

*A Day in the
Life of an ABHAYAGIRI*
Buddhist Monk



One of the common questions

we are frequently asked as Buddhist monks is: what does a monk *do*? It's a good question. So for those who are interested, I welcome you to join me on a tour through an average day here at the monastery; illustrations included- because everything's better with pictures.

Enjoy!

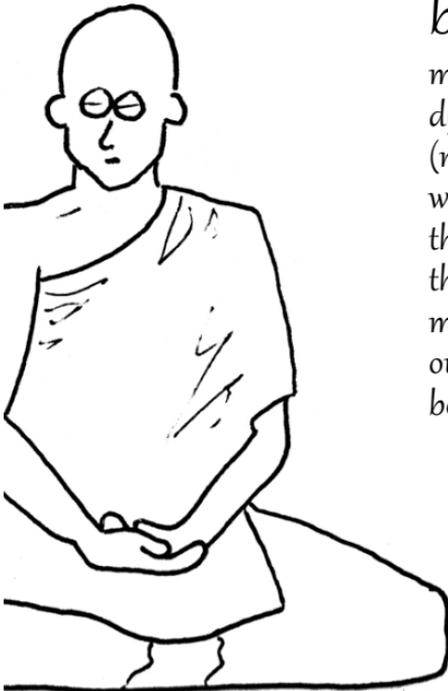
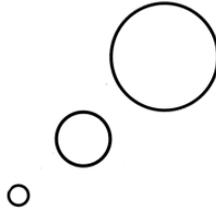




For context, it may be helpful to know that Buddhism comes in many different colors and packages around the world. While its core concepts may be similar, the differences in appearance and practice between traditions can vary widely.

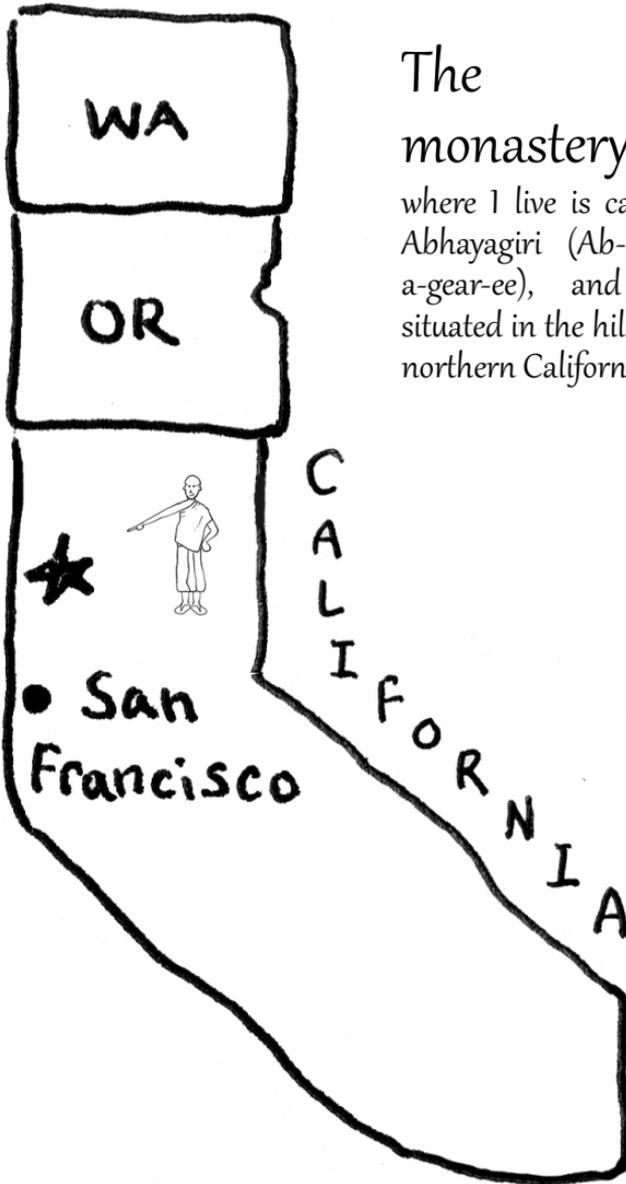
The tradition I belong to is called the “Thai Forest Tradition,” and is unique because of the emphasis it places on meditation and monk’s discipline, rather than ceremony or purely analytical study. Approached in this way, Buddhist practice is more accurately viewed as an active training rather than something merely philosophical.

What are we training? Our minds – or – our hearts, depending on how you want to look at it.



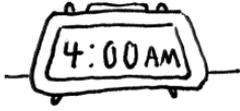
Buddhists

believe the untrained mind is what causes difficulties in our lives (not to speak of the world), and it's through the practice of meditation that allows us to calm the mind in order to direct our attention more beneficially.



The
monastery
where I live is called
Abhayagiri (Ab-bye-
a-gear-ee), and is
situated in the hills of
northern California.

BEEP BEEP BEEP!



Normally I wake up around 4 AM in my small, simple cabin high up on the mountain. Abhayagiri is comprised of 280 acres of steeply graded, beautifully forested land with lots of wildlife.

Each resident has their own secluded dwelling. The 30 minute walk down the mountain to the main area is one of my favorite parts of the morning- especially when the sky is filled with stars!





Everyone – monks and overnight guests alike – gathers in the Meditation Hall at 5 AM for chanting and meditation. Although meditation is a foundational part of a Forest Monk's life, it is far from the only thing we spend our time doing.

Another equally strong emphasis in our tradition is Community. For example, after the morning meditation, everyone lends a hand in the various chores such as sweeping walkways or cleaning toilets.

At 7 AM a simple breakfast is served.

Then at 7:30 AM, everyone gathers again to discuss the day's work. People are assigned jobs according to their skills and abilities. Some monks work in the office ...



... while others work outside; building or maintaining our numerous facilities, cabins, trails, bridges and roads.



The laity (non-ordained) assist the monks and take on the added role of working in the kitchen to prepare the main meal. As monks, cooking is one of the things we cannot do. For our daily sustenance, we are completely reliant on the generosity of others. In fact, the same is true of all the four basic requisites: food, medicine, clothing, and shelter- because we can't use money either. A large part of our training as monks is learning to be content with little, and whatever is offered. In this way we are able to live relatively uncomplicated and unburdensome lives, allowing us to focus more of our time and energy into our spiritual practice.

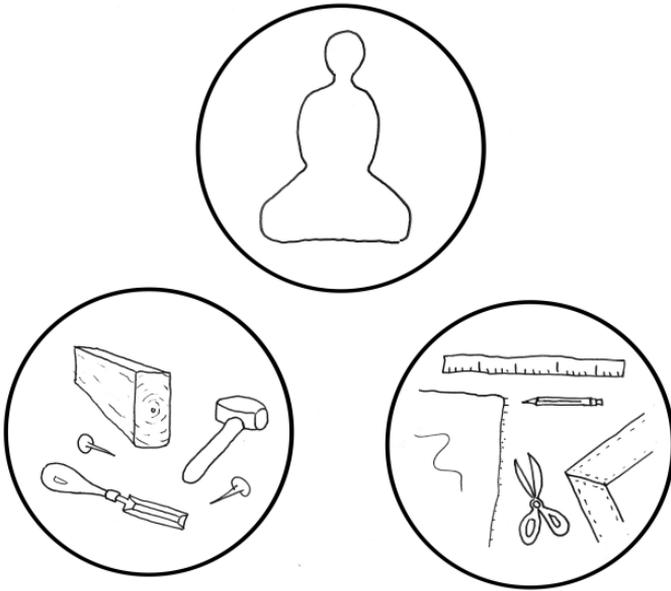




At 11 AM the meal is offered. In Thailand, monks walk to a nearby village every morning with their alms bowl to receive food from the local villagers. Because monasticism is still largely unfamiliar in America, we only walk through town for alms once every week. The common response from people being that of kindness and curiosity. Other days, we receive food from the monastery kitchen.

We eat all our
food out of a single
bowl!

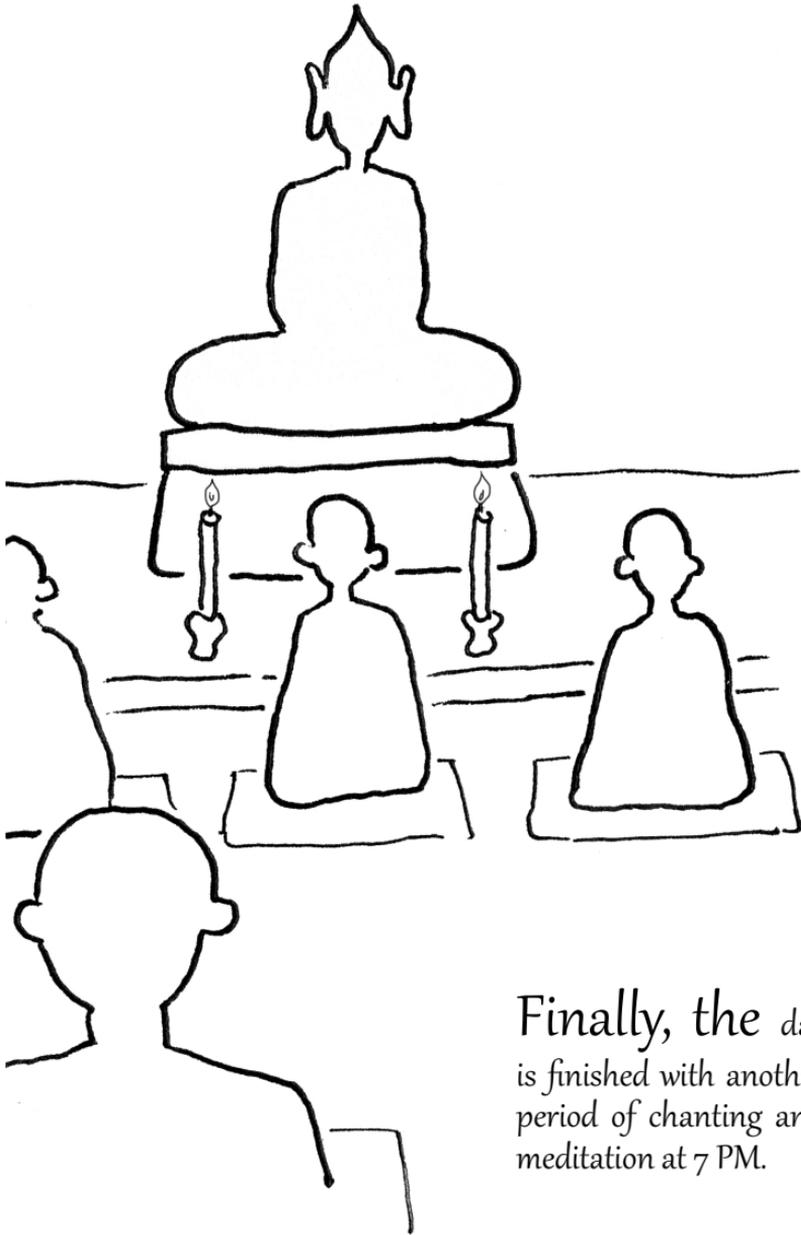




After the meal clean up, it's an open afternoon. Some monks go back to their cabin to continue their meditation practice, while others choose to work on some personal project such as woodworking or sewing.

Come 5:30 PM, tea is made available and one of the senior monks meets with people for a Q&A.





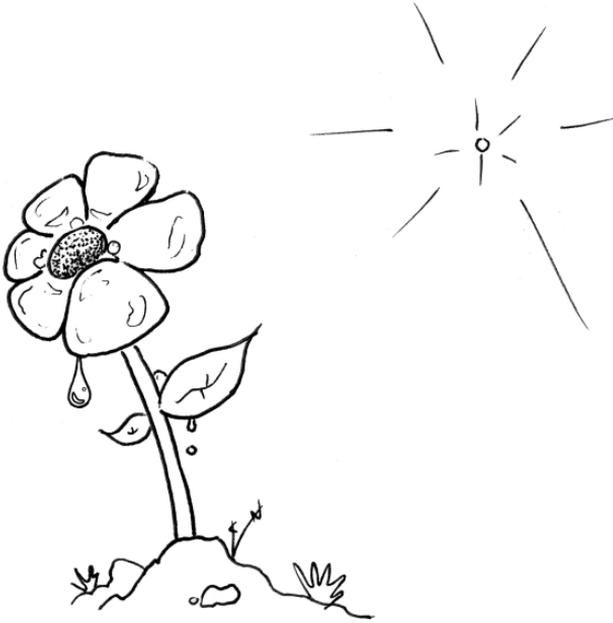
Finally, the day is finished with another period of chanting and meditation at 7 PM.



That, more or less, is what an average day at the monastery looks like. While it may not look very appealing on the surface, for a monk – someone who has committed themselves to the training – living within a structured community that shares a common goal is extremely supportive.

Because as it turns out, (re)training the mind is quite a difficult thing to do. Having the guidance of qualified teachers as well as the support of my monk friends is truly invaluable.

When I first arrived at the monastery as a guest, I didn't necessarily plan on becoming a monk. Although I was greatly interested in Buddhism at that time, it was all still very new, and the monastic life seemed too difficult (not to mention utterly dreadful).



So why, then, did I end up ordaining? Well, to put it simply, after some time it became clear to me that I had truly found what gave me a deep sense of purpose. The subtle beauty of living at the monastery also became clearer to me. Eventually I got to the point where I couldn't –and still cannot– imagine committing to something more worthwhile or beneficial for myself and others.

Naturally one might wonder: how can a small monastic community living tucked away in the forest be of benefit to the world? As I've come to realize, monasteries like Abhayagiri are far from isolated. People come from all over the world to learn about meditation and Buddhist teaching, which as a result, helps them to learn more about themselves and lead more balanced lives- which is of benefit to everyone.



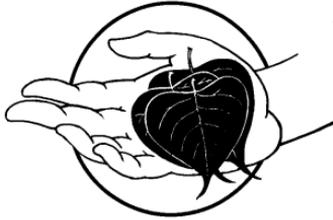


Additionally, the monastic community serves as a steady reminder of the value of simplicity, generosity, and moral responsibility within society. Qualities that are always relevant and necessary within the world- especially the one we find ourselves in today.

Of course, this is merely a glimpse of what life is like living at a Buddhist monastery. Thanks for reading.

Take care!





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