

# FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

## The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter

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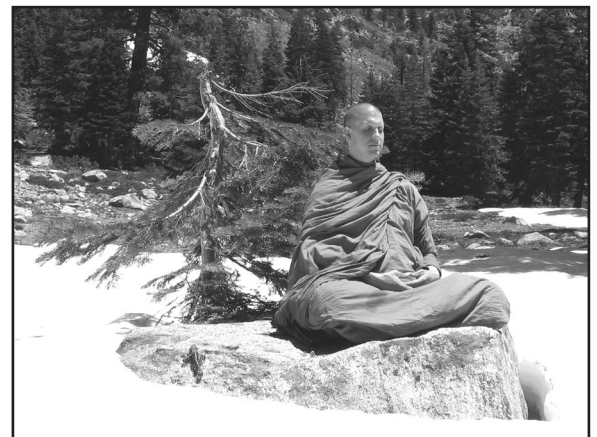
Peace, peace

By Ajahn Chandako

I remember before I was a monk, before I had considered making the big step into monastic life, I was considering, “What am I going to do with my life in a way which is actually going to be beneficial for the world?” The idea of making the world a better place seemed so overwhelming to the point of being hopelessly idealistic. It was like trying to clean up the entire environment in the world; it seemed like such a daunting task. But I realized: “well, I may not be able to clean up the entire environment in the world, but this one little corner of the environment called the body and mind, there is at least some semblance of control, at least a delusion of control over this one little corner of the environment.” Entering into Buddhist practice it was very much the momentum of working towards bringing a sense of peace into the world, starting from the center and working out.

I remember when I was a young monk, a common meditation method used in Thailand was to recite the mantra “Buddho” in the mind, and I tried that for a while but somehow it didn’t stick as easily as another word that I came up with, which was “peace.” So I just started using “peace” as a mantra. When I was sitting I would just say “peace,” silently repeating it to myself, feeling it reverberate—“peace, peace, peace.” Then when I was doing walking meditation, walking back and forth with each step I’d say “peace, peace, peace.” Whether I was working or on almsround, eating, even in

conversation I found that every time that I could bring my mind back to the center of “peace, peace,” then everything started to come back into balance. I realized it was a quality that I needed. So it was a reminder. It was also a focus of concentration—always coming back to “peace, peace.” When the mind was getting upset, I’d just remember, “Right. Peace. Just be peaceful.” When I desired a delicious taste, just “peace, peace.” Or when I was confused or uncertain about



Ajahn Chandako, northern California

what was going to happen in the future—just “Peace, peace. Right here, right now, just be peaceful.” It was very much in line with how I was beginning to understand the law of *kamma*. It’s like everything in the universe, the whole history of the universe just reaching up to this one moment right here and now, and what has happened already—there’s nothing we can do about it. But our reaction to this moment can very much determine the amount of peace in our lives. So I realized, “Well, I’m creating my future moment-by-moment. If I respond

*(Continued on page 11)*

## From the Monastery

*Ñ niko Bhikkhu writes on behalf of the Sangha:*

The year 2006 has ended and 2007 is upon us. Dennis Crean has relinquished his role as newsletter editor and the job is being done in-house now, so with this issue you can expect a few changes. In the previous newsletter there was an announcement that if anyone wanted to help out with the upcoming issues they were welcome to do so. We received several responses and would like to thank all the people who stepped forward. At this point I have been given so much to work with that I feel I should apologize if I'm not able to include everything.

### Community, Teachings, Travels

Last issue's "From the Monastery" column ended with the ordination of Anagarika Whit Myers in early October. So, in this issue we continue in early October with Ajahn Sudanto traveling to North Dakota at the invitation of Patrick Anderson (ex-bhikkhu Piyas lo). Ajahn Sudanto stayed in North Dakota for one week. During this time, he gave a public talk followed by a weekend retreat at the Lotus Meditation Center in Grand Forks. About twenty-five people attended the teachings.

Iris Landsberg, an up sikkh who helps out with our book mailing department and is a Sanghapala board member, was diagnosed with a four-centimeter-wide brain tumor last year. In October, she underwent surgery for its removal. The surgery was successful except that the breathing tubes injured her vocal cords, making her voice hoarse for several months afterwards. Iris, along with Steve Holly, has been mailing free Dhamma books to people and in particular to prisoners over the last couple years. The community here breathed a big sigh of relief when the tumor was successfully removed.

This year's Kathina ceremony took place in late October. Each year at the end of the Rains Retreat (July–November is the monsoon season in Asia) the lay community offers robe cloth and other requisites to the Sangha. The cloth must be sewn into a robe and dyed an appropriate color before the next dawn. The robe is then bestowed upon a bhikkhu of mindfulness and wisdom who has done great service for the Sangha (or is in need of a new robe). Everything went very smoothly this year, partly due to the new facilities which allowed people to spread out more, and partly because we had several working sewing machines (as opposed to no working sewing machines last year). The Kathina cloth was formally offered by Sanya and Sompong Kunaboot. Many other generous lay supporters offered tools and useful requisites. A lower robe



Kathina Offering Ceremony 2006

(sabong) was sewn and offered to Tan Karunadhammo this year.

Soon after Kathina, Ajahn Sudanto and Tan Jotip lo headed to Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota to participate in the second "Monks in the West" Buddhist-Catholic dialogue. They met up with Reverend Heng Sure, Reverend Kusala, Ajahn Punnadhammo and several other Buddhist and Christian monks to dialogue on the topic of "Authentic practices of celibacy and intimacy in religious communities of men." The monks discussed why we practice celibacy, how we actually live it out and how we deal with transgressions. Aside from the formal dialogues, this was also a time to strengthen old friendships and create new ones within the wider spiritual community in the United States.

After the dialogue Tan Jotip lo spent a few days giving talks at Common Ground Meditation Center in Minneapolis. This is the fourth time he has met with them. CGMC is a *dharma*-based community group that has generously supported Tan Jotip lo and Ajahn Punnadhammo over the last few years.

Bhante Gunaratana paid us a weeklong visit in early November. Bhante had been tirelessly giving teachings around the world, so we wanted to give him the chance to take it easy and make use of the new accessible guest facility (although we still couldn't resist asking him to give a talk one night). The community was grateful for the opportunity to share time and good conversation with this most venerable elder.

Ajahn Thaniya paid us a visit in November and stayed for one week before heading off to Santa Rosa with Ajahn Amaro to co-lead the annual Thanksgiving Retreat. Ajahn Thaniya also joined us for the November community work day and displayed inspiringly high levels of kindness and generosity. It was good to have renewed contact with the sabbhara community through her presence and that of Sister Dhammadhira, who was travelling with her.

The annual Thanksgiving Retreat took place in late November at the Angela Center in Santa Rosa. A few of the junior monastics joined Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Thaniya for the ten day retreat. Periods of sitting and walking meditation were interspersed with chanting tips, interviews and yoga instruction offered by Mary Paffard. Morning and evening chanting and Dhamma talks provided a structure for each day. A CD of the talks given during the retreat was compiled and is currently available for free distribution.

After the Thanksgiving Retreat Ajahn Amaro headed to Egypt to join Luang Por Sumedho, Ajahn Vimalo, Ajahn Ñarato, Richard Smith, Edward and Ead Lewis for a two-week journey. The group explored the pyramids, visited temple



This photo was taken in Phuket, southern Thailand. Luang Boo Soo-Pah is sitting in the back. Ajahn Pasanno's mother, Rhoda Perry, is sitting in the chair. Front row from left is: Ajahn Pasanno, Khun Viro, Khun Onn, Debbie Stamp, Khun Jung and Khun Plern

ruins, Mount Sinai and several Coptic Christian monasteries to name just a few places. They also journeyed up the Nile River and many photos were taken to record the adventure.

While Ajahn Amaro was in Egypt, other members of the community picked up the teaching engagements. Ajahn Sudanto led the first Tuesday of December at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery. Tan Karunadhammo led an Up sika Day and Tan Jotip lo led a daylong retreat at Yoga Mendocino.

At the end of November, Tan Dhirapañño bid us farewell and returned to Thailand after a five month stay at Abhayagiri. During his stay he led the annual Vinaya Classes during the *Vassa*. Tan Dhirapañño is now living in Thailand with Tan Jotimanto at a small branch monastery of Wat Pah Nanachat. We hope that Tan Dhirapañño comes back soon to be a part of the Abhayagiri community again.

Debbie Stamp spent seven weeks in Thailand, also near the end of the year. Ajahn Pasanno's mother, Rhoda Perry, visited Thailand during this time. Debbie, Rhoda and friends traveled with Ajahn Pasanno to Chiang Mai, Phuket, Kanchanaburi and Laos. In Phuket the group had a memorable meeting with a 112-year-old monk named Luang Boo Soo-Pah. The group was also able to connect with Mae Chee Orn in Ubon, a ninety-six-year-old nun who had met Rhoda twenty-five years before (it just so happened that Mae Chee Orn died about one month after this). The groups of Thai people who looked after Ajahn Pasanno and his mother were most gracious and generous with their exemplary show of hospitality. Ajahn Pasanno is in excellent spirits after his extended period of retreat, and is looking forward to his return to Abhayagiri.

Before his return, Ajahn Pasanno will be paying a visit to the New Zealand branch monastery, Bodhinyanarama, and will see Peter Fernando (ex-monk Tan Dhammadaso). The community here also extends their greetings to Tan Dhammadaso, er, Peter, and passes on their best wishes. Ajahn will also visit Vimutti Vih ra, where Ajahn Chandako is the abbot.

The Abhayagiri community entered into their three-month silent retreat on January third. All work and most practical tasks were taken over by a group of laypeople who offered to serve the retreat. This allows the monastics to focus completely on meditation practice and training. Ajahn Amaro gave daily readings from the teachings of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho.

## Development

In the latter part of 2006 there was quite a push to finish off some projects which put us well into "phase two" of the monastery's development. In short, we completed two solar systems, two elders' kutis and two standard kutis—one next to the sauna, called the "sauna kuti" and one out the trail at the end of the road, called the "first creek kuti."

The first solar system to be completed was in the cloister area. A collection of sixty solar panels was mounted to the roofs of the Dhamma Hall and main house. This system is known as a "grid-intertie" because there are no batteries and it is wired directly into the public electrical grid. During the day, the monastery uses power directly from the sun and the extra power is fed back into the grid. During the night the monastery still draws power from the grid. With excess power production during the day, this allows the monastery's electrical bill to zero-out and the system will probably pay for itself within ten or fifteen years.



Cloister area solar array



Ajahn Pasanno's new kuti



Abhayagiri monastic community with 2007 Winter Retreat crew

The second solar system is known as a “stand-alone” system because it has batteries and is like a miniature power plant. This system includes an array of eighteen solar panels, a new solar shed next to the sauna, a large inverter, four huge batteries for storing power and a backup generator. This system currently powers the two new elders’ kutis, the two new standard kutis, several other kutis within the vicinity and lights in the sauna, but was sized to power a utility building and Dhamma Hall in the future as well. Having this system in place will greatly reduce the cost of gas for generators, since power tools can be run using the batteries.

Getting this “stand-alone” system running was no small task. Richard Jordan, a local solar power specialist, was constantly working with us running wire, hooking up electrical connections and getting the inverter and batteries hooked together. There were several trenches that had to be dug and lengths of electrical conduit to be laid in the ground. We discovered that running wire is difficult and messy work, due to the lubricant that must

be put on the wire so that it slides through the underground pipes (conduit) to its various destinations. The most difficult wire-run was from the new solar panels to the solar shed—about 400 feet. There were two rolls of very fat wire, each roll weighing 250 pounds, which had to be fed into two-inch conduit. It took four hours and was quite an experience for those involved. Much thanks to Richard Jordan for his tireless help and advice with this project.

The four new kutis were framed by Madlem Construction of Redwood Valley. We did the finishing work on them, which included putting up the concrete composite siding, doing interior work and painting. Also, a shed had to be built near the elders’ kutis to house the controls for a septic pump. The community work days were largely dedicated to painting all four of the new kutis. Without the generous help from the lay community it would have been difficult to get all the painting done.

On the community work day in November, the solar pump which draws water from a well on the ridge was upgraded. The current well pump’s motor had burnt out so it was necessary to pull that pump out of the 200 foot deep well and put a different one into it. The new pump is a ray-direct Dankoff brand pump which draws about five gallons per minute from the well when the sun is shining. “Ray-direct” means there are no batteries, but when the sun hits the solar panels, the water pumps; when the sun leaves, the water stops pumping. This is a considerable upgrade from the last pump which was had a two gallon per minute draw.

*Anumodan* to all the people who have helped us complete these projects. We did a huge amount of work in the last two years, so 2007 is our “building moratorium.” We aren’t starting any new building projects this year but are just focusing on maintenance and basic running of the new facilities. 🙏



Eighteen-panel solar array



The new solar shed

# Tales from Varapañño

## The Early Years with Ajahn Sumedho

*Paul Breiter (who, thirty years ago, was Varapañño Bhikkhu) recounts his experiences with Ajahn Sumedho in the early 1970s.*

My first year in college I had one of those rare instructors who prodded and provoked students into thinking and investigating the world and themselves. One day he was talking about myth. He said that myths are something relevant to their time and place and fill a need, allowing contact with dimensions of life that we normally feel disconnected from. In modern times (that was 1967), a mythic figure might be someone like Bob Dylan.

About six years later I found myself walking behind Ajahn Sumedho on *pindapat*<sup>1</sup> in the environs of Wat Pah Sri Mah dh tu, on the outskirts of Bangkok. It was almost rural in those days and the pindapats were bright and peaceful occasions. I hadn't seen Ajahn Sumedho for about a year (later on we were to learn that he had burned out on *Pra Farang*<sup>2</sup> and asked Luang Por Chah's permission to go off on his own to central Thailand and then India). While he had always been an impressive figure, it was evident that he had matured further. This was something I would notice over the years—every time I saw him after a period of time, he displayed new facets of spiritual development.

We had inspired and brilliant conversations on the walk to and from the houses during those two weeks. His words conveyed clarity and profundity in that uniquely accessible way of communicating he's always had. I felt it a great honor to walk in his footsteps as we made our almsround and I began to think that here indeed was someone who provided a truly meaningful mythic figure for our times, a model that youngsters would do well to aspire to, much more so than any frenetic musician or poet. The one statement I recall clearly from those days long ago is his saying that "All the little *mohas* (delusions) seem like such big things now," because he wasn't struggling with the grosser levels of defilement.

He left for India after New Year 1973. One of the monks he traveled with for part of that time was Dhammagato, who occasionally made memorable statements. When we were talking about Ajahn Sumedho once, he said, "He and Luang Por (Chah) are really the same; they're only different in their param"<sup>3</sup>.

I returned to Wat Pah Pong, where I inherited the mantle of translator and sometimes guide for newly arriving farang. Ajahn Chah would tell them, "This is Varapañño. He is your Ajahn. That's not because he has any wisdom, but because he's the only one who can translate for you." Still, I got a little too comfortable with my Big-Man-on-Campus role and Luang Por sent me into exile for the Vassa.

Shortly before Vassa began, I was at Ajahn Chah's kuti one day. Out of the blue, he remarked, "I miss Sumedho. I'd like to see his face again." The next day when I approached Luang Por's kuti after chores, a big, skinny farang in bright city robes was sitting there. His back was to me and it took a moment to realize that it was Ajahn Sumedho.

My Vassa was a rough ride and I didn't garner any accolades for it. One night, after I had returned to Wat Pah Pong and thought I was settling in again, several of us met with Ajahn Sumedho. Like Luang Por Chah, he could be soothing or wrathful; especially after returning from India, there was something leaner, sharper and tougher about him. On this occasion, it was definitely the wrathful manifestation.

He heard out my whining, complaining and vacillating and then let me have it. "These are monasteries. You can't go into these places and demand everything be to your comfort. You create disharmony; you've got a reputation as a troublemaker.

"If you're committed to this way of life, you have to make up your mind to endure and stop complaining and putting conditions on things. It would be better to die than to continue like that. It would be the manly thing to do."

His words rang in my ears for a good while after that night. Of course, in monastic life, one knows that such scolding is not a personal attack and hard feelings are (generally) not held. I had plenty of respect for Ajahn Sumedho, and also had nowhere else to turn, so I tried to step up my feeble efforts. I ended up at Wat Nong Hai with Ajahn Sinuan, he with Ajahn Jun. Each occasional meeting with him would have a different tone and subject matter.

Ajahn Sumedho doesn't go much for categories and standard Buddhist terminology, but he probably fits the bill for *dukkha-patipad -khipp bhiiññ*, one whose path involves suffering but who comes to see quickly.

Ordaining in his mid-thirties, he had more life experience than most of us who took robes in the 1960s and 70s. Always something of a seeker and thinker, he told me that he was a voracious reader. "I used to sit in coffee shops and libraries reading books and I finally started to wonder, 'What's the point of life if all you can do is read about it?'" He was also of a religious bent from an early age, eagerly taking part in church activities, but as he grew up and perceived suffering in himself and all around him, he began to think that "God must be a terrible bore and have a really bad sense of humor" to create such a world. When he came across Buddhism, he said, "I had faith in it because it told me I didn't have to believe in anything."

After a year of practicing meditation, he heard about Ajahn Chah. He went to stay at Wat Pah Pong but chafed at the discipline, still wishing to be a hermit meditator, and after one year he went to live on a remote hill in Sakon Nakhon province.

1. Pindapat: Daily almsround.

2. Pra Farang: Thai lingo for western monk. Farang by itself refers to any westerner.

3. Param : Perfection, or in this case accumulated virtues and qualities.

He became seriously ill and had a major breakthrough in his practice and finally “realized what a silly person I was and made up my mind to go back and surrender to Ajahn Chah.”

Ajahn Chah must have been very fond of his first farang disciple (especially as he was much more mature and durable than many of us who followed), which meant he didn’t make life easy for him and afterwards loved to tell stories about him and occasionally jab in the needle. As often happened, things reported to Luang Por got magnified and embellished and recounted over and over.

One episode involved eating *som tum*, the raw papaya salad that’s made fiery spicy in the northeast. Ajahn Sumedho was caught by surprise the first time he ate it, with comical results, and the story grew to him picking up handfuls of it, stuffing it in his mouth and catching on fire from it. Luang Por used to do an imitation that included Ajahn Sumedho smearing som tum on his face.

Then on one of the Buddhist holy days, when Ajahn Sumedho had gone to see Luang Por at his kuti, Luang Por told him to go prepare for circumambulation, *wien tien* in Thai. The way Luang Por told it, Ajahn Sumedho showed up with his bowl all packed and ready to travel, because he thought they were going to Vientiane (the capital of Laos).

Ajahn Sumedho says that he was generally respected by the monks because he practiced hard, but to the laypeople he became something of a circus attraction, “like a monkey.” All they knew of America in those days was from Elvis Presley movies and they wondered why an American would want to come live in an austere forest monastery when he could be home “riding a big motorcycle and singing and dancing in the street.”

A senior scholar monk in the area was once visiting Ajahn Chah. Ajahn Sumedho came to Ajahn Chah’s kuti while they were talking. Astonished, the scholar asked, “Can a farang be a monk?” to which Ajahn Chah replied, “He’s a better monk than you—he doesn’t handle money!”

I first heard of him in late 1970. I had been ordained for about two months in Wat Boworn in Bangkok, which was pretty much *Dhammayut*<sup>4</sup> headquarters. I had met several veteran Pra Farang, and though they were friendly, dedicated and seemingly very clear about what they were doing, there was something subdued, almost desperate, about them all—maybe just their Britishness giving off that feeling of likeable, duty-bound people slogging onward. Then Jack Kornfield (Santidhammo Bhikkhu) and Douglas Burns (Suvijjano Bhikkhu) showed up after spending a Vassa (their first) with Ajahn Chah and Sumedho. They were practi-

cally bursting with enthusiasm and it was contagious, as much as anything could be for me in my depressed state of those days.

Ajahn Chah showed up in Bangkok not long afterwards and blew me away. A few weeks later I was on the train to Ubon.

When I arrived at Wat Pah Pong, monks were just getting back from pindapat. I saw Suvijjano and one other farang, Dhammaguto, and then Ajahn Sumedho was there and they introduced me. He had his famous ear-to-ear grin—sort of unmonk-like, I thought, having been around dour types like Khantip lo in Bangkok—and welcomed me.

I stayed for about three weeks. He was generous with his time, taking us to see Ajahn Chah on a few occasions and inviting us to his kuti for tea and conversation. There was something very natural and unforced about his bhikkhu-hood. He would admit that food could be delicious, that things could be attractive—also seemingly unmonk-like—but he had the wider view that such things were bound up with their opposites. Rather than fostering blind revulsion and avoidance, he talked about learning how the mind works in all situations in order to no longer be a slave to habits. He would say, “It’s natural to like sweet things. You give your girlfriend chocolates—you don’t give her *samor* (emphyric mirobalan, small sour fruit that is taken as a laxative and is a standard post-noon refreshment for monks in northeast Thailand) pickled in Ajahn Chah’s urine.” He obviously had great trust in Ajahn Chah and confidence in monastic life. Being there and experiencing his presence and common sense and of course Ajahn Chah’s was very uplifting for me. I decided that after getting my visa renewed in Bangkok, I would return.

A couple of months later I was back, as hot season was about to begin. Ajahn Sumedho was at Wat Tam Saeng Pet<sup>5</sup> and Luang Por was sending farangs there to stay with him, so Dhammagutto and I, who had returned together, were on our way after a few days.

We were told that Ajahn Sumedho was sick with malaria, a recurrent illness for him. Someone led us to his cave on the hillside. He was sitting crosslegged, wrapped in his robe. He greeted us, we asked how he was, and with a huge grin he said, “Not very well.” That was impressive. He didn’t look like he was suffering just because he was very ill.

As the mind is wont to, I had already started to accustom myself to Wat Pah Pong and feel some sense of security in the routine there. All of a sudden I was in a huge, mostly empty monastery, consigned to a cave and left to practice on my own. The first night’s jolly meeting in the *s /*<sup>6</sup>, with a full kettle of some steaming sweet

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4. Dhammayut: Refers to one of the two main orders of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, the other being the Mahanikai.

5. Wat Tam Saeng Pet: A branch monastery near Wat Pah Pong located on a small hill with caves.

6. S / : Meeting hall.

liquid to drink, allayed some of the unease, but as the days went by I began to wonder what I was doing in such a place.

Ajahn Sumedho would chat after the meal, sometimes invite us to meet in the *sal* or one of the caves in the evening. One day as we parted at a fork in the paths on the way back to our caves after the meal, he started talking about peaks of inspiration and valleys of despair in practice. I think most of us westerners were concerned with success and achievement and expected our minds to be always clear, brilliant and inspired, and felt it was something wrong and terrible if we weren't always happy and making measurable progress in our meditation—in other words, we were racing right past the real point of practice, while Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho kept pointing out the impermanence of absolutely everything.

He also said something I didn't catch on to for a long time, that wisdom is like space. "We notice objects, but we never notice the space around objects," he said, without further elaboration.

He started guiding my meditation, having me pay attention to the way the senses work, to get a feel for what my body was. He would tell me to do things like grasping parts of my body with my hands when I woke up. It did have a peculiar grounding effect to do that. Then he went on to one of his great loves of the time, the *hua tou* or *koan* method as explained in Charles Luk's book, *Chan and Zen Teachings*, using doubt to open up the mind. He certainly wasn't promoting a lifetime of *anapanasati*, which he compared to learning to play scales on the piano. (One monk remarked a few years later that *sam dhi* came easily for Ajahn Sumedho, much more so than for the rest of us. That might be why he didn't place great emphasis on meditations that focused on a single point.)

The koan stuff was effective, perhaps too much so. I started to feel like I was descending into the depths of myself way too fast; everything was hitting the fan and it seemed to be more than I could handle or even force myself to try handling. One night after an evening meeting, I asked if I could speak with him. We went to the dyeing shed and sat in meditation together for a while and then I told him I was having a really hard time and didn't see how I could continue (not that I saw any alternative, which was the most frightening part).

He had already told several of us how he had struggled in his early days, how he had reached his own depths and finally let go. Now he was telling me that sometimes there was nothing to do but grit your teeth and bear it, and that when it changed, which it always did, you were left with a deep understanding of impermanence that could see you through anything. Finally he said, "You wouldn't believe what it's like," when you do let go.

Because he had met with strong difficulty in his practice

and had come through it, he was someone we could relate to and someone we could look to as an inspiring model of what could be. And I think it gave him real empathy—indeed, he always said that compassion comes about from first seeing suffering in yourself and then realizing that others suffer just the same. Still, I was too freaked out. There wasn't really any haven anywhere, but I thought I might be safer at Wat Pah Pong (I wasn't) and then in Bangkok. Before leaving for Bangkok, when talking with Ajahn Chah, he simply said, "Sumedho says, 'Varapañño thinks too much.'"

At Tam Saeng Pet I thought the bottom had fallen out, but during my Vassa at Wat Boworn, it fell out further. I realized that the only hope was to go back to Ajahn Chah after the rains retreat and take whatever medicine he was dispensing. I scrapped my way through the three-

month period and corresponded with Ajahn Sumedho and the others, who were spending Vassa at the dreaded Tam Saeng Pet.

An aside on impermanence: one part of the forest routine that depressed me most, made me feel all alone with a vast and endless task before me and no pleasure to look forward to, was sweeping the grounds of the monastery. Once when talking about taking the daily life as practice, Ajahn Sumedho urged putting energy and mindfulness into everything we did. "When you sweep the leaves," he began to say, and repeated the party line. During my exile in Bangkok, I used to recall the misery of sweeping and immediately Ajahn Sumedho would pop into my head, saying, "When you sweep the leaves . . ." But it turned out that sweeping with the long handled brooms became an exercise in mindfulness (and good physical exercise as well) that I started to enjoy and even looked forward to, especially as I felt myself working in concert with a few dozen monks and novices around me at Wat Pah Pong. When I returned to Tam Saeng Pet as a layman in 1981 and years after, it was almost pure pleasure staying there and meditating in the caves.

Doug Burns, now back in lay life, dropped by once in a while. When we were discussing Wat Pah Pong and the cast of characters, he told me, "Santi (Jack Kornfield) says Sumedho is a saint." I mentioned that in one of my letters to Ajahn Sumedho, telling him that if ever I had met anyone I wanted to be like, it was him (Ajahn Chah's example seemed too far out of reach).

The whole crew pitched in and wrote a letter back, each person offering words of encouragement. It was quite moving. Ajahn Sumedho, of course, was the least sentimental. He told me to forget about trying to be like anyone else, not to get caught up in the dramas going on in my mind. Whenever thoughts of fear or worry, hopes and ideals, came up, I should simply say, "Horseshit!" and keep on saying that until it all subsided.

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(Continued on page 12)

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



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Clatskanie, OR 97016  
Tel. (503) 728 0654  
www.greatvow.org

#### Insight Meditation Society (IMS)

1230 Pleasant St.  
Barre, MA 01005  
Tel. (978) 355 4378  
www.dharma.org

### Portland Friends of the Dhamma

1422 SE Tacoma St., 2nd Floor  
Portland, OR 97202  
sakula@notjustus.com

#### SATI Center

Insight Meditation Center  
1205 Hopkins Ave.  
Redwood City, CA  
Contact: karuna@sati.org  
Tel. (415) 646 0530  
www.sati.org

#### 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

### UNITED KINGDOM

#### Amaravati Buddhist Monastery

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Hemel Hempstead,  
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ.  
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www.amaravati.org

#### Cittaviveka

Chithurst Buddhist Monastery  
Chithurst, Petersfield,  
Hampshire GU31 5EU.  
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www.cittaviveka.org

### AUSTRALIA

#### Bodhinyana Monastery

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Serpentine, WA 6125.  
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www.bswa.org

#### Bodhivana Monastery

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East Warburton,  
Victoria 3799.  
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### NEW ZEALAND

#### Bodhinyanarama Monastery

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Stokes Valley,  
Lower Hutt 5019  
Tel. +64 (0) 4 5637 193  
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz

#### Vimutti Vihara

PO Box 7  
Bombay, 2343  
Tel. +64 (0) 9 5795 443  
www.vimutti.org.nz

### THAILAND

#### Wat Pah Nanachat

Bahn Bung Wai,  
Amper Warin,  
Ubon 34310

## M ra's Desk

### M ra: A Brief History and Vocabulary

By *Mettika*

We have heard about M ra, the Evil One from the story of the Buddha's courageous battle with his armies, minions, and daughters on the evening of his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. As soon as Siddhattha started meditating, he was confronted with the figure of M ra, the Lord of Darkness. M ra tried to tempt Siddhattha into despair and in giving up his quest for enlightenment. However, the future Buddha called upon the Earth Goddess to be witness to his quest.

M ra's armies are: desire/lust, dislike for the higher life, hunger/thirst, craving, sloth and torpor, fear/cowardice, doubt, hypocrisy/obduracy, gain/praise/fame/honor/false glory, exalting self/despising others. M ra's daughters represent: lust, greed, desire, pride and ignorance. M ra's hordes represent the sum total of our deepest fears.

M ra can be viewed as the embodiment of unskillfulness and the death of the spiritual life in all of us. The nuns at the time of the Buddha grappled with M ra. He would sneak into their hearts and thoughts, desiring to arouse fear, trepidation, and terror. They, Uppalavanna, C la, Soma, Alavika, Gotami, Vij ya, Upapacala, Sisupacala, Sela, Vajira, to name but a few of the nuns, caught M ra immediately and answered him with brilliant replies whereby M ra sneaks away, caught in the act, foiled again. HISSSSSS.

Beginning in the fall of 1997 *Fearless Mountain Newsletter* featured a four-part series by Ajahn Punnadhammo entitled "Letters from M ra." I found my interest and imagination piqued about this character named M ra. If you have a chance to read these letters, do so. They are most humorous and elucidating.

Several years ago, on Visakh P j , Ajahn Amaro gave a brilliant Dhamma talk. He assumed the voice of M ra, as George Saunders, a British character actor who often played the role of an oily cad. In this voice M ra confronts the Buddha and asks him who he thinks he is that he should be enlightened as he is a loser who abandoned his wife, son, and palace responsibilities. He couldn't even make it as an ascetic. He had to start eating again.

M ra shows up in all our lives whispering such things as: "You could have done better, why don't you have that piece of pie, you *deserve* it, I need a new I-Pod, you're not smart enough, I see it, I want it, I like it, I get it, If only I had a boy/girlfriend then everything would be alright, why me? I don't like it and it shouldn't be this way. I have really ugly thighs."

For the past many years, I too have started hearing M ra's voice. Humor and skirmishes have begun with this dark trickster. On the last evening of a past Thanksgiving Retreat with Ajahn Amaro, I composed a song dedicated to M ra based on the tune, "I'm Just a Gal Who Can't Say No." One line read "I'm in your terrible grip. I always say 'come on let's go' just when I need to do zip." Another time, I wrote an article entitled "Hearing M ra on the Loop Trail" which addressed my fears of getting lost, getting stuck, encountering a mountain lion, falling off the mountain and missing the meal.

The latest battle with the Evil One was just a few months ago. I had a bone marrow biopsy and was waiting for the results which took two weeks. There were four possibilities: nothing, something to be checked yearly, a quick exit from planet earth, or an extremely rare blood disease called Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia—which I later found out was the diagnosis. During the next two weeks, M ra's voice was a deep diabolic laugh and then the voice said, "Mettika, you're going to die." Sometimes I was able to feel the fear in the belly which created awareness and then was able to see M ra and watch him slunk away. Sometimes I felt the pure dread of impending death. M ra was happy with that response.

So, Dhamma friends and wayfarers, be on the lookout for M ra in his many forms. The worst form of all is not seeing or hearing M ra's whisperings and becoming entangled, shackled, trapped, upset, blind, deaf, heedless, and unprepared. We now have the opportunity to catch M ra's armies, minions, and daughters. Stay tuned and feel free to write to M ra's Desk if you too have had encounters. Drop me a line. 🙏

*Cindy Mettika Hoffman is an up sikh who has long been a part of the Abhayagiri community.*

*Please write to M ra's Desk at [cindyho@mcn.org](mailto:cindyho@mcn.org)*

## ❁ FEARLESS MOUNTAIN ❁

*Fearless Mountain* is the periodic newsletter of Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, a Buddhist community in the Thai Forest tradition of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho. It is composed of materials submitted to or written at Abhayagiri and distributed free of charge to friends of the Abhayagiri community. Comment within is personal reflection only.

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(continued from page 1)

in a way which is going to be agitating, it's going to lead to an agitated future. But if I respond with this sense of peace . . ." So whatever it was, whatever the whole history of causes and conditions had produced in this moment, pleasant or unpleasant, I could create my future moment-by-moment through responding with peace. Meditation is of course a central feature in our lifestyle. Before I went to Wat Pah Nanachat I was doing a long meditation retreat in Thailand, and it was more of the *vipassan* style. I was told "Well, you're welcome to do *samatha* meditation if you *want*, but it's basically a waste of time—it makes you a little peaceful, you get a little happiness, but you get attached to it and then you end up just as stupid as you ever were. But *vipassan* —that's the essence of wisdom, that's the thing which is going to liberate you." So I said "great!" and put all of my energy into it. By the time I got to Wat Pah Nanachat, I realized, "Actually what I need is some peace." And Luang Por Chah, he didn't make this big distinction between *samatha* and *vipassan* . He said, "Well, we know what flowing water is. You can go down to the creek and study how water flows by and around the rocks and it's a real study and learning about our minds as well, just watching how water flows. If we've had the experience of seeing a really still pool somewhere," Ajahn Chah would say, "Well, we know what it's like when it's still, absolutely still." I had been a ranger up in the Sierra Mountains up above the tree line and had seen these pools and lakes that were just snow melt, freshly melted from snow and glaciers—absolutely still and clear. No wind, and you could look right through the water and no matter how deep it was it seemed you could see all the detail of the rocks and everything on the bottom. That was such a beautiful simile for the still mind. "But," Ajahn Chah says, "even if we know what water is like when it's still, what we don't know is still flowing water." This is one of my favorite similes of Ajahn Chah's—still flowing water—this paradox: when water flows, then we can understand that and when it doesn't flow then it's still. And when it's still it doesn't flow, it's not moving. But how can it be flowing and still at the same time? This is what we need to figure, this is what we need to know firsthand. And as we know, the Buddha didn't just teach the Dhamma. He taught *Dhamma-Vinaya*. When he talked about meditation he didn't just teach *vipassan* , he taught *samatha-vipassan* .

I think it was Ajahn Buddhadasa who first came up with this simile of *samatha* and *vipassan* being very much like a knife. His simile was of the practitioner as someone who's carving away through a dense jungle, a dense thicket. One doesn't need to cut down the whole jungle; one just needs to cut a path through the jungle to get to the other side. The tool to work with is the meditation. To be able to use the tool effectively, to have an effective

tool, it's got to be both heavy and sharp. To try to get through the jungle with just a razor blade, clearly is not going to work. To try to get through the jungle with just a dull stick is not going to work. But when you combine the sharpness and the heaviness then you get one of these Thai machettes and with systematic effort and persistence, you can make your way through the jungle bit-by-bit, vine-by-vine, tree-by-tree. This was Ajahn Buddhadasa's simile for *samatha* and *vipassan* . *Vipassan* was that sharpness, that clarity of mind, that investigative edge, where *samatha* was the weight behind it, the oomph, the power. It gives it some-

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I see *samatha* to be a rock and not to roll. And *vipassan* is pure rock and roll.

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thing. Even if there's a lot of energy, if you just have this tiny razor blade edge, it doesn't work very well. Actually one of the similes I like with *samatha* and *vipassan* is that I see *samatha* to be a rock and not to roll. And *vipassan* is pure rock and roll.

If we look at how the Buddha talked about the causes and conditions that lead to enlightenment and liberation, if we look at *yath -bh ta-ñ na-dassanam*, seeing things as they clearly are in accordance with reality, what's the cause and condition for that? Well, it's *sam dhi*. It's a very important thing. Also it's important to recognize that the cause and condition that the Buddha said led to *sam dhi* was *sukh* , happiness, and how important that sense of happiness is in one's life, in one's meditation. It's something we can systematically develop. We tend to think, "Well, at the end of the path there's going to be happiness, maybe I'll have suffering in between but finally, someday I'm going to be happy." But the Buddha was saying even before we get to advanced stages of insight, even before we can learn how to really make the mind peaceful, we have to learn how to be happy enough, developing happiness in the lifestyle, in the meditation, actually focusing on it. One of the paradoxes of spiritual life I find is that we have everything we need to be happy right here and now and yet, at the same time, there's clearly something to be done. So if we have everything we need to be happy right here and now, why not just be lazy and complacent? But if we realize that we have enough right here and now to give rise to a certain level of contentment, then whatever it is—pleasant, painful, a lot or a little, it's enough to be content with it. This type of contentment is that happiness which can lead to peace of mind. Going back into "peace, peace, peace," Then it's just natural. The more calm the mind is, the more clarity there is. And the more clarity there is, the more we let go of all the things which agitate and disturb the mind. And then the more peaceful the mind becomes, the more clarity there is. So the way the ajahns in the Forest tradition talked about the whole *samatha-vipassan* issue was not to make a big distinction between the two from the very beginning. We've got to use wisdom every moment throughout the day to try to understand why it is that we're not peaceful. What are the obstacles to peace? Whatever our lifestyle is, monastic or lay, we've got to deal with

these worldly dhammas, these things which are upsetting to the mind or bringing the mind away from a point of peaceful balance. This takes wisdom all the time. And yet there is this constant emphasis on “just sit and be still and meditate.” Make the mind calm and peaceful, allow it to be peaceful. If we don’t stir it up, then peace arises all by itself.

One of the great insights for me in the early days of meditation practice was, “Well, this peace of mind which I’m seeking is very much intertwined with everything I’ve ever done and said.” So then I saw the connection between what I was doing, my behavior, everything I said, even everything I thought and my state of mind when I was sitting in meditation. Again it comes back to that basic law of kamma. Everything we do, moment-by-moment, there’s this opportunity to direct it to a certain future course. And that very much depends on what we want from our life. So over and over I try to ask, “What is it that I most deeply aspire to?” I believe the highest happiness is peace. That does seem like something worth aspiring to. So I keep coming back to this “peace, peace,” and then looking at these behaviors: what I’m doing, my actions, are these coming from a peaceful intention? When I’m speaking, reflecting before and afterwards, if I wasn’t mindful at the time then I try to reflect afterwards, “Was this coming from peace? From the inclination towards peace, or not?” When it wasn’t coming from a sense of leaning, inquiring toward peace, then the effect usually wouldn’t be very good, very beneficial either for myself or for others. It wasn’t leading to an

increased peace in the world. As we know, the Buddha didn’t just teach one technique, such as following the breath. He taught a whole range of different ways to approach training the mind based on personal inclination or where a person was off balance, based on where the strengths of their defilements were, based on a particular period in their lives. So whether we do *n p nasati* or loving-kindness or going through the components of the body or reflecting on the qualities of the Buddha and so on, all of them incorporate this balance of wisdom (*paññā*) and sam dhi. Still flowing water. If the methods are going to be successful they have to be used in a way which is going to bring the mind back to a point of being centered and peaceful. Peaceful with clarity. Not a dull, dumb peace. Not the kind of meditation where we sit down and say, “Boy, that’s really peaceful. Wow, I’m feeling so peaceful . . .” And then forty-five minutes later the bell rings and “Wow! That must have been really deep sam dhi. That time passed so quickly and I feel really refreshed. I must be getting close!” No, it’s a type of peace that’s got this astute clarity happening, moment-by-moment. 🙏

*From a talk given during Abhayagiri’s tenth anniversary. Ajahn Chandako is the abbot of Vimutti Vihāra, a new branch monastery in New Zealand. Transcription by Minty Ryan of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.*

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*(Continued from page 7)*

I finally did make it back, on the day of Kathina. It was already a big relief to be there. Ajahn Chah seemed greatly amused to see me, saying, “Varapañño’s come back! I thought he was afraid of sticky rice (a good part of my difficulty had been inability to digest the food, especially the glutinous rice that is the staple of the diet in the northeast!)”

After Kathina, Ajahn Sumedho and the others were soon off to other monasteries and Ajahn Chah himself was often away, going to Kathina ceremonies at the various branch monasteries. I floundered around for a couple of months until Ajahn Chah probably got the idea that I might be staying this time and took me under his wing.

I would see Ajahn Sumedho every few months. Sometimes we would gather at his kuti, sometimes talk on pindapat or in the sala after chanting, sometimes at a fork in the path when returning to our kutis. His words were always to the point and memorable. Tall and upright, full of vigor and without hesitancy, he felt like a tower of strength. And he never seemed to put his own needs or desires first; many years later, I realized that I had never seen him do anything selfish. Yet he wasn’t trying to project any certain persona and often spiced up his advice with stories of his own foibles and difficulties.

He freely poked fun at the way he tended to get ahead of himself. When he was first ordained, he thought, “I would be

happy if I could become just a little bit better—if I could just quit smoking, that would be something.” But as his practice progressed, he occasionally started thinking big. Once on a train to Bangkok he was thinking that he had realized truths that would help create a utopia and he saw himself as possibly Spiritual Adviser to the United Nations. His heart was full of love for all beings. But as soon as he arrived in the bustling city, he immediately became angry and irritated.

Another time, he was living in a cave, enjoying blissful meditation. He decided that his profound insights should be preserved, so he started writing poetry. “After a while, it began to feel like the whining of mice and I wondered if it would ever stop,” he said of his scribbling.

He was especially tuned in to doubt. He saw and heard farang after farang come and air out all sorts of doubts, about themselves, about the teachings, about the practice, the teacher, the way of life. He had a take-no-prisoners attitude and was always urging us to burn our bridges. At the same time, he recognized that doubts did occur and couldn’t simply be suppressed, so he recommended looking directly at each doubt as just another mental occurrence, even to use doubt, such as in the hua tou method of asking, “Who is the one that is thinking?”

Months and years went by. My parents came to visit during



the Vassa of 1974. I came from Ajahn Sinuan's monastery, Ban Nong Hai, to meet them at Wat Pah Pong. It seemed I was out of the doghouse, especially when I recited the *P timokkha*, at the end of

which Luang Por, for once taken by surprise, I think, said "*Hai hojuk Varapañño* (You guys should know Varapañño)." Before I left, one night after Wan Pra, I had tea with Ajahn Sumedho at his kuti. We had a nice, relaxed chat. I felt like I might have been through most of the worst days of my monastic career and I boldly proclaimed, "If I make it through the next hot season, nothing can stop me!" He was kind enough not to ask, "Stop you from doing what?" Then he told me that he wasn't trying to do anything special, just being aware of himself. "I watch my mind, how it's always looking for something to happen. Even waiting for the bell to ring becomes a big thing. Usually I know what it's going to do next—my mind is so boring!" He said he was becoming more and more dispassionate. "I'm not enamored of living anymore. I don't dislike life, but I'm not clinging to it." Being with him on such occasions would usually put me in a meditative way and enable me to see myself more clearly and feel a sense of detachment from what I saw: it was obvious that he spoke from experience and he transmitted something tangible. Maybe that's what is called blessing or grace.

After that Vassa I ended up at Wat Pah Kloh in Amper Detudom, not far from the Cambodian border (it was early 1975, just before the Khmer Rouge took power and we could hear sounds of fighting sometimes). I lived with two lovely old gentlemen there. When I returned to Wat Pah Pong for Magh P ja, my first night back I went to chew the fat with Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Ban Kao, a Laotian bhikkhu who now lives in France. Just as I thought we were ready to adjourn, he insisted I listen to him recite a sutta. It was on the topic of ditth —views—and it took the framework of the Four Noble Truths: views, the arising of views, the cessation of views and the path leading to the cessation of views. After his recitation, he remarked that there must be some reason for it being presented that way, i.e., that views and opinions themselves, when clung to, were the cause of suffering. This was to become a main theme of his teaching, almost an obsession, it seemed (Venerable Pabhakaro once commented that our "Opinions Ajahn" has a few of his own).

That night he was also talking about the practice in general and meditation as the vital point. "And what is meditation?" he asked rhetorically. "Sometimes it's just sitting there with a sick mind and listening to all the shit that's been accumulated over a lifetime." He talked about forbearance and going against the grain. "Sometimes when your bladder is aching, you can just sit there and watch your reaction instead of immediately getting up to go urinate." After a pause, he added, "Your mother would never understand something like that." (To be continued) 卐



### 100,000 Prostrations

*Anagarika Lee Mintz reflects on the past year*

Having been asked to write a few words about my experience as an anagarika, I am reminded of last November, when Ajahn Thaniya gifted Abhayagiri with her kind presence. During the visit, I asked her for advice concerning the difficulties that occur in the first year of monastic training. In response, she said that the anagarika year is comparable to the Tibetan practice of 100,000 full-body prostrations. As an anagarika, I needed to learn to surrender with generosity and internally bow to any difficult experiences.

One major part of the anagarika training is observing the mind in response to the five major duties: cooking, driving, cleaning, digging, and shopping. As a layman, I was willing to do these tasks on my own terms—when I wanted to and in my own way. Key words: When, I, wanted, my and own. But training to be a bhikkhu means eliminating the clinging and craving empowering these words. Not learning this means dukkha, dukkha and more dukkha.

Being the kitchen manager for over a year forced me to come to grips with and go against many of my views and opinions, likes and dislikes. I had to choose my battles wisely and allow most preferences to recede into the background of the mind. Even when I wanted to prepare something besides the monotonous oatmeal or cereal for breakfast, I had to be prepared to bow: "Yes, Ajahn. Just oatmeal or cereal. I'll put the french toast out for the main meal" (sob, sob, sob). And there was always someone in the kitchen doing something that I didn't agree with: "I don't think we need more dessert, what we need are more vegetables and more protein and more FRENCH TOAST!" Then there were specifics on which items should or should not be put on the *d na* wish list or how the kitchen needed to be cleaned. In the end most of these issues were less important than I made them out to be. For as difficult as it is for me to admit (even now), the food was always good, there was always enough *d na*, and the kitchen was almost always spotless, even if my advice was not heeded. So I bowed. And I bowed again.

During the long afternoons, after my duties with the meal were at an end, I often decided to return to my kuti to "meditate" (translation: take a nap). That's when I would hear, "Anagarika Lee, could you drive me into town and help me purchase some rigging equipment?" Or, "Anagarika Lee, could you sort through this timber pile for any usable lumber? It's covered in rat feces." Or, "Anagarika Lee, get ready for a twelve-hour afternoon work period and a midnight brick-laying party." All the while my mind was saying, "But, what about returning to my kuti? But, what about my practice? But, what about MY NAP?" My response instead was to generously bow and say, "Yes, Ajahn."

*(Continued on bottom of next page)*

## Adventures of Me & I

By Elizabeth Matovinovic, medical writer in Santa Clara, CA

My consciousness pivots between conventional and ultimate reality. Consequently, incompatibilities related to how personal identity functions within these realities are a source of suffering for me. While conventional reality necessitates constructing multiple identities in order to function within society, these identities interfere with the boundless freedom existing within ultimate reality. I don't mean to claim that I have fully experienced ultimate reality for that may be a permanent enlightenment, but there are fleeting moments when a chair is no longer a chair and terms like "me" and "I" become confining delusions projected onto a boundless cosmic force.

I have a choice to focus the consciousness on three main things: internal mind chatter, the external world and the Dhamma. The most frequent yet most unstable option is centering on the internal mind, which is not anchored to any external validity and can uncontrollably proliferate emotionally and dominate the consciousness with unwholesome thoughts and feelings. Shifting consciousness away from mind chatter and focusing it on something in the external environment, such as the computer humming sound, is an instant relief and results in a neutral feeling. Unlike the mind, the external environment is easy to observe without becoming, and results in a glimmer of peacefulness akin to ultimate reality. Focusing consciousness on the Dhamma acts as a bridge to ensure safe travel between the internal mind and external world. Following the Dhamma path, I can venture into the mind and watch its antics from the side of the road then move out to the external world and observe a more ultimate reality.

Recently, I admitted to Ajahn Amaro that I was often possessed with the need to burst into his office and plead with him to tell me that it gets easier, not to worry, that it would all be okay in a few years, or better yet, a few hours. His response was to repeat a favorite quotation of Ajahn Sumedho's: "Oh please, tell me that you love me, even if it isn't true, say it anyway."

This training—it's not about me, not about following my desires, my terms, or only working when I'm in the mood to do it. Sure, I can grumble, grumble, grumble all I like but never will I invent a ninth step in the path that outlines complaining one's way to *Nibbana*—although if anyone has a chance at this, I do! In fact, complaining out loud is especially dangerous to the anagarika. Believe it or not, it does happen . . . occasionally. Most of the time my fellow anagarikas, or the slightly more advanced samaneras, act as a mirror for my mind, reflecting its ego centered defilements. But sometimes the complaining mind is less contained and we commiserate together: "Life is so difficult for us newbies! The other day when I was . . ." Grumble, grumble, grumble. I have to remind myself, even here, to bow, bow, bow.

Ajahn Sudanto and Samanera Kassapo often tease me by repeating: "It's too difficult for me," a phrase I often use when talking to my family on the phone or to other monastics when

Conventional reality can be unsatisfying because my consciousness is constantly pulled into the mind chatter, in order to create and maintain requisite forms of identity. For example, since my occupation is "writer," I have to make sure my work emails are well written even when I am rushing or tired. Also, coworkers have asked me how I can be a writer since I type using only two fingers—they think writers should be fast typers. So, I am now learning to type using all my fingers in order to maintain this cumbersome writer identity. Even though I hate grammar jargon, I am forced to learn it so I can satisfy coworkers' notions that good writers are good grammarians.

Similarly, being a vegetarian involves boring and tedious conversations about why I am a vegetarian and why do I eat eggs if I am a vegetarian, why do I wear leather etc. . . . I am much better off with the discomfort I feel from eating meat than having to justify not eating it! In addition, being asked where I'm from is another identity-building, pigeonholing question that is confining and boring to discuss.

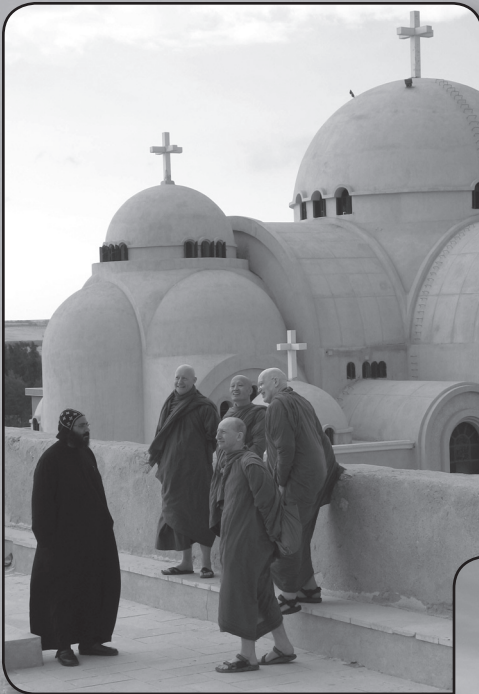
Anxiety and depression result from forming identities because they are limiting, predetermined and there is no adventure or freedom in it. Interestingly, constructing identities reinforces the ego and attachments to self, which makes my inevitable death less acceptable since building and decay are opposites. Keeping a daily routine that involves meditation helps me to focus through the Dhamma, tolerate confining identities needed in conventional reality, and experience some fleeting freedom through ultimate reality. 🌸

I'm having a bad day. And in fact, everything about that sentence is true except for the word "too," because I'm able to bear the difficult. Even when I think I'm not bearing it, I'm bearing it. Eating little (or trying to eat less and sometimes feeling real hunger—Oh no!), sleeping little (the monastery schedule is designed to squeeze the feeling of self out of you—and apparently the sleep too), and talking little (observing the intention to give voice and refraining from speaking, counting words, purifying the tongue)—it's difficult.

And that is life, isn't it? Lay or monastic, it is just this: difficult, unfair, filled with ups and downs, losing or becoming attached to what one loves, not liking certain things. This is what the practice teaches us: there is suffering and it is to be understood. So one must bow and bow again to the difficult. One must face the uncompromising ego-driven defilements and learn to observe them, and then go against their grain, against the craving and clinging. We do this because it is in that space of recognition, bowing, and responding with wisdom and generosity that freedom from suffering may arise. 🌸

*Lee Mintz will have completed his year of anagarika training in April and is scheduled to take s manera ordination on April 22, 2007.*

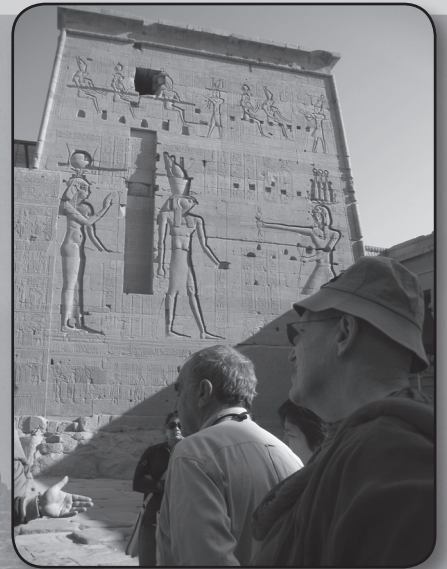
# Egyptian Journal



Coptic Monastery of Saint Bishoi  
Photo: Richard Smith



Ajahn N narato, Kitchener's Island, Aswan  
Photo: Ajahn Amaro



Temple of Isis at Philae  
Photo: Ajahn Amaro



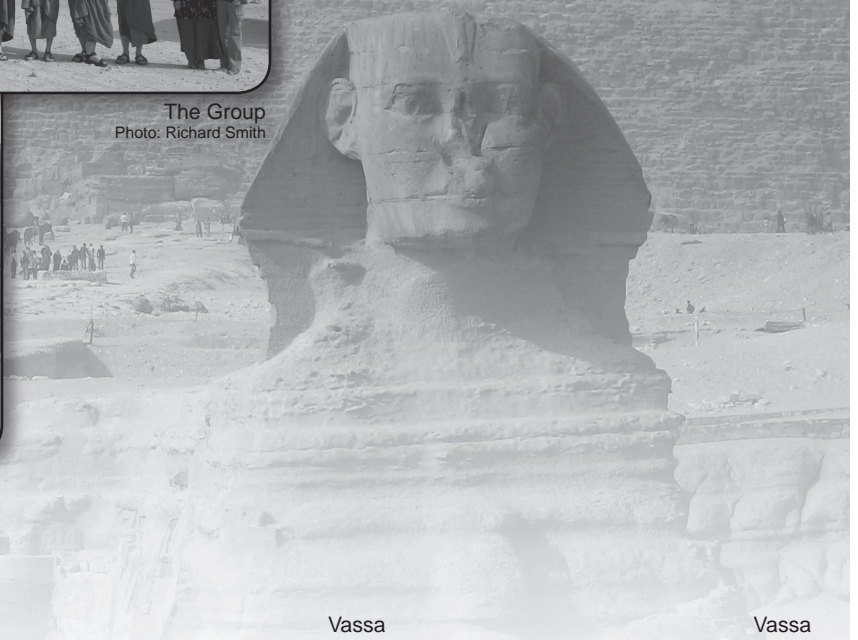
The Group  
Photo: Richard Smith



Dawn on the summit of Mount Sinai  
Photo: Ajahn Amaro



Ajahn Amaro meets Charlie Brown the camel  
Photo: Richard Smith



## MONASTIC RESIDENTS

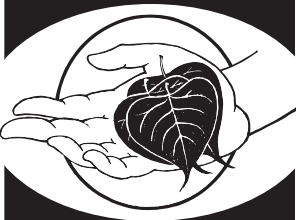
	Vassa		Vassa		Vassa
Ajahn Pasanno Bhikkhu*	33	Jotip lo Bhikkhu	7	S manera Thit bho	1
Ajahn Amaro Bhikkhu	28	N niko Bhikkhu	4	S manera Kassapo	1
Ajahn Sudanto Bhikkhu	12	C g nando Bhikkhu*	2	Anagarika Lee Mintz	1
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	9	Sampaj no Bhikkhu	1	Anagarika Whit Myers	0

\* Scheduled to arrive on the fourth of April.

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

**ABHAYAGIRI  
BUDDHIST  
MONASTERY**

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..... ❁ April 22, Bhikkhu & S manera Ordination at Abhayagiri. ❁ .....

*Spring 2007 in Barre, Massachusetts*

**Apr 25–May 3**

**Monastic Retreat**

Insight Meditation Society (IMS)  
with Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Punnadhammo  
and Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia

**May 5**

Barre Center for Buddhist Studies (BCBS)  
“Exploring the Nature of Nibb na”  
with Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Punnadhammo

**May 6** at BCBS

“Fourfold Family of the Buddha”  
with Ajahn Amaro and Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia

*For information, visit [www.dharma.org](http://www.dharma.org)*

**June 25**

**Weeklong Retreat**

Great Vow Zen Monastery  
Clatskanie, Oregon  
with Ajahn Amaro

**August 1**

**Family Retreat**

Spirit Rock Meditation Center  
with Ajahn Amaro, Julie Wester,  
Betsy Rose and Heather Sundberg