conceptual thinking, prejudices which are simply the mirror image of prejudices towards scripture and authority. Who is willing to throw out the holy writ of their own private thoughts? This point of the Buddha's, that reason is no surer guide to truth than is faith, is worth emphasizing as it strikes a middle path between certain presently opposed cultural camps.

So what does the Buddha offer to replace faith, reason, and the rest? This:

*"Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them."*

*"What do you think, Kālāmas? Do greed, hate and delusion appear in a man for his benefit or harm?"*

*"For his harm."*

*"Kālāmas, being given to greed, hate, and delusion, and being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by greed, hate, and delusion, this man takes life, steals, commits adultery, and tells lies; he prompts another too, to do likewise. Will that be long for his harm and ill?"*

*"Yes."*

*"What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things good or bad?" – "Bad, venerable sir" – "Blamable or not blamable?" – "Blamable." – "Censured or praised by the wise?" – "Censured." – "Undertaken and observed, do these things lead to harm and ill, or not? Or*

how does it strike you?”— “Undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill. Thus it strikes us here.”

“Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: ‘These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,’ then you should practice them and abide in them.”

“What do you think, Kālāmas? Do absence of greed, hate and delusion appear in a man for his benefit or harm?”

“For his benefit.”

“Kālāmas, being not given to greed, hate, and delusion, and being not overwhelmed and not vanquished mentally by greed, hate, and delusion, this man does not take life, does not steal, does not commit adultery, and does not tell lies; he prompts another too, to do likewise. Will that be long for his benefit and happiness?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things good or bad?” — “Good, venerable sir” — “Blamable or not blamable?” — “Not blamable.” — “Censured or praised by the wise?” — “Praised.” — “Undertaken and observed, do these things lead to benefit and happiness, or not? Or how does it strike you?” — “Undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness. Thus it strikes us here.”

The method the Buddha advances as a replacement for reason, faith, obedience, and the rest of the Terrible Ten is one of continuous experiential observation of one’s motivations and behavior and the results thereof. One assesses one’s thoughts and actions with reference to four criteria: is this behavior skillful (kusala, here translated ‘good’)? Is it blamable? Do wise people criticize it? And finally, does it lead to harm and suffering? These four can be understood as, respectively, a check against one’s internal sense of how one is doing, a check against the external standards of one’s community, a check with people one regards as wise, and finally an overall criterion: is this a cause of harm to anyone?

What’s offered here is not an inflexible dogma or ideology. It’s not one set of ideas that needs to be put to use in fighting against another set of ideas. It’s an operational form of ‘common sense’ (that

supremely *rara avis*) that is grounded in compassion and that substitutes observable causality for fixated belief. It’s a self-correcting process that replaces the mechanical application of old ideas with discernment of circumstances, requiring one to keep one’s attention on what is actually happening, what one is actually doing, and why. The method offered is also, importantly, a social activity, since it demotes individual opinion in favor of taking other people into account.

In short, it dispenses with authority, whether external or internal, and places attention firmly on practice – practice of the skills of observation, discernment, and relating to others. It is apprenticeship to the present. It is responsibility. And it is on this ground that members of other religions and cultures may be met.

The Buddha then offers a technique for improving one’s attitude, which will increase one’s ability to practice the method proposed above:

---

*“The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kālāmas, who in this way is devoid of coveting, devoid of ill will, undeluded, clearly comprehending and mindful, dwells, having pervaded with the thought of amity, one quarter; likewise the second; likewise the third; likewise the fourth; so above, below, and across; he dwells, having pervaded because of the existence in it of all living beings everywhere, the entire world, with the great, exalted, boundless thought of amity that is free of hate or malice. He does the same with compassion, gladness and equanimity.”*

*“The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kālāmas, who in this way is devoid of coveting, devoid of ill will, undeluded, clearly comprehending and mindful, dwells, having pervaded with the thought of amity, one quarter; likewise the second; likewise the third; likewise the fourth; so above, below, and across; he dwells, having pervaded because of the existence in it of all living beings everywhere, the entire world, with the great, exalted, boundless thought of amity that is free of hate or malice. He does the same with compassion, gladness and equanimity.”*

These practices, the four brahmvihāras, can be a particularly valuable contribution to dialogue with non-Buddhists. As sincere redirections of the will towards goodness, they are in a sense forms of prayer, and can be understood by theists as such; and as a type of conscious self-reprogramming, they are in line with cognitive therapy as well as current knowledge of neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to rewire itself in response to new conditions, which should surely be acceptable to materialists.

In the final part of the sutta, the Buddha deals with the question of the afterlife:

*“The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kālāmas, who has such a hate-free mind, such a malice-free mind, such an undefiled mind, and such a purified mind, is one by whom four solaces are found here and now.*

*“Suppose there is a hereafter and there is a fruit, result, of deeds done well or ill. Then it is possible that at the dissolution of the body after death, I shall arise in the heavenly world, which is possessed of the state of bliss.’ This is the first solace found by him.*

*“Suppose there is no hereafter and there is no fruit, no result, of deeds done well or ill. Yet in this world, here and now, free from hatred, free from malice, safe and sound, and happy, I keep myself.’ This is the second solace found by him.*

*“Suppose evil (results) befall an evil-doer. I, however, think of doing evil to no one. Then, how can ill (results) affect me who do no evil deed?’ This is the third solace found by him.*

*“Suppose evil (results) do not befall an evil-doer. Then I see myself purified in any case.’ This is the fourth solace found by him.*

(Continued on page 15)

# Pali Tipitaka Offering

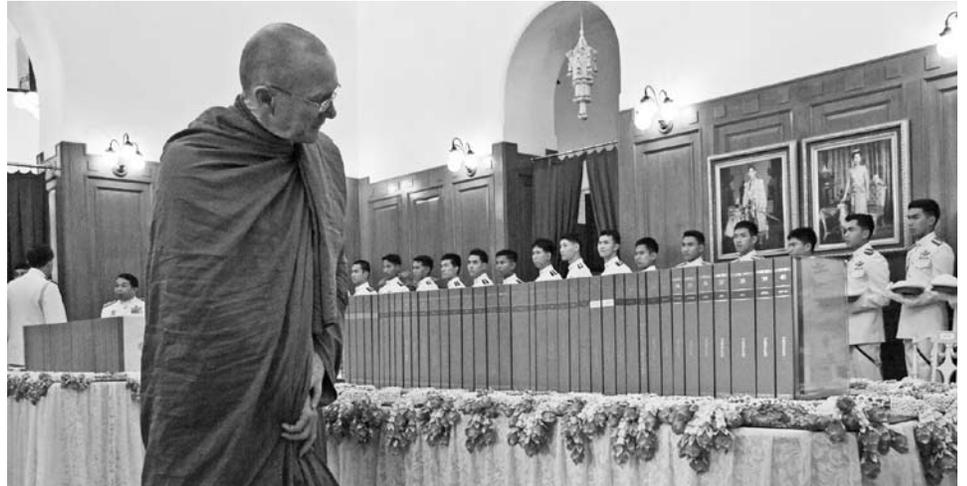
by Ajahn Amaro

On November 24th 2009, Ajahn Pasanno was invited to attend a ceremony at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, in Bangkok. The sponsoring organization, The World Tipitaka Project, had also invited members of the Sangha from Burma – including monks who could recite either two or all three of the divisions of the Pali Canon – as well as senior monks from the Theravādan regions of Yunnan, in mainland China.

The principal aim of this private foundation is to provide the world with a reliable edition of the Pali Canon in Roman script. To that end they have spent ten years poring over extant editions. These include the text agreed upon by the Sixth Great Council, held in Burma over the year 2500 of the Buddhist era (1956-57), the edition produced by the Pali Text Society, as well as that of S.N. Goenka's students, and several others. Through meticulous checking and cross-checking they managed to find and correct literally hundreds of thousands of typographical and other errors. Their efforts have born fruit in what can certainly be reckoned as the most trustworthy representation of the Word of the Buddha, in the Roman alphabet.

The ceremony in Bangkok was an occasion of commitment; the group has undertaken to offer these sets of 40 volumes to various universities and monasteries worldwide, many of them going to the very same institutions that were given similar sets in 1897, but in Thai script, by HM King Chulalongkorn. Last year's ceremony was presided over by HRH Princess Chulabhorn – the youngest daughter of the current King and Queen of Thailand – and was also an occasion to dedicate the blessings of the offering to the Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Nānasamvara, on his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday.

On March the 13<sup>th</sup> 2010, Abhayagiri Monastery was honoured to receive a delegation of twenty people from The World Tipitaka Project, headed by the Project's founder and primary organizer



Ajahn Pasanno examines the 1897 and 2010 editions of the Pali Tipitaka during the ceremonies in Thailand.

Maj. Suradhaj Bunnag and Princess (Mom Luang) Anong Ninubon, who also celebrated her 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday that very day. The group had come to make a presentation of sets of the Tipitaka to The University of Washington, Seattle, as well as to Abhayagiri. In addition they came to visit The University of California, Berkeley, particularly to view the edition of the Tipitaka that had been given to that university in 1897.

As this was an auspicious and unique event many of the long-standing friends and supporters of Abhayagiri gathered for the occasion, even though it was in the usually quiet time of the winter retreat. Many of our regular visitors also stowed their customary wardrobe of jeans and t-shirts for the day with everyone making impressive efforts to deck themselves in suitably festive attire. As befitted the occasion, the hall was also festooned with an abundance of flowers; delicate bouquets and effulgent sprays garlanded the newly-offered volumes.

The visitors began the event by showing a presentation about their project and, when all of the procedures of the presentation were complete, and reflections on the occasion had been offered, the event was closed by reciting the Buddha's first teaching – The Discourse on Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma – and a communal Sharing of Blessings.

It is in the spirit of sharing blessings that this energetic and generous group have put forth the Herculean effort required to create this World Edition of the Pali Canon. They see that these teachings are part of the world's heritage of knowledge and have undertaken this endeavour in order to enable all those who wish to partake of that knowledge to be able to access it freely. May the books that they have offered to this one small monastery serve to illuminate the hearts and minds of all who reside here, and thus help to illuminate the lives of all those with whom we are connected. 🙏



The chief flower arranger for the ceremonies at Abhayagiri, Shutintorn "Apple" Daoruang with some of her creations.

Photo by Aninitida Donsamak



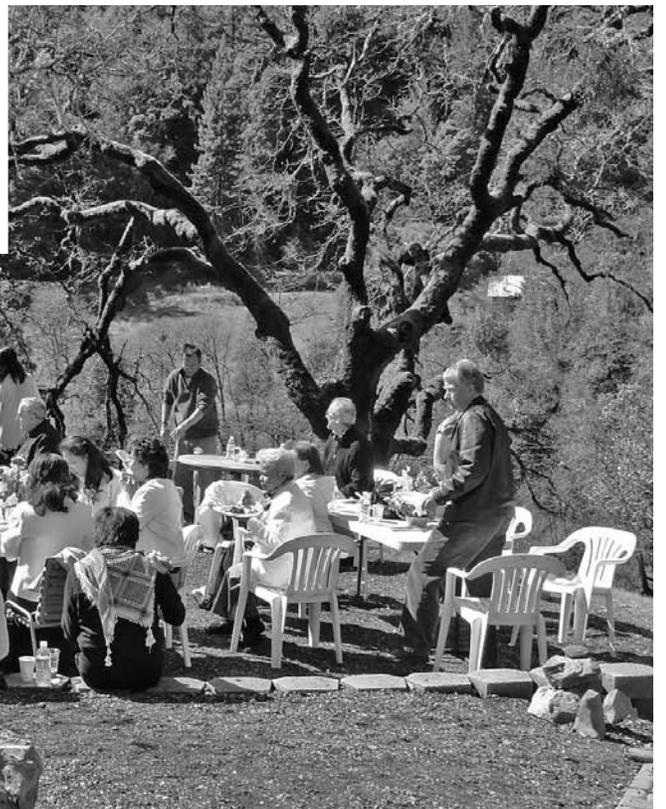
The formal offering of the Tipitaka by Dhamma Society's World Tipitaka Project group in Bangkok. Maj. Bunnag is on the far right. Photo by Dhamma Society



Princess Anong Ninubon (right) and Khuning Vichandra Bunnag at the start of the offering ceremony, March 13th at Abhayagiri. Photo by Janejira Sutanonpaiboon



The visiting elders offer alms food to Tan Cāgānando & Tan Sampajāno. Photo by Janejira Sutanonpaiboon



The Abhayagiri lay community and visitors enjoy a celebratory meal in the welcome sunshine. Photo by Shutorn Daouang

# **Page 8**

# **Calendar**

# Page 9

# Calendar



# Ajahn Amaro To Move To Amaravati

One day during the time that I was in Thailand with Ajahn Pasanno, Luang Por Sumedho asked me to come to his kutī for a chat. I was expecting, if anything, little more than an informal chin-wag over a cup of tea, just to catch up on news and plans, but to my surprise Luang Por made it the occasion to formally invite me to take on the role of abbot at Amaravati Monastery, in England.

He had been keen to retire from that position for a long time, having been in the leadership role there for 25 years as well as, for the previous ten years, at Wat Pah Nanachat, the Hampstead Vihāra, and at Chithurst Monastery. It was only now, however, that he felt the conditions were ripe for him to be able to pass things on to another pair of hands. Needless to say I was both startled and honoured by the invitation, and in need of some time to digest it.

I let Ajahn Pasanno know the next day. We decided to wait until we had had a chance to get back to Abhayagiri, to discuss the matter with the Sangha there, before I would give any definitive “yea” or “nay” to the invitation. When it was brought up with the community, shortly after we returned at the end of January, the response (once everyone had got over the shock) was unanimous “sadhu!” and thus the decision was made.

The current plan is that I will make the move to Amaravati in mid-July, to be there in time for the beginning of the Rains Retreat on July 27<sup>th</sup> – coincidentally being Luang Por Sumedho’s 76<sup>th</sup> birthday. He will remain there for the next three months, to facilitate the handover of duties, and then, after the Kathina festival in November, he will set off as a free agent with no fixed destination. He has already been the recipient of a vast slew of offers of places to stay but, for the time being, he is deliberately and gleefully keeping all his options open.

Once I had given him the news of Abhayagiri’s agreement, and we were discussing these changes, he reflected that, even though the wandering way of life is the essence of the mendicant spirit, it’s something he has never had the chance to follow since the very beginning of his monastic career. He has always been confined by one set of duties or another.

As one who has been a grateful student of his for more than 30 years it is a genuine pleasure to repay the immeasurable benefit he has brought into my life by enabling him to make this move. It will be a wrench to leave Abhayagiri, and all of the close connections that have formed in the 20 years since I first came to the USA, but I also welcome this change – unexpected though it might

have been. Amongst other things it gives me a chance to clear out many accumulations; both those internal – my unconscious assumptions about cheerfully growing old in the forest at Abhayagiri, as well as external – all those bookshelves and filing cabinets groaning with the weight of papers of dubious worth.

I feel very grateful for the years that I have had working in collaboration with Ajahn Pasanno, the admirable group of lay friends who have served on the board of Sanghapala Foundation since its inception in 1988, and the fine monastic community that has developed here since 1996. It has been an honour and a delight to have been a part of bringing Abhayagiri Monastery into being but, by a fortunate confluence of circumstance, it is now in a state of maturity where it no longer needs both Ajahn Pasanno and I at the helm together. In this light, I have no doubt that it will continue to flourish without me, and I expect to come back and enjoy that flourishing from time to time as a visitor.

But aren’t we all, in truth, just visitors?

Transiency bears a bitter-sweet tang. The flavour of loss is an ache in the heart but the flavour of Dhamma is freedom. So, may this move and all that comes with it be a cause for the savouring of that finest of all tastes, utter freedom. 🙏



*There are these...* (continued from page 1)

Soon after dawn a young American monk appeared. He had come to set up the *sālā*, he told me, for their morning meal. He was then joined by two other Western monks and, before we could say more than “hello,” by Tiwapon, her companion and the two young guys all bearing trays laden with cooked food. After we had eaten, the monks told me we were now going up the mountain with Tiwapon and another four-wheel drive vehicle which had just arrived with three men from Bangkok. The monks carried the cardboard box in the new vehicle while I went with Tiwapon who now had four large sacks filled with petals, presumably plucked from all those flowers. As we drove along, crossing and re-crossing a stream, Tiwapon threw large handfuls of petals out of the window, into the path of the following vehicle. We left the stream to climb steeply on a track with long drops to the side and several switchbacks, eventually coming out on a mountain top with another *sālā* and a magnificent view across forested hills enveloped in faint morning mist.

While I stood their stunned by the view, everyone else formed into a line, the three monks in front, one holding the box the other two with their hands held palms together. Tiwapon produced a small Buddha image which she gave to one of the men, then the monks started to chant and slowly circumambulate the *sālā*. Tiwapon and the other lady followed, scattering petals, and the rest of us came along behind. Once we had been round the *sālā* three times the monks carried the box inside and placed it reverentially on the shrine. Then, after some conversation in Thai, all the Thais left in the two vehicles and I finally got to find out what it was all about.

The monks explained that Tiwapon had originally invited the Western monks to live there. That was when she leased the surrounding forest for a mining operation. With the coming of the National Park status the mining had been stopped but the monks had stayed on. Now their temporary lease had to be renewed and Tiwapon was worried because some of the local power-brokers, including a National Park officer, wanted the site instead for

an eco-tourist lodge. The box contained Buddha relics which Tiwapon and her daughter had collected in Bangkok as their way of trying to protect the monastery.

I found out more the next day, when Tiwapon returned to build a place for me to stay on my retreat. While the workers, directed by her daughter, cleared a site, I asked her how it had all begun, while the monks translated for me: “It was the time when there were lots of monks walking through the forest,” she said. “They always stayed with Khun Sunan and I took food there. The first time I met Ajahn Pasanno I did not speak to him. Next time I invited him to my forest. Then he came back with other Western monks.”

Ajahn Pasanno is now the co-abbot of Abhayagiri Monastery in California and it was he who had arranged for my stay. But in the 1980’s he was just a junior monk wandering with a *klot*, an umbrella from which a mosquito net is hung, and an alms bowl. He had told me how awe-inspiring the vast tracts of primary rain forest had been then but also how painful it had been, as it was the residents of the tree-felling camps which had often fed him. By the time he became the abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, the Thai monastery established by Ajahn Chah for his Western disciples, there was little forest left in Thailand. Tiwapon however had resisted the money offered for her six thousand hectares and, being at an altitude of two thousand feet, it had a pleasant climate in the hot season. So he had brought most of his monks here to Dtao Dum, walking in for two days from the main road, during the hot season every year.

Tiwapon also described how difficult it had been for her to protect the forest. The Thai government had handed out cheap logging and mining concessions, but had provided no enforcement and no police. “It was like the Wild West. Hardest was when the National Park came. Local big men knew the government had promised that anyone farming could keep the land so they hired all my Burmese mineworkers to burn the surrounding forest. There were fires everywhere,” she pointed to the hills falling away to the east. “So I came to Ajahn Pasanno to ask him what to do.



Photo by Ajahn Amaro

Micheline Sheehy Skeffington and Nick Scott  
in Bangkok, 2010

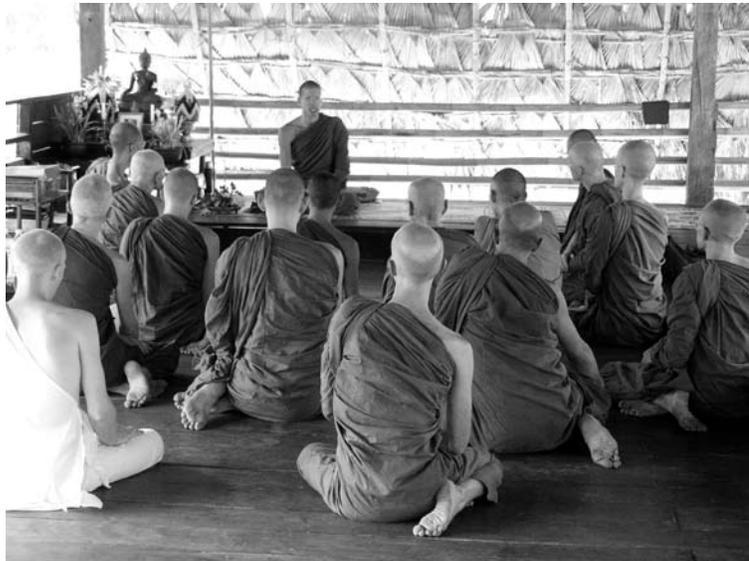
He said, ‘Tell the District Governor.’ He came, stopped them and made them leave. But then they wanted to kill me. When I went to town I went a different way each time so they did not know where I was. Two times they sent a man but each time I was lucky.” Eventually she received an award from the King for her dedication to nature conservation.

We were talking with Tiwapon for several hours and I could see how much she enjoyed telling the history to me and the three monks, for whom most of it was also new. Before she left we went to inspect the site I was to use. The workers had shored up steps leading to an old clearing on the side of the hill. It had been freshly tidied up for me. The decayed bamboo from the old platform had been piled on one side and a new platform built, the size and height of a large double bed. There was a pole above the centre line supported by posts at each end and the monks showed me how to hang my *klot* and mosquito net, and how to tie the net in a big knot when not in use. The workers had cleared the adjacent walking meditation path and cut back the vegetation on the slope to reveal a spectacular view out across the forested valley.

(Continued on page 12)



Tan Jivako's platform, beneath the trees at Dtao Dum.



Ajahn Siripaño giving instruction.

Photo by Montri Sirithampiti



Tan Cittaviro crossing one of the many bamboo bridges at Dtao Dum.

Photo by Nick Scott

### *There are these...*

Listening to Tiwapon's account I was yet again impressed with how much Ajahn Pasanno had done for nature conservation in Thailand. The previous month I had travelled with him from Bangkok on his annual visit to be met at the regional airport by a large deputation from Nature Care, the NGO he had helped found. When he left Thailand to start Abhayagiri monastery in California they had begged him to remain their patron and they were now delighted to see him again. Then at Wat Pah Nanachat I wandered around the forest, much of which had been planted when he was abbot. The original monastery was established in a forest remnant left as the village cremation ground. This he had doubled in size, twice over, with land donated or purchased by local supporters and then planted with native trees. There were now small cabins, or kutis, for the monks to meditate and live in, scattered through the new forest.

Then there was Wat Poo Jom Gom. As the main monastery attracted more and more visitors Ajahn Pasanno sought somewhere quieter as a branch monastery. It was the District Governor who suggested the poor region on the border with Laos which still had forest. There they stayed in caves on the side of a rocky plateau overlooking the Mekong, and there Ajahn Pasanno was moved to action by the steady degradation of the forest, caused by the local people. He encouraged his supporters to form an organisation to help locals create village committees to manage their own forests. Again a strong woman was pivotal in this. Suranee was the Regional Director of the Department of Nutrition, and already wanting to do something to protect the natural resources of the area. She led the group which greeted us at the airport, and was with the Nature Care staff when they came later to make a formal report to Ajahn Pasanno. It was she who then offered to give me a tour.

This we did in the bright yellow Department of Nutrition vehicle driven by her government driver. First we stopped at the Nature Care headquarters, outside her office in the regional capital, Ubon Ratchathani. Originally she had provided one room, she explained, but now they needed a whole building for all the staff and volunteers. There the director outlined the various projects they now ran – I was amazed by the number and diversity of them. As well as the original forest protection work, which had resulted in a region-wide network of village forest committees, there were water scheme projects, cultural projects and projects to generate sources of income for villages such as a co-operative orchid production business. Suranee explained that Ajahn Pasanno had always emphasised that Nature Care should serve the villagers and facilitate them helping themselves rather than imposing ideas on them from outside. So the orchid project had come out of a problem one village had wanted to solve. The village was next to a new National Park from which they collected orchids for sale to tourists at the border crossing with Laos. The National Park officials wanted them to stop, so Nature Care had helped them to

*There are these...*

develop the orchid farms.

We went to visit several projects, driving eastwards into a land of poor soils, scrub woodland and occasional villages. The first project was based in a village school that educated both children and adults in traditional culture; at another village we met the chairman of the village forest committee. He explained how the committee made decisions to protect the forest, such as a recent fifteen-year moratorium on cutting trees for building timber, or setting aside areas where mushrooms should be left so they could produce seed. Members of the women's group unfolded a plan of the village, with its fields and forest, that they had painted on a large cotton sheet. Shyly they told us how they policed the forest. They were collecting forest products every day so they could then report illegal logging to the government forest department or tell the committee that a villager was breaking their rules. Nature Care had helped many villages to set up such women's groups and they now helped each other. This group had a garment-making co-operative using the cloth woven by women in other villages. It was now so successful they could no longer supply all the people who came to buy their products.

On a later visit to Wat Poo Jom Gom with Ajahn Pasanno he took me to visit the caves that had been their original accommodation. There I tried telling him how impressed I was with the nature conservation work he had channelled into existence. However, typical of him, he wouldn't let me give him too much praise. He told me it was simply the traditional role of the monk, giving the example of Ajahn Mahā-Boowa, a greatly respected Thai abbot. He encouraged one wealthy supporter to build Bangkok a new women's prison after he'd read in a newspaper that the women were living in a dilapidated hundred-year-old building plagued with rats. His junior monks would cut out any articles like that from the newspapers so that he could pass them on to supporters to deal with.

Ajahn Pasanno said many senior monks directed their supporters to help society – that was what Thai people expected of them – guidance in good acts. Western monks particularly cared about nature but they were not alone in this, Thai monks also undertook forest projects; meanwhile Western monks also worked in other areas, like Ajahn Jayasāro who had become the abbot of Wat Pa Nanachat after Ajahn Pasanno, who was particularly interested in the realm of education.

While I travelled with Ajahn Pasanno I had seen for myself just how much Thailand expected of senior monks. Every day he spent from six in the morning until late in the evening receiving people and meeting with monastics seeking his guidance. So it was no wonder that he enjoyed our day walking in Poo Jom Gom; he said it was the first time he had had a break from teaching since



Ajahns Pasanno, Amaro and Siripaṇṇo at the root of one of the great forest elders, January 2010

Photo by Joop

he had come to Thailand. We climbed up through the dry forest, much of it growing from amidst rocky pavement, until we were above a cliff overlooking the Mekong River, twisting in wide blue strands through an even wider sandy bed. Beyond it the forested hills of Laos disappeared to the horizon. We clambered down to one of the caves the monks still used. There an old English monk showed us round his simple abode; a wooden platform was wedged beneath an overhang, his few belongings hung from notches in the rock.

After that I visited Ajahn Jayasāro where he now resides at the end of a gated and guarded valley in the hills, a couple of hours drive to the north of Bangkok. His simple small wooden building, tucked away amidst newly planted woodland, was a sweet contrast to the elaborate second homes for Bangkok's wealthy being built in the rest of the valley. It was he who explained to me how Western forest monks had become so important for Thailand. "We are able to use the concepts and language that the new urban generation relate to so, through us, sophisticated Thais have been able to re-discover Buddhism and meditation." He regularly gave talks in Thai on the radio and

*(Continued on page 14)*



Photo by Nick Scott

Tan Pāsādiko pauses during his path-sweeping, at Dtao Dum

television and there is a meditation center where he teaches retreats, built by one of his supporters, amidst the new houses of this secluded community.

Then there are the two Buddhist schools he is the patron of. "Up until now all the private schools have been either Christian or International ones teaching Western values. The state schools are nominally 'Buddhist' but there is no real Buddhist input." The first school was for primary children in Bangkok but the next is a secondary boarding school being built near by. "I hope they'll become models of how a Buddhist school can be. This school will have 'Ecology and the Environment' as its speciality as that fits in with Buddhist values."

With the rapid changes happening in Thai society, the way Buddhism serves it is also changing. The traditional village temples I saw attracted few recruits and seemed to have less relevance to the people, but the forest tradition with its

emphasis on meditation has many young monks and it is now supported by the Thai middle classes, able to drive out to remote sites in their cars. They seemed, in fact, almost to be giving too much support. The simple forest lifestyle has been replaced by modern comforts and wonderfully appointed buildings, and for the Western monks there is yet more potential interest and support. That is why Ajahn Jayasāro is tucked away where people can't find him and why Dtao Dum is so important. Despite its extreme remoteness – four hour's drive from the nearest village – they still get visitors in four-wheel drives.

My retreat there was both the most enjoyable I have done in my life as well as one of the most testing. Initially I was on that hillside, looking out at giant hornbills and other forest birds gliding by. There it was only the insects which were difficult; the mosquitoes at dusk with their danger of malaria and, in the heat of the afternoon, the tiny sweat bees which, although otherwise harmless, had a strong desire to go up my nose or into an ear, a certain way of preventing samadhi. But when the preparation work in the cooler, inner forest was complete, I moved to one of the clearings there.

Dtao Dum is right next to Burma. Some of the best rainforest left in Southeast Asia stretches along this border and most of the way to the Indian Ocean. It has good populations of tiger, elephant and many other large mammals such as tapirs, which all occasionally wander into Dtao Dum's inner forest. Parties of monkeys and gibbons swing through the trees every day, twice an elephant passed my clearing in the night leaving fresh steaming dung on the path, and I glimpsed deer, goat-like serows, several martens and a forest cat on my daily walk down to the sālā to collect my meal.

Being completely alone in a small jungle clearing can be frightening. When a tiger roared in the distance I was petrified. I was doing yoga and all I could think of was to get onto my platform. As if that would have saved me from a tiger! Then there was the binturong, a harmless nocturnal creature that lives in trees but which has a

loud blood-curdling scream, first produced when I was doing walking meditation in the dark. The monks also warned me of the twenty foot python living near the main path I took each day down to the sālā. That kept me mindful, as did the thought of the smaller, more deadly snakes and the nine-inch centipedes which gave excruciatingly painful bites. But the most difficult were the smallest. With plentiful wildlife inevitably the creatures living on them will be common too. Leeches waited, waving, near the bridges and ticks were everywhere. Some were huge and my body's reaction to their bites was like an erupting fist-sized volcano, which remained raw and itching for the rest of my stay.

So practice in the jungle might not have been ideal for concentration, but it did lead to insight. The constant oscillation in extremes of pleasant and unpleasant: the heat, then startling beauty to take one's breath away; the insects; or fear, then delight at a squirrel or bamboo-rat scampering through the clearing. This helped me contemplate the Buddha's teaching on how we both designate phenomena and react to them, keeping ourselves forever restless. We do the same with states of mind: bright wakefulness, dullness, concentration, lethargy. Wanting the pleasant, not wanting the unpleasant – the movement towards one inevitably creating the other, because the designation is always relative. By the end I had so tired of it all that I treasured the ordinary and a simple sense of all-rightness.

My visit to the Western monasteries in Thailand has left me both deeply thankful and very impressed. Before my journey I had not realised that Western monks also benefited Thailand, and how they continue to give excellent training there to the many foreigners who still arrive. Young and old, like the monks at Dtao Dum. Venerable Pāsādiko (previously John Shakleford) was from the US. He took up Zen in the 1970's, had tried various spiritual traditions then decided at fifty, to "Take it seriously and become a monk." That had been nine years before. While Cullam McConnel (now Sāmanera Sallekko) was

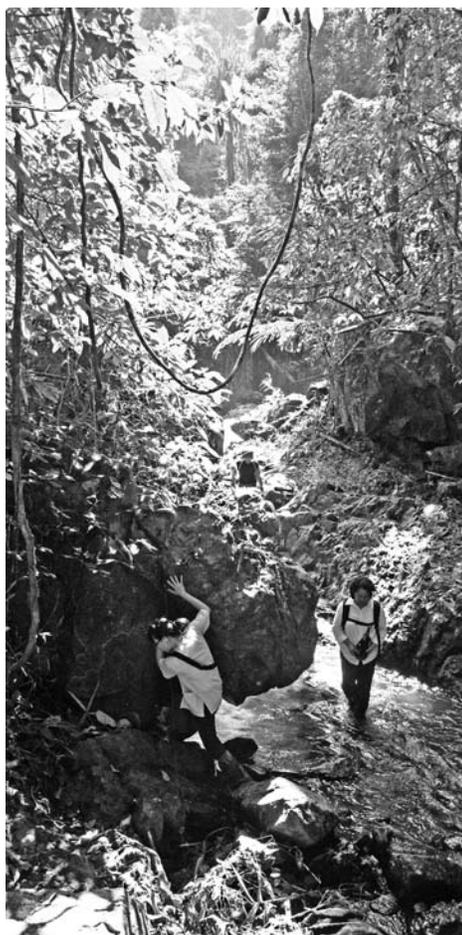


Photo by Ajahn Amaro

Janejira Sutanonpaiboon, Patriya Tansuhaj and Jittima Pangsapah negotiate one of the many streams during a hike through the Dtao Dum forest.

only twenty-six when he came recently from Ottawa, having found the monasteries on the Internet. Both were now very committed to the simple life of a forest monk. Guiding the monasteries has now passed to the next generation; monks whom Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Jayasāro trained are now in turn training others. At Dtao Dum it is Ajahn Siripaño, who has a Thai mother but was brought up in England, who is now the abbot there; while at Wat Pah Nanachat it is the German monk, Ajahn Kevali, who has been invited into that role. Both are still in their thirties. Some of those monks they train will eventually return home to help run the Western monasteries already seeded by this tradition, some will plant new ones, and others will be sure to stay in Thailand.

I am told that the threat to Dtao Dum has now receded. There is a new government in power and a sympathetic Minister of the Environment has established a programme which recognises forest monasteries in National Parks as a way to protect the forest. That is how it should be. Forest monks do indeed protect the forest. They need to as, amongst the many other noble and wholesome reasons, it is their natural habitat, somewhere to practise in the way the Buddha recommended – at the foot of a tree. 🌳



Photo by Montri Sirithampiti

The view from the Dtao Dum ridge, early morning.

**Kalāma** (continued from page 5)

*“The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kālāmas, who has such a hate-free mind, such a malice-free mind, such an undefiled mind, and such a purified mind, is one by whom, here and now, these four solaces are found.”*

Most religions and ideologies are predicated on acceptance of a particular view of what happens after death. The Buddha here approaches the question pragmatically and without emotion-mongering, and shows that in order to live a moral and contented life here and now, it doesn't actually matter whether or not there is an afterlife. This offers a further support for peaceful dialogue, as no mention of things like heaven or karma is required.

All in all this sutta provides an excellent tool kit for productive communication with non-Buddhists. It is a non-sectarian, non-ideological, culturally neutral method for living one's life in peace, developing mutual understanding and avoiding arguments. I feel that if there is one Buddhist text that should be spread widely in the world, for the benefit of all who read it, it is this sutta. To that end I have produced a more user-friendly version; this can be read online at <http://www.abhayagiri.org>

**SUPPLEMENTARY:**

**Comparison chart:** A dozen or so different translations of the “ten things not to go by”: <http://tinyurl.com/yg9lxqj>

**An in-depth look at the precise meanings of the ten things in Pali:**

Knowledge and Truth in Early Buddhism: An examination of the Kaalaama Sutta and related Paali Canonical texts by Dharmacari Nagapriya  
<http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol3/Knowledge.htm>

**Cautions against freehanded interpretations:**

A Look at the Kālāma Sutta by Bhikkhu Bodhi [http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay\\_09.html](http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_09.html)



**Fearless Mountain Production Team**

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to *Jebbie Lavoie* for design and layout, along with editorial assistance by *Kristy Arbon* and *Elizabeth Matovinovic*.

Evan Corcoran was in training at Great Vow Zen Monastery, OR., for some time. He now resides at Chuang Yen Monastery in NY, with Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. 🌳

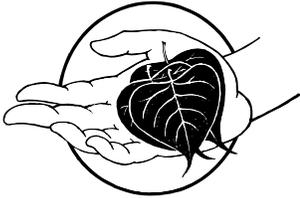
Sanghapala Foundation  
**ABHAYAGIRI**  
BUDDHIST MONASTERY  
16201 Tomki Road,  
Redwood Valley, CA 95470

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**  
AUTOZIP

# FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

Return Service Requested



The Dhamma Society, World Tipitaka Project group, with co-abbots  
Ajahn Pasanno & Ajahn Amaro, Abhayagiri Monastery, March the 13<sup>th</sup> 2010/2553