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HOW DOES THE SANGHA DECIDE?

~ A brief history of the Elders' Council & its meetings ~

WHEN PEOPLE COME TO VISIT A MONASTERY, one of the things that they are immediately struck by is the quality of order in which varied aspects of life – such as standards of dress, and etiquette around the meal – have a precisely patterned feel to them.

The question thus arises:

How and why do they choose to follow this particular form?

And is this because of the

Vinaya (the monastic rule), or

Thai custom or did they decide on this for themselves?

Furthermore, for those of the lay community who have a longer association with the monasteries, many people wonder: How do you decide who goes where? And how did you come to agree on making such and such a change... to start using those jackets... to construct that new building? Who decided, and how?

The monastic rule was established in the time of the Buddha and has been used as the fundamental guide for ordering the affairs of the Sangha ever since. Nevertheless, despite the great comprehensiveness of the *Vinaya*, new situations arise with new times and new countries, and decisions have to be made as to how to adapt, given local and current circumstances. In Sangha life, there are often

two parallel and interpenetrating sources of authority: on the one hand that of the teacher of a community in terms of *Dhamma-Vinaya* (the teaching and training of the Buddha), and on the other, the equal voice given to all members of

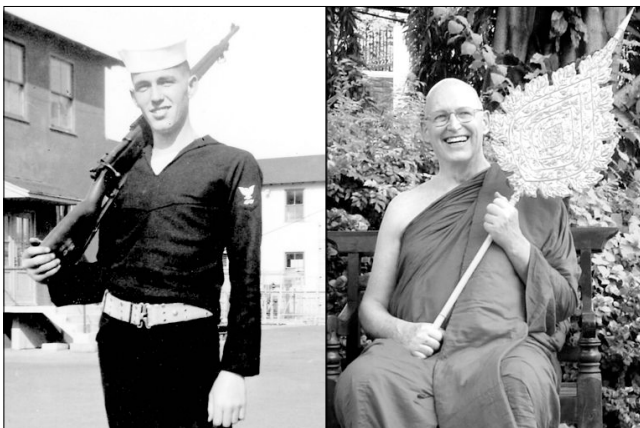
the monastic Sangha in terms of day-to-day management.

The interrelation of these authorities has persisted as a characteristic of the

Buddhasasana (the dispensation of the Buddha) over the ages.

For example, at his monastery, Wat Nong Pah Pong, Luang Por Chah was a unique figure as the revered teacher and mentor for everyone there, yet he actively cultivated a quality of equally-shared community, both in monastic training and in decision-making. Among the monasteries founded and guided by Luang Por Sumedho in the West the same kind of interrelation can be found; moreover, as this community has grown in the West, the responsibility for management has evolved in regard to communal matters. One central organ of responsibility that has evolved among the European monasteries is known as the 'Elders' Council.' This article aims to give an overview of the Elders' Council, its origins, its authority and how it functions.

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<< Luang Por Sumedho's 72nd birthday was celebrated in July, at Amaravati.

C H A N G E S

OCTOBER IN BRITAIN is a time when the turning seasons can help make more conscious the perpetual nature of change inherent in the natural world. Another autumn, another year, always now and ever different.

This issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter represents a number of transitions, both in its articles and production. The most significant of these from the perspective of this publication has been a changeover in editorial duties. Ajahn Varado has given meticulous care and attention to the FSN over the three years he has served as Editor, and we are all grateful for the commitment, long hours and careful effort he has offered. Roles of service in the Sangha such as the office of FSN Editor often have a similar life-span, several years or so before the job is taken on by another. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ajahn Varado on behalf of all of us for the truly fine work he has done with the Forest Sangha Newsletter.

I would also like to invite all FSN readers to send me, at any time, any feedback or ideas that may occur to you regarding the newsletter, what in it you find interesting or valuable, or what you'd like to see more or less of. I hope that in this way I might get a better feel for the wider community the FSN serves. I can be reached at Amaravati (address on the back page), by letters addressed to "FSN Editor" or at the following e-mail address: editor@amaravati.org.

With this issue another change comes into effect, which is the necessity to comply with a new pricing system introduced by the postal service in Britain. As a result we face a choice: either to fold the newsletter in half, resulting in a mid-line crease, or to produce the FSN in A5 format (half the current page size). For now we're experimenting with the former.

If there is a theme to this issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter, it could be evolution and maturity. Ajahn Amaro's lead article describes the development over the years of our community's central decision-making body,

the Elders' Council, for whom, in a Herculean effort he recently went back through 250,000 words of minutes of Sangha meetings recorded over the decades since Luang Por Sumedho's first arrival in London in 1977, with a brief to extract and collate all the agreements and decisions. Since this has been undertaken, and in light of the fact that many people are unaware of the structures of Sangha life, the Elders' Council asked him to produce an article summarising it's history to be published in the FSN, for the benefit of the Sangha and laity alike.

One reason this was considered timely was the observation that there endures a perception amongst many outside the Sangha that Ajahn Sumedho remains in charge of everything, when in fact he has neither wanted nor held that role for many years. He explains this in his article "On Strong Roots," recorded and transcribed by the editor. And within the Sangha, particularly for those more recently arrived, the origin and functions of our community structures can be a matter of mystery. With the Elders' Council playing such a significant role in our lives, the presentation of this article will hopefully serve as something of a reference providing an introduction to it's history.

Finally, Luang Por himself reached one of the conventional milestones marking a transition, when on July 27th he turned seventy-two. For those who follow the traditional Chinese astrological calendar, which includes Buddhist Thailand, major phases are counted in groups of twelve years; therefore, this year marks the completion of Luang Por Sumedho's "sixth cycle." The celebrations included a slide show providing interesting snapshots from Luang Por's life, which should soon be available on the recently re-designed Amaravati website, www.amaravati.org. Included for your interest in this issue are a few of the many photos from that presentation, accompanied by excerpts from the Dhamma talk Luang Por gave that day.

Bhikkhu Jayanto

Glossary — some of the Pali terms frequently used in the Forest Sangha Newsletter

Please note: due to typographical limitations, Pali diacritical marks have been omitted throughout this issue of the FSN. Also, the descriptions below are *not* necessarily full definitions, they are intended only as brief explanations of how these words are being used here. Because of their common occurrence and familiarity to many readers, they have generally not been italicised.

Ajahn : (Thai) A senior monk or nun; a teacher.

Anagarika : A male or female postulant in the preliminary noviciate stage.

Bhikkhu : A Buddhist monk.

Buddha : Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.

Dhamma : The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.

Luang Por : (Thai) A title of affectionate respect.

Sangha : The community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns.

Siladhara : A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.

Theravada : The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

Thera : A bhikkhu of ten or more vassas; **Theri** : A Siladhara of ten or more vassas.

Vassa : The summer "Rains" retreat; a mark of how many years ("vassas") a monk or nun has been in robes.

On Strong Roots

Luang Por Sumedho Reflects upon his Evolving Role Within the Sangha he Founded

THIS SUMMER MARKED MY FORTIETH VASSA AS A BHIKKHU, and my thirtieth year living in England. When I came to Britain in 1977 the idea was to establish a Theravadan Sangha following the tradition from which I'd come, the Thai forest tradition as I'd experienced it under my teacher, Luang Por Chah at his monastery, Wat Pah Nong Pah Pong in Ubon, Thailand. At that time I had only ten *vassas*; I wasn't that experienced or senior but I was more senior than the other Westerners. That put me in a position of being the head of the Sangha here, as well as the teacher, and I also became President of the English Sangha Trust.

In every capacity I was looked to for guidance and leadership, and that lasted for about the first ten years.

Yet as the Sangha grew and we established branch monasteries it became

apparent that that structure would not always work, and we started having meetings between the abbots and senior monks from the different branches. Early on I was still regarded as the main decision-maker — one monk used to refer to me as the Supreme Commander. Then over the years, because of the seniority and ability of many more monks and nuns, that role was no longer appropriate. I began to step back, and eventually we established the Elders' Council, which is a body set up by the senior monks and nuns to make decisions and consider the various issues and difficulties encountered as we live the monastic life in the West.

This structure has been operating now for over ten years. It makes life very agreeable to me because, now that I'm seventy-two, I no longer have the interest, the energy or the heart for managerial functions. I'm very pleased to have been able to hand all the decision-making over to the Elders' Council, which has proved itself over many years as a capable, trustworthy group. I can now enjoy my retirement from those roles and live my life out as a Buddhist monk without having to be involved with committee meetings, let alone carry the responsibility myself.

In the beginning, I felt more or less that it was up to me to hold it all together. Now I don't feel that way at all: I feel I could exit at any time and it will be carried on, that it's not dependent upon me personally to keep it going. This is very satisfying, because as one gets older one clearly sees that if an organisation has been established so dependent on one person, then when he or she is gone the thing can't sustain itself—and that oftentimes happens with religious groups. Whereas I feel confident that what we have has its

own momentum; it's not me doing anything, it holds together on its own. So, I feel our Sangha has been established in the right way.

The Elders' Council has evolved in a natural way, coming out of the process of growth as a community as we've lived it, rather than conformity to an idea of how this should work. There is a lot of experience involved; we're not just a bunch of neophytes coming from ideas. Over the years here in England, both the monks and the nuns have developed skill and wisdom around how to resolve the

inevitable conflicts that can arise within the group itself. Of course, that gives it much more stability and maturity. And also, here at Amaravati and at Cittaviveka both the male and female communities have developed skills regarding

living in the same monastery; we know better how to live within our own communities, and how the two can coexist in a way that works for each.

The nuns are now quite autonomous. I have great respect for the senior nuns: they know what's needed in the nuns' community; whereas, I think oftentimes monks making decisions for nuns doesn't work. Just as it wouldn't work if nuns were making decisions for monks. But then, one feels that the two communities support each other, too.

I feel it makes things easier for the monks to have the nuns here at Amaravati, because they can take care of all the needs of the laywomen who come to the monastery. In the past, the monks would attend more to female visitors seeking guidance, and that doesn't happen much now because the nuns can provide that — better than we ever could.

So the Sangha here feels to me to have taken root. The Thai forest tradition will always be our prototype; then it's up to us to adapt to conditions here, which has been done gradually. We've been particularly careful not to just discard traditional ways to try to make things more British, but instead see what works and what doesn't, through attrition and through time. You become more aware of what works, what benefits; what is respectful, and beautiful within this culture, too. What inspires faith in the British people, and what works in meeting their needs.

Because the main interest for Europeans is in meditation. As they develop they may become more interested in the religious side of it, but the popularity of Buddhism in the West is because it has such clear teachings and skilful means for mental development. And I'd say that's what's most important to all of us. ☸

"I'm really pleased with how things have evolved. I can sit back in my rocking chair for the rest of my days and be confident the monastic community is well-practised in handling its affairs. If I dropped dead tomorrow I know the Sangha will continue on as it is doing already, able to handle whatever comes our way..."

Continued from page 1

HISTORY

At first, from the arrival of the community in England in 1977 until 1981, most of this monastic group lived in a single place – initially at the Hampstead Vihara, then at Chithurst Buddhist Monastery, which opened in 1979. The model that was used to decide matters in those days was that most common amongst forest monasteries in Thailand, i.e. “Whatever the Ajahn wants.” Luang Por Sumedho was the only *thera* in the group, he was the teacher and natural leader, so this mode of looking after the welfare of the community seemed appropriate. By 1981 though, the group had started to spread. In Northumberland people had gathered their resources and the Harnham Vihara was opened up; in Devon, supporters were actively seeking a place to start a branch down there. Within another two or three years Chithurst was full, and the first group of nuns had taken the Ten Precepts. In the Southern Hemisphere a monastery had opened up in Perth, Western Australia and a new place was mooted for Wellington, New Zealand.

This rapid expansion led to two key developments in the growth of the community of Luang Por Sumedho’s monastic disciples: firstly, the foundation of Amaravati in August of 1984, and secondly, the establishment of a process of Sangha meetings in February of 1985. At that initial gathering, in the chilly halls of the as-yet-uninsulated Amaravati, Luang Por opened the meeting by stating its purpose:

“The Sangha is now spread over a wide area geographically. The coming together as a group gives the occasion for communication between members. This brings about a feeling of trust and avoids misunderstanding.”

[Sangha Meeting, Feb. ‘85]

THE THERAS’ COUNCIL

In January of 1986 the whole of Luang Por Sumedho’s monastic community came together – there were twenty-two *bhikkhus*, eight *siladhara*, and thirty-three *anagarikas*, male and female, plus another ten lay people who were helping out with the winter retreat. It was a grand occasion but unwieldy when it came to discussions and decision-making. However, by the summer of that year there had emerged a core group of the senior monks, the elders at Amaravati and the heads of the various branches in the UK, and these formed the decision-making body that soon became known as ‘The Theras’ Council’. All of the *bhikkhus* of ten Rains or more were eligible to participate.

This group then began to meet, on average, four or five times a year and, from late 1986 until the end of 1992 all of the major matters of community concern were processed through this body. These included a broad range of subjects: from those concerning the details of the nuns’ training; what should and should not be considered as allowable ‘medicines and tonics’; appropriate clothing for the *anagarikas*; the relationship of the Theras’ Council to the English Sangha Trust (EST) and other steward bodies; the ‘allowableness’ (or not) of reciting the monastic rule in

English; who was being suggested for ordination or to travel to different monasteries, and many, many more.

THE ABBOTS’ MEETING

However, by late 1992 the Theras’ Council’s meetings had become unwieldy – there were several visiting elders who were resident but not involved in community organisation and others without leadership roles – and it was clear that a change was needed. A natural opportunity to create such a shift came with the first gathering of the heads of all the branch monasteries from around the globe, at Wat Pah Nanachat, on the occasion of the funeral of Luang Por Chah, in January of 1993. This, effectively the first of what were later to be called ‘World Abbots’ Meetings’ (WAM for short), catalysed the formation of a smaller group, the ‘Abbots’ Meeting’, which comprised the abbots from Luang Por Sumedho’s monasteries in Europe. The group was to meet more frequently, roughly every two months, and also included any invited *theras* or *theris* who were not abbots (usually the second most senior monk or nun in a given community) in order to give a continuity to the group when they came to take on further responsibility. By 1995, those attending the meeting would include the abbot of each monastery and, for those with four or more monks or nuns, another representative elected by their communities who had trained as a *bhikkhu* or *siladhara* for more than ten vassas. This was later amended to eight vassas, because in some of the smaller monasteries, with only one *thera*, a more junior member might be carrying a major responsibility for the monastery as a whole.

During these years, there was also a shift in the role of the EST and the other trusts associated with the different monasteries. This change can best be described as a movement out of the role of ‘patron’ to that of ‘steward’. One factor this movement entailed was an increased responsibility for the role of Sangha members in guiding the activity of the trust bodies. Many of the discussion items at Theras’ and Abbots’ meetings involved the nuances of this monastic community / steward relationship; it has been looked at and adjusted numerous times over the years:

Currently three bhikkhus speak on behalf of the Thera Council on the board of the English Sangha Trust. The Thera Council has a duty to learn to act as an advisory body, to find a way of working with the lay directors, and look to lay people as advisors. There is a shift in emphasis from Sumedho Bhikkhu to the Council.

[Theras’ Meeting, Oct. ‘87]

The matter was discussed of involving people in decision-making so that they will feel supportive of the process. An example given of this was the consultation with the community about design issues regarding the [Cittaviveka] Dhamma Hall. Lines of communication need to be clarified so that people in the community know whom to consult, so that their input will be considered at the appropriate level. Rather than informing people after the event, to seek out ideas and consensus before the decision

is made. This may be conducive to greater harmony and a maturing of Sangha members... So the Abbots (or their equivalents) would go to a meeting with an outline of the feelings of the community on matters to be discussed. This proposal ties in with the admission of nuns to the 'Abbots Meeting'.

[Abbots Meeting, Aug. '95]

THE ELDERS' COUNCIL

By this time, in the mid-nineties, there were now several participants in the meeting who were not abbots and, as the general numbers of theras and theris was growing steadily, the 'Elders' Council' was officially formed in March 1996 and had its first meeting in the April of that year. The structure which was established then is still largely the one employed today:

(i) *Who is automatically entitled to attend this meeting?*

Sumedho Bhikkhu, the abbots and vice abbots of the seven monasteries in Europe and the USA, two elder nuns and invited guests. [This soon became the abbot or senior nun, plus another representative of eight or more vassas elected by each community of at least four in robes — ed.]

(ii) *What constitutes a quorum?*

...At present... the general principle of consensus applies, so that if some members of the council are absent when an important decision is made, the implementation of that decision is deferred until all Elders have been consulted and have agreed.

[Elders' Council Meeting (ECM), Jul. '96]

A parallel set of meetings was launched for the complete group of elder bhikkhus – the Theras' Meetings – and also for the entire siladhara community.

So from April of 1996 until the present, April 2006, Elders' Council Meetings and their parallel Theras' Meetings, which are non-decision-making, have, with the occasional lapse, continued to take place. The ECMs currently occur twice a year. Alongside these, in the sphere of the greater community of Luang Por Chah's monastic disciples, there are meetings of the abbots of all the branch monasteries in Thailand – plus any of the foreign ones that can attend – at Wat Nong Pah Pong on Luang Por Chah's birth and death anniversaries in June and January of each year. In addition, two other World Abbots' Meetings have been held – in October, 2001, at Amaravati, and in January of 2006, at Wat Pah Nanachat – and, despite being more for discussion rather than decision-making, have been occasions for extensive community building and the reiteration of mutually respected standards.

Although the framework of the ECM has been established for the last ten years, it should not be assumed that it has sustained a static form – far from it. Among the most common discussion items in the archive of minutes are such topics as:

- Elders' Council Procedure of Discussion and Decisions.

- What is the Elders' Council for? (Areas included issues of remit, training, consultation, feedback, support, etc.)
- Who is on the Elders' Council?
- What are the parameters of the community it serves?
- How do we recognise and support the channels feeding into and out of the Elders' Council?
- Where does the authority of the Elders' Council come from and how is it exercised?
- What assumptions are there regarding the Elders' Council in all these areas, both from within and from without?
- How do we manage the human side of our business meetings?
- How do Elders receive advice, feedback, support and other resources from a peer body?

In short, there is a high degree of self-examination and reflection upon how the group operates and a concern that it is functioning in a maximal state of health.

DECISION-MAKING

The guiding spirit has been to establish decision-making procedures that support the whole monastic, and thereby the lay community, e.g:

Procedure for changes in convention

The Sangha should abide by decisions made at meetings such as this one, at least until a subsequent Sangha meeting can give room for 'feed-back'.

[Sangha Meeting, Jul. '86]

Decision-making and Discussion

Suggested: *The emphasis should be on full and open discussion, and we should aim to recognise and avoid being pressured into decision-making. Better decisions usually emerge after there has been time for gestation.*

Noted: *Unspoken or underlying issues can hamper both discussion and decision-making on the given topic. If the meeting can recognise that this is happening then the underlying tension needs to be addressed. This can require skill from the Chairperson to "switch gears."*

Generally, the right balance of sensitive and decisive chairing is enormously helpful. However, there is also a collective responsibility for the facilitation of the meeting.

Suggested: *Needs more than consent by silence if silence is ambiguous – an active "yes" would be better.*

Noted: *Absent members of the meeting may have an important contribution to make on some topics. When it is felt that their views have not been adequately canvassed or represented then any decisions should be tentative or conditional.*

Suggested: *That part of any summary of a topic include issues such as who else to inform, etc.*

Discussed: That if those present are not courageous enough to express their views honestly, then the meeting will not work well. We can all pay attention and reflect on how we affect and are affected by each other. For example, it is not helpful to be in fear or awe of Luang Por [Sumedho].

Agreed: A clear statement of the proposal should be made, so that the meeting knows that it is making a decision.

Agreed: Decision-making should be by consensus, understood as, "everyone is willing to go along actively with the decision" or a "full, willing consensus." Consensus implies a willingness to compromise, because unanimity is rarely possible.

Agreed: Decisions should be clearly shown in the minutes.

Agreed: Action points should include who, what, when, etc.

[Abbots' Meeting, Dec. '95]

Eventually, specifically informed and inspired by the book 'Beyond Majority Rule—Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends' by Michael J. Sheeran, the Elders' Council adopted the following pattern for coming to agreements, once a full discussion had occurred:

The meeting formally AGREED that agreements should be reached by the Chair using the threefold structure outlined in May's meeting: "Are there any objections to this proposal?" "Does anyone not support this proposal?" and "So can we take it that the meeting agrees to this proposal?" If these three questions are followed by silence then the proposal can be taken to be agreed.
[ECM, Oct. '03]

From early on an archive of past minutes was maintained, in order to be a reference for all future generations of Sangha members. By 1996, this had shaped up as:

The minutes of the Elders' Council Meeting should note only the

salient points of the discussion and any agreement come to by the Elders. The Minute-taker and the Chairperson should sit next to each other in meetings, and the Chairperson should summarise at the end of each discussion topic what agreement the minute taker should record.
[ECM, Nov. '96]

Moreover, a process was developed whereby the minutes were checked through various revisions up to three times and agreed upon by one and all as a fair and accurate record.

This kind of thoroughness might seem to imply that all Sangha discussions resolve into neat and tidy resolutions. However, the decidability of an issue is usually inversely proportional to its importance, i.e. simple issues get firm decisions, whereas emotionally loaded, major issues are often minuted surrounded by conditionals, are revisited apparently fruitlessly for a few meetings before they reach resolution, or get deferred and simply hover uncomfortably in the wings; or, occasionally, are decided by default outside the face-to-face rationality of a formal meeting.

For example, after some four years of the nuns attending the ECMs:

The question of whether a nun would be a suitable Chairperson was discussed. One elder objected to a nun chairing the meeting; this view was questioned, and concerns about Vinaya, leadership and power were expressed. These were neither validated nor dismissed. Others pointed to the fact that nuns chair mixed meetings in mixed communities; that a junior elder would have to, and did comply to, the same requirement for respectful speech that would be binding on a nun as Chair. There was a suggestion that the bhikkhus-only format be refreshed for topics that are bhikkhus-only concerns.
[ECM, Nov. '99]

A SLIDE SHOW PRESENTATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS FROM AJAHN SUMEDHO's life was presented on his seventy-second birthday at Amaravati, with commentary given by Luang Por himself. The complete set of images, and a transcription of the commentary, can be found on Amaravati's website, www.amaravati.org.



This is the entire minute. Does it mean yes?... No? Maybe...? Perhaps things had to shift in silent ways, but by May 2002 a nun was chairing an ECM and the issue does not seem to have arisen at an EC meeting in between times. This is not to say that the meetings are dysfunctional or ineffective; it is merely pointing out that there are natural limitations on the ease with which difficult matters can be encompassed in such formal and structured circumstances. At the very least, the meeting provides the opportunity for the area to be explored by the group and sometimes, despite appearances, it is just this repeated group chewing-over of a knotty problem that is the resolving agent – it needs to be unresolved for a few sessions so that the whole group can find a way to make room for each other's points of view. The value of harmony in the Sangha is so great that major differences of opinion are naturally handled with intense care, thus the aura of great caution when a significant issue arises. And some matters are recognised as being plain undecidable – intensely important but fundamentally resistant to order.

One last consideration with this issue is to bear in mind that this is not only a modern problem: the Buddha prescribed a series of seven *adhikarana-samatha dhamma* – ways of settling legal processes. These include, as the final option, "Covering over as with grass" (*tina-vattharako*), that is to say, just letting certain insoluble issues be laid aside for the sake of communal harmony.

One final point to outline is that, since 1987 (at least), Luang Por Sumedho has insisted that the Council, and not he should be the decision-making element in community life. However, perhaps naturally, people still often wish to see him as someone who says what goes and what doesn't. This can cause confusion and difficulties, so from time to

time, there has been the need to clarify these roles:

Although Sumedho Bhikkhu has on various occasions let it be known that he does not wish to be seen as one who can make major decisions without consulting the EC, there has been no formalised minuted statement of this. Without such clarity there are sometimes misunderstandings about where true authority lies, especially in the light of the fact that in some cases trust deeds specifically state that the trustees are to look to Ajahn Sumedho for guidance and as a spiritual director....

Sumedho Bhikkhu therefore stated that he sees the EC as the decision-making body for the sangha here in the UK. He himself should be regarded as a member, but the EC itself has the authority to make decisions rather than him as an individual. If requests come for him to make decisions, he in turn will refer to the EC decision-making body. He wished for this to be minuted.

[ECM, Oct. 2000]

The intent, therefore, is to place the egalitarian spirit of shared responsibility clearly at the centre, and for that to be the fundamental source of the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the tradition as it has come down to us preserves a hierarchy of respect: although all bhikkhus have an equal voice in *sangha-kamma* (formal acts of the community of monks), whether ordained for one day or a hundred years, there is always deference to seniors. So there is equality and there is a hierarchy. The archetype of love, respect and deference toward the spiritual parent, the teacher, cannot be ignored or militated against, but rather it needs to be accommodated within the egalitarian framework. The spirit of the Elders' Council is an emulation of these same values – the voices of all the Council members are given equal weight and form the substance of the community decisions, whilst the natural, monastic and social hierarchies are respected. ☸

Luang Por Sumedho (Robert Jackman) was born in Seattle, WA, USA, in 1934. These photographs (pages 6 and 7) show his parents, childhood (with his elder sister, Virginia), high school graduation and entrance to the navy at the end of the Korean War.



Welcome to the Desert of the Real

Adapted from a Dhamma talk Luang Por Sumedho gave on his 72nd Birthday

It seems only a couple of years ago that I celebrated my sixtieth birthday at Chithurst. Of course, with reflection we can realise that time is simply a function of perception. Whether it seems a long time or a short time is really a view we're having right now in the present moment. We can notice how our thinking, how our mental and emotional habits affect consciousness. If I'm sitting waiting for the bell to ring, it seems to take a long time even if it's only a few minutes. Yet I can sit in meditation for several hours and it seems like a very short time.

Whether time seems short or long, what there really is is the here and now. Experience is now. Dhamma is now. The morning meeting, evening meeting, days and years going by — these are conventions, the world of conditions that most of us regard as reality. It's easy to live with the idea of doing something now to get a reward in the future. This is the attitude we all start meditation with, that we all have as part of our cultural conditioning, our identification with personality and the body. The whole society calls it the real world, so it's very convincing.

I suggest that the only way we can see the 'real world' for what it is is through mindfulness, or what I call intuitive awareness. Otherwise, we merely operate from within our perceptions, conceptions, and habits. This ignorance and the attitudes that come out of it are the "real" world for most people. Even now, though one might understand what I'm saying, I'm still using only words, and words are limited conventional forms like anything else. The real must be realised. It must be *recognised*, this *sandhitthikko akalika dhamma* — apparent here and now, timeless, to be looked into — it's immediate. Having the idea of it but not the reality, one can't recognise the real. With meditation, with *bhavana* (spiritual cultivation; meditation practice), it's a breaking down, a destruction of the world through insight. It's Armageddon — the end of the world that we

take to be real. See the world as simply this: the conditions that we hold to, the attachment, the habit formations that we identify with.

That kind of seeing isn't itself a condition, it's not another creation out of ignorance — so it is to be recognised, and valued. Even the way we talk about it, using conventional forms within the Pali tradition, it's still communicated in terms of doing something now to get something in the future. Practice hard now and you will be rewarded in the future. You are an ignorant, unenlightened person now and if you practice hard, you might eventually be liberated from ignorance, in the future. And that seems reasonable enough and is how we generally see life. We see ourselves as being this body.

It's my seventy-second birthday. This is a convention, a conventional reality. Of course, it provides us with a chance to generate valuable qualities like generosity and faith, and so the conventional realities are not to be despised; practice is not a rejection of the world as an effort to dismiss it. This 'destruction of the world' is not an effort to annihilate the world of conditions, but rather to know it for what it is. 'Knower of the world' is an epithet for the Buddha.

As we get older, notice how age has certain emotional effects. To me, seventy-two has always seemed old. I hear people saying of others, "Well, he's very elderly — he's over seventy." And in modern society 'old and elderly' isn't usually regarded as something good. "He's seventy-two, an elderly monk... but he's still young at heart..." 'Young' and 'old' — I encourage you to investigate the language itself, how it affects your consciousness. Since I've been a monk and a meditator for a long time now, being 'old' is not something I find unpleasant, because old age is a natural part of life. But if when I was twenty you had told me I looked forty, out of vanity I would have felt insulted. When you are twenty, forty is old; when you are



PHOTOGRAPHS : ROBERT JACKMAN TO BHIKKHU SUMEDHO

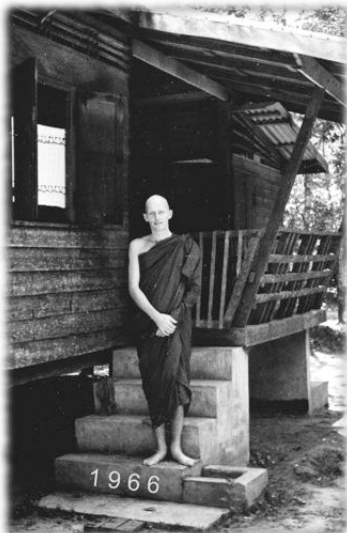
Page 8, from left: (1963 to 1966) ** From working in the Peace Corps in Sabah, Borneo, * to teaching English in Bangkok.

Page 9, counter-clockwise from bottom left: (1966 to 1967) * In Vientiane, Laos, just before entering the monk-hood; * as a novice at his hut in the monastery in Nong Khai, Northeast Thailand where Samanera Sumedho spent his first year in robes; * in white with shaven head being paraded traditionally through the streets of Nong Khai on the day of his novice ordination; ** 8th July, 1967—the full ordination (*upasampada*) of Bhikkhu Sumedho (waiting to enter the *sima* and leaving the *Upasatha* Hall after the ceremony); * a meal offering during Bhikkhu Sumedho's first month at Wat Nong Pah Pong after Phra Sommai (4th from right) had introduced him to Luang Por Chah; * serving food with the other monks at Wat Pah Pong.

seventy-two, forty is young. It's all relative, and this is what conditioning involves: perceptions, assumptions, and positions we take to be real. These are conditions that tend to distort reality for us so that we are constantly caught in reactivity — emotional reactions, fears, hopes, memories, happiness, sadness, resentments, envy, regret, and all the rest. In a lifetime we build up and hold on to these emotional habits because usually that is all we know how to do: grasp things.

That's where we need *vipassana* (insight) meditation's emphasis on mindfulness: to constantly observe in our experience the way it is, what *sakkaya-ditthi* (personality-view; identification with the body) is. Now again, these words are just concepts, they're Theravada conventions. To talk or think about *sakkaya-ditthi* or personality-view is only a pointing. What is *sakkaya-ditthi*? What is it right now? What is the sense of 'me' and 'mine', 'my personality', 'my separate being'; of self-consciousness, self-worth; of identification with the conditions we experience, identification with the body? I am seventy-two years old. I am a Theravadan Buddhist monk. These can be merely conventions that one uses in a conventional situation or they can be a strong sense of self. Being a male or being American or a member of the Labour Party or an anti-war demonstrator: such things can be good for what they are, but the *sakkaya-ditthi* problem is never resolved no matter what the identity is. No matter how marvellous the condition you identify with might be, the problem of suffering is never resolved that way.

The resolution comes through an awareness of Dhamma, the way things are. All conditions are impermanent: *sakkaya-ditthi* is something that arises and ceases. 'Personality' is a very unstable, changing experience. It changes according to conditions: one can have the most beautiful aspirations, feeling inspired to want to help save



the world and help all beings, and the next minute be caught in raging anger over somebody's foolishness. This conflict in the Middle East now, I've been observing how it affects my mind, the righteousness of both sides. I have studied righteousness a lot because my personality can get that way very easily; righteous indignation is a very stimulating emotion. It's not anger over somebody slamming the door or insulting Theravada Buddhism, indignation arises over high minded stuff: about what is wrong and bad, tyrannical, corrupt, and wicked.

Indignation is exciting — even just trying to express these words in an indignant form feels exciting — there is something very alive about that emotion. And of course, in modern society there is a lot to be indignant about. There is no end of opportunity to find just causes and sympathetic souls who will help us to perpetuate a feeling of indignation. But the important thing to see is not that an emotion like indignation is 'wrong', but that it can be part of our identity. It can be what we depend on to feel alive. Thinking of how to right the wrongs and how it shouldn't be this way, the corruption, the dishonesty, the deceit! In the same way sexual desire makes us feel alive, indignation can make us feel vital, like there is something important to fight for.

Strong emotions bring a lot of energy into experience, and this can be what we depend on to feel alive, because so much of life is neither/nor: it's just ordinary stuff, boring and tedious. Our ordinary life can involve so many petty things. Hurt feelings, projections, learning to accommodate the people in our lives with whom we get bored or irritated, and to live with our own shortcomings. Having a cause to fight for can be a much more stimulating energetic experience than the humble tedium of ordinary life.

It is only through mindfulness that all this can be seen for what it really is. As I have said many times, this is the gateway to the deathless. It is the escape hatch. But, it doesn't seem like anything. Awareness is not exciting.

There's a line from the movie 'The Matrix' that goes, "Welcome to the desert of the real." It is exciting to be deluded. To have something emotionally stimulating or

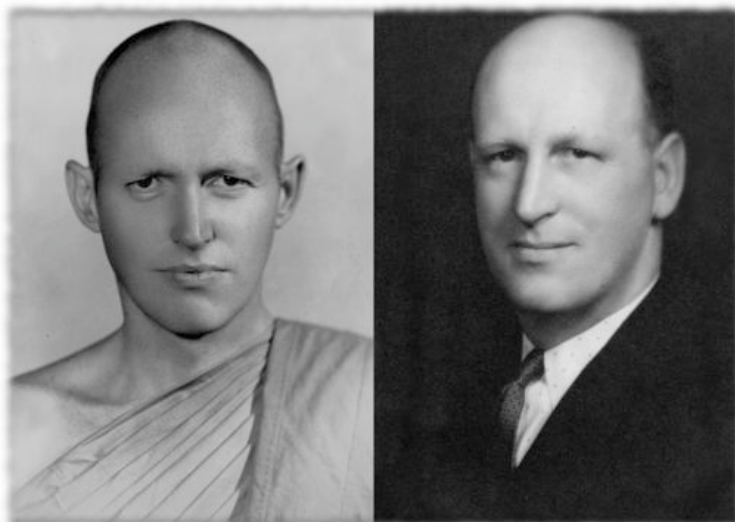
sensually pleasing is entertaining: always something to look forward to. The real can be compared to a desert, which implies a kind of arid spaciousness without anything much in it, just sand maybe, and sky.

Yet I have found the result of this practice to be an appreciation of what could be called this spaciousness, the emptiness of not holding on to anything. Emotionally this can seem like a desert, and we can feel quite averse to it. It can appear boring: like the quality of space itself seems boring. "So what: everybody knows there is space." We dismiss it, we give no importance to remaining aware of the space within which objects exist. Yet that's like what we are able to do with mindfulness, if it is true and deep: let go of all of the things that arise in consciousness, as they arise; let go of every feeling of compulsion that arises, of everything we do, every identity, every thought; of even the ideas of space or emptiness — let go of those concepts, because those too are only words. Like in 'being empty': 'experiencing emptiness' is another idea that we can grasp, without recognising the grasping.

That's why I continually encourage a *recognition* of awakened consciousness, each of us in our own experience. We're all intelligent people, we understand Buddhist concepts quite well so it's not a problem on that level. One can feel very inspired by these ideas. But there is no liberation from 'self' through just thinking and analysing. Reality is recognised through attention, deep, sustained attention — and this does bring up strong emotional reactions.

My reaction when I first experienced this insight was, "I can't do it." Yet at the same time I had this insight into *anatta* (the selfless nature of all things). And I remember watching myself, emotionally saying, "You can't do it" — it was like I was watching a child screaming "I can't do this, I can't do this!" — a kind of internal screaming, and at the very same moment watching this emotional reaction as it was happening. It was so easy to identify with the emotion, since that was what I was used to.

I have always found the monastic form very helpful for cultivating this practice, because if you use it properly it really is a good vehicle. If you stay in it and agree to it's



limitations, the monastic life gives you references, it has this quality of encouraging you to keep aware, to break through delusion — to simplify. It's ironic, isn't it, with all its rules and so forth Buddhist monasticism seems very complicated, but basically it's very simple — because the whole aim is to be here and now, is to simply rest, profoundly open.

That here and now conscious experience is not something we create out of ignorance, it's not a self, it's not cultural, it's nothing to do with creation or language. There's nothing at all we can point to or get a hold of. It's not even an 'it'. Even calling it 'awareness' or 'knowing' is not it: talking this way is just a means to incline the mind towards an ineffable recognition of release. Actually, there's nothing there. But since we have to use language to communicate, we say that 'it' is real: the reality of now. And it can be recognised and cultivated. In the Four Noble Truths, then, recognition of this is the Third Noble Truth. And the Fourth is cultivating it.

In my own life, when setting out to cultivate this within the convention of the Thai forest tradition I didn't know if it would work or not, I was putting it to a test. This is now my fortieth vassa, so over half my life I have been contemplating, meditating on the Dhamma. I have enormous gratitude and appreciation for this tradition because I feel pleased with the results of my life as a bhikkhu. Buddhist practice is a tool we can use, whatever the particular conditions of our lives, to recognise the universal.

When I first came across Buddhism it inspired me. I think I intuitively recognised it; something in me opened to Buddhism in a way it had never really opened to anything else. I can't say why that was, but it happened to me quite surprisingly when I was about twenty-one. It wasn't part of my culture; emotionally I was conditioned for other things — nothing bad or wrong — it was just that something in me was not attuned to that way of life, something that had no problem in attuning itself to a culture as strange to me as the Thai forest tradition. Different language, different everything, and yet, while it had its frustrations and difficulties, I didn't really mind



PHOTOGRAPHS

Page 10, from left: ** Bhikkhu Sumedho at five vassas, aged 38, and his father at age 40; * 1976, with his mother—Ajahn Sumedho returns to the U.S. for the first time in 13 years.

Page 11, counter-clockwise from bottom left:

* Ajahn Sumedho and Luang Por Chah tour Oxford in 1977; * the Hampstead Vihara is established in London as a branch of Wat Nong Pah Pong (from left: Ajahn(s) Sumedho, Viradhammo, Khemadhammo, Luang Por Chah, Santacitto, Nyanadharo, [unknown] and Anando); * at Chulalongkorn Hospital in Bangkok with Ajahn Jagaro, reporting to Luang Por Chah about developments in the Sangha in Britain; * Sangha gathered for the meal at Amaravati on Luang Por Sumedho's 72nd birthday, July 27, 2006; * Receiving the Royal Ceremonial Fan and ecclesiastical title 'Phra Sumedhajahn' from HRH King Bhumipol of Thailand.

that much because I felt it was always helping to point me towards awareness, encouraging me towards liberation. Whereas I felt if I went back to my old life in the States, that would have pulled me back into delusion.

I always appreciated the opportunity that was made available to me in Thailand because it gave me a way out of it all. Thus the life here, at a monastery like Amaravati is an attempt to give this same opportunity to people. But please don't cling to the convention itself. One can be a conceited Buddhist monk. One can be completely deluded and still talk all about the Four Noble Truths, about how wonderful Buddhism is as a religion and how it is better than all the rest.

This practice takes great honesty, watching and accepting the way it actually is, even if we don't like it. Mindful, intuitive awareness is not critical, it's not judgemental, not saying there is anything wrong or right with what we are feeling — it's noticing. It implies refraining from that which is unskillful and harmful to this effort and cultivating that which supports it and brings benefit. It is discerning the very nature of conditioned phenomena, and recognising the unconditioned reality.

So use everything that happens to you, here and wherever you are as an opportunity to observe, to be the awareness. Cultivate the purity of the heart. It is not an easy path and it has its challenges. For one thing, welcome to the desert of the real — refraining from investment in the senses, practising sustained awareness amidst the same things day after day after day. Use the form of the life, the morning and evening meetings, the Pali chanting, the etiquette and everything else. We can perform these dutifully as perfunctory acts of necessity, or we can consciously choose to use them as reference points to support our practice of awareness. Don't demand that you feel a certain way, but whatever way you are feeling be aware of it in terms of its nature to change. Be aware of emotional reactions as change, being the knower rather than the changing emotion. Then there is stillness.

By cultivating in this way, the result is stillness — and not one which depends on things around us being quiet. We use the word *bhavana*, or cultivation. What does that really mean in practical terms? Recognising this 'desert of the

real', this stillness. And again, it's *recognised*, it's not clung to. If we cling to the idea of it we're deluding ourselves again. So even 'stillness' is not the right description, because words are only pointers — this is not a definition. The Third Noble Truth, the cessation of conditions, needs to be recognised.

If we cultivate this way, then all conditions are seen to arise and cease within stillness: every emotion, every thought, every sensual experience, every desire. The stillness is not changed by the arising or cessation. In its recognition, resting in it, one always has perspective on emotional habits: the loves, hates, likes, dislikes, approval, disapproval, fears and desires, no matter how important or trivial they might appear in their quality or quantity. They are what they are. We will find that this stillness is natural; it's not an illusion; it's not dependent. It is merely unnoticed — ignored — because it doesn't seem like anything, it has no quality. It's not absolutely fantastic and it's not annihilation. And we're not sitting in a void, a paralysed zombie feeling nothing. We feel and we are aware, allowing conditions and the way they move and change, to be what they are. There's nothing to do. We don't have to go around trying to control or manipulate things or resist or collect anything else.

This is real — it's not an abstract or unattainable ideal. And we have to know it for ourselves; it's realised through our own wise reflection. We know it in terms of Theravada Pali Buddhism, which is an excellent map. It's all there: there's nothing missing, it just needs to be used. The conventions, the words, these are to be used skilfully, like a good map. Of course, if we want to go someplace we have to start moving; we can't just sit here and think about going to Paris, for instance, and expect to get there if we never start walking, even if we have a lovely map.

The emphasis the Buddha made was on liberation, on release. This is not just inspired idealism, it is pragmatic: it offers us all an opportunity to break out of the trap. To get out of the 'matrix', to break through the world of delusion. Not by destroying it, but by so thoroughly understanding it there's nothing left — it's not a matter of annihilation but of recognition. So, I offer this for your reflection on my seventy-second birthday. ☸

25th
Anniversary
Aruna Ratanagiri
1981 - 2006

15th OCTOBER
2006

Kathina and
25th Anniversary
Celebrations

Please join us to gather
with old friends and
celebrate Harnham's
Silver Jubilee

INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION AMARAVATI

Saturday Afternoon Classes 2 pm—4 pm

Meditation instruction for beginners,
with an opportunity for questions and dialogue.

Classes are in the Bodhinyana Meditation Hall.

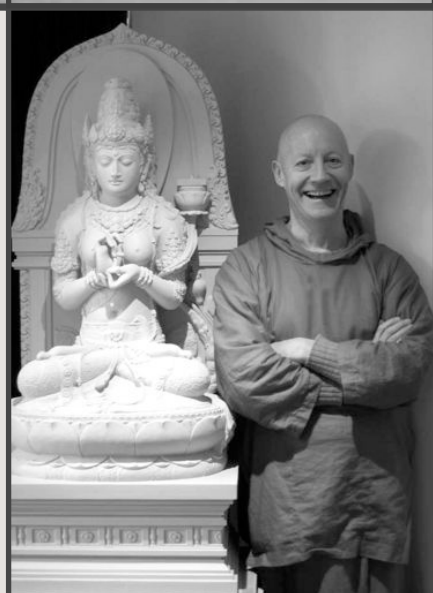
Feel free to come along — no booking is necessary.



Perfecting Wisdom in a Work of Love

Ajahn Vimalo reports that he will have finished his sculpture of the Prajnaparamita (Sanskrit for the Perfection of Wisdom) by the end of the vassa (photos top left and bottom right). He has been working on the figure off and on for many years, including a long layoff during ten years of training as a bhikkhu in Thailand and Sri Lanka. He says he has often wondered if the end would ever come. The image is a replica of the famous 13th-century stone sculpture from Singosari, East Java (pictured at bottom left), which Ajahn Vimalo began sculpting from scratch many years ago, before he entered the monastery. Now that the likeness is finished, he hopes to be able to have a mould made in order to cast reproductions. The first would be placed in the new Dhamma Hall at Cittaviveka.

"She has been an exercise in patience."



NOTICEBOARD

SANGHA

From early January, our monastic communities will be in retreat. During this time overnight accommodation will not be available for guests. Visitors may still come during the day to meditate or to help with mealtime offerings. If you would like to offer dana, it is helpful to let the kitchen manager know beforehand (by phoning the monastery.)

At Amaravati, a Dhamma talk will be given on Observance nights; at Cittaviveka, on Saturday nights. The Saturday afternoon meditation workshops will continue at Amaravati. Telephone messages will be processed regularly throughout this time, but in general, written enquiries will not be attended to until late March.

AMARAVATI

Kathina — Sunday, 29th October

Almsround begins at 10:30 am

This year, the Royal Kathina Robe will be graciously offered by the King of Thailand through a representative.

The Kathina ceremony and Kathina cloth will be sponsored and offered by Mr Amara and Dr Dharmani Makalanda. To join their offering or for further information on the day, please contact Alison Moore:

e-mail: amala@petalmoore.net
telephone: (0144) 286-5519.

Winter Retreat: Support Invited

As in previous years we hope to have a small lay support team staying in the monastery for three months to help with kitchen and other duties. We invite applications from lay people who have stayed at Amaravati before who are willing to make a minimum commitment of one month. Write to the Amaravati Secretary before mid-November.

New Website Design

Amaravati's website has been re-designed. Have a look at:
www.amaravati.org.

[Some supporters may be interested to know that the new website now has a facility for online donations. This can be accessed by selecting: Participate/Support Monastery/Donate from the drop down menu. Then select online donations. — the Treasurer]

Family Events

Young Persons' Retreat: Nov. 24-26th.

Family Camp Over 18's Activity Weekend: Dec. 15-17th.

Booking forms and information can be found at:

www.family.amaravati.org

or send an e-mail to:

familyevents@amaravati.org

Ray Glover is manager for both events.
His mobile: (0797) 675-6948

For 2007 family events please see the Amaravati website: www.amaravati.org.

Amaravati Lay Events (ALBA)

These events provide an opportunity to practice together and explore themes relevant to daily life. They include silent and guided meditation, yoga, discussion and study groups, and other activities. Events are led by experienced lay-teachers. All are welcome.

Days of Practice (no need to book)

9:45 am till 5 pm (Please bring food to share)
Oct. 28, Dec. 2.

Retreats (advanced booking essential)

Sept. 15-19 — 'Mindfulness and the Psychology of Skilful Living'

Nov. 10-12 — 'Cultivating Awareness'

Website: www.buddhacommunity.org

ARUNA RATANAGIRI

Kathina and 25th Anniversary — Sunday, 15th October

As always, all are welcome for this year's Kathina, which will be sponsored by Mrs. Kahakachchi and Mrs. Samarage. This year the day will also be an occasion for us to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery. Luang Por Sumedho and many other senior monks and nuns, including some of the previous abbots will be joining us. For further information please phone Mrs. Kahakachchi at (0191) 386-7600. The celebrations will start at 10 am.

Please come and join us!

CITTAVIVEKA

Kathina — Sunday, 22nd October (for the benefit of Rocana Vihara.)

Begins 10:30 am.

Please contact Sriyani Makuloluwe: (0124) 377-6025 or Chandi de Silva: (0190) 326-1953 for details.

Winter Retreat: Support Invited

Lay men or women who are experienced in their practice and the monastic lifestyle and are willing to offer support to the Sangha during January-April, 2007, please write to the Guest Monk or Nun. Two weeks minimum; month or more preferred.

Forest Days:

Sat 28th Oct. /Sun. 26th Nov.

Garden work Days:

Sun. 8th Oct. /Sun. 19th Nov.

Lay Forums: Sun. 15th Oct. /Sun. 12th Nov. /Sun 17th Dec.

Forest Days and Garden Days are occasions when visitors can help to support the monastery with some simple forestry and gardening projects. We meet at the monastery at 1 pm. Lay Forums are occasions for dialogue on themes that integrate Buddhist practice with daily life.

HARTRIDGE

Saturday Meditation Workshop: November 25th.

DHAMMAPALA

Retreat Support in Switzerland

We would like to invite anyone (man or woman, but an experienced and self-reliant meditator) who would like to support our small community of four or five monastic residents during our winter retreat. The area of service is mainly around the kitchen in the mornings, and there is ample time available for personal practice during the remainder of the day.

Please note that there will be no formal group practice; neither will teachings be given during this time. The minimum stay is one month, during February and/or March, 2007.

(Monastery contact information is given on the back page.)

NEWSLETTER

Contributors

Luang Por (Ajahn) Sumedho is abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, in Hertfordshire, U.K.

Ajahn Amaro is co-abbot of Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, in Redwood Valley, California.

Photographs

Page 13

Richard Smith (top left), Ajahn Munindo (top and bottom right), public domain historical image (bottom left).

LPS Slide Show Presentation

The other photographs featured in this issue were selected from a slide show presentation of Luang Por Sumedho's life put together by Ajahn Panyasaro and Ajahn Rattanawanno. The entire collection, with accompanying commentary, is to be available online at www.amaravati.org.

Contact

To contact the Editor, write to Amaravati, or use e-mail: editor@amaravati.org.

CONTACTS AND PRACTICE VENUES

AMARAVATI RETREATS

ENGLAND

Bath	Bill & Carol Huxley	(01225) 314 500
Bedford	David Stubbs	(01234) 720 892
Berkshire	Anthea West	(0118) 979 8101
Brighton	Nimmala	(01273) 723 378
Cambridge	Dan Jones	(01223) 246 257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	(01227) 463 342
Carlisle	Jean Nelson	(01228) 543491
Harlow	Pamutto	(01279) 724330
Hemel Hempstead Bodhinyana Group:		
	Chris Ward	(01442) 890034
Kendal Fellside Centre, Low Fellside:		
	Sumedha	(01539) 729 793
Leeds Area		
	Daniela Loeb	(0113) 279 1375
	Anne Grimshaw	(01274) 691 447
Liverpool	Ursula Haekel	(0151) 427 6668
London Hampstead, 1 Hillside (Rm. 6)		
London NW5, (Entrance in Highgate Rd):		
	Caroline Randall	(020) 8348 0537
	Ann Booth	(020) 7485 0505
London Buddhist Society,		
58 Eccleston Square, London SW1		(020) 7834 5858
London-Notting Hill	Jeffery Craig	(0207) 221 9330
Leigh-on-sea	Rob Howell	(01702) 482 134
Midhurst		
	Barry Durrant	(01730) 821 479
	Vivian Bell	(01730) 812 362
Newcastle	Ian Plagaro-Neill	(0191) 469 2778
Newent-Glouce.	John Teire	(01531) 821 902
e-mail: john.teire@virgin.net		
Norwich	Ian Thompson	(01603) 629129
Penzance	Lee	(01736) 762 135
Portsmouth	Medhavi	(02392) 732 280
Redruth	Vanessa	(01209) 214 031
Sheffield	Greg Bradshaw	(0114) 262 1559
e-mail: greg.bradshaw@btclick.com		
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati)	(01305) 786 821
Southampton	Ivor Minard	(023) 8089 4890
Steyning, Sussex	Jayanti	(01903) 812 130
Stroud	John Groves	(07967) 777 742
Surrey-Woking	Rocana	(01483) 761 398
Taunton	Annie Fisher	(01278) 457245
Teeside	John Doyle	(01642) 587 274
Totnes	Jerry	(01803) 840 199

OUTSIDE ENGLAND

Co. Clare, Ireland: Sunyata Centre	(00353) 613-67073
Cork, Ireland	Paddy Boyle (00353) 214-622964
Dublin	Rupert Westrup (01) 280 2832
Edinburgh	Neil Howell (0131) 226 5044
Glasgow	James Scott (0141) 637 9731
Machynlleth, Wales	Angela Llewellyn (01650) 511350
Pembrokeshire, S. Wales	
Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson	(01239) 820 79

Retreat Schedule 2007

Date	Duration	Teacher
13—17 April	5 Days	<i>to be announced</i>
20—22 April	Weekend	<i>to be announced</i>
4—13 May	10 Days	Ajahn Vajiro
25—27 May	Weekend	<i>to be announced</i>
8—17 June	10 Days	Ajahn Thanasanti
29—1 July	Weekend	<i>to be announced</i>
13—17 July	5 Days	<i>to be announced</i>
28 July—9 August	13 Days	Luang Por Sumedho
<i>(experienced meditators only)</i>		
7—16 September	10 Days	Luang Por Sumedho
28—30 September	Weekend	<i>to be announced</i>
12—14 October	Weekend	<i>to be announced</i>
19—21 October	Weekend	<i>to be announced</i>
2—6 November	5 Days	<i>to be announced</i>
16—25 November	10 Days	Ajahn Sucitto
7—9 December	Weekend	<i>to be announced</i>
27—1 Jan 2008	6 Days	<i>to be announced</i>

General Guidelines

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat. Due to demand, people may join not more than three retreats a year. The Retreat Centre is dependent on donations alone to meet its running costs.

Booking Procedure

Bookings can only be made with a booking form, and cannot be made by e-mail or telephone. For confirmation of your booking, please enclose a stamped addressed envelope or your e-mail address.

Start and Finish Times

Registration is from 4 pm to 7 pm on the first day of the retreat. The orientation talk is at 7:15 pm. Weekend retreats end at 4 pm; longer retreats end at lunchtime.

Contact Information

Retreat Centre, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery (full address for Amaravati is listed on the back page).
Retreat Centre tel. no.: (0144) 284-3239

e-mail: retreats@amaravati.org

website (for updated information): www.amaravati.org

Ajahn Sucitto

A Series on Meditation

At the Buddhist Society, London
Oct. 26th, Nov. 2nd, 9th, 16th.

V I H A R A S

BRITAIN

♦ Amaravati Monastery

St Margaret's, Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ
Tel: (01442) 84-2455 (Office)
84-3239 (Retreat Info.)
Fax: (01442) 84-3721
www.amaravati.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Amaravati

♦ Aruna Ratanagiri

Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland
NE20 0HF
Tel: (01661) 88-1612
Fax: (01661) 88-1019
www.ratanagiri.org.uk
e-mail:
community@ratanagiri.org.uk
Stewards: Magga Bhavaka Trust

♦ Cittaviveka

Chithurst Buddhist Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield,
Hampshire GU31 5EU
Tel: (01730) 81-4986
Fax: (01730) 81-7334
Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Cittaviveka

♦ Hartridge Monastery

Upottery, Honiton,
Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (01404) 89-1251
Fax: (01404) 890023
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust

THAILAND

♦ Wat Pah Nanachat

Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubon Rajathani 34310
www.watpahnachat.org

People in Thailand wanting the
Forest Sangha Newsletter,
please write to Amaravati.

U.S.A.

♦ Abhayagiri Monastery

16201 Tomki Road,
Redwood Valley, CA95470
Tel: (707) 485 1630
Fax: (707) 485 7948
www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: Sanghapala Foundation

North American distribution of
the Forest Sangha Newsletter
is handled by Abhayagiri
Monastery: please contact them
directly to be put on the N.
American mailing list.

ITALY

♦ Santacittarama

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02030 Frasso Sabino (Reiti)
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SWITZERLAND

♦ Dhammapala

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AUSTRALIA

♦ Bodhinyana Monastery

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♦ Bodhivana Monastery

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♦ Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre (Perth)

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Nollamara 6061 WA
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♦ Santi Forest Monastery

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♦ Bodhinyanarama

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Stewards: Wellington Theravada
Buddhist Association

♦ Vimutti Monastery

750 Paraparata Road, Bombay
S. Auckland; Tel: 09236816

KATHINA CEREMONIES

OCTOBER 15 — ARUNA RATANAGIRI
(25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS)

OCTOBER 25 — CITTAVIVEKA

OCTOBER 29 — AMARAVATI

ALL WELCOME

For more information, see inside: NOTICEBOARD

OBSERVANCE DAYS

On these days some monasteries are given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome to participate in the evening meditation vigils. At Amaravati on the full and new moons, there is an opportunity to determine the Eight Precepts for the night.

Moon Phase	○ FULL	◐ HALF	● NEW	◑ HALF
OCTOBER	7 (Sat) ✱	15 (Sun)	21 (Sat)	29 (Sun)
NOVEMBER	5 (Sun)	13 (Mon)	20 (Mon)	28 (Tue)
DECEMBER	5 (Tue)	13 (Wed)	19 (Tue)	27 (Wed)
JANUARY	3 (Wed)	11 (Thu)	18 (Thu)	26 (Fri)
✱ Pavarana Day (Vassa ends)				

If undelivered, please return to: AMARAVATI MONASTERY
St. Margaret's, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead,
HERTS, HP1 3BZ, England, U.K.



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