



FOREST SANGHA

newsletter

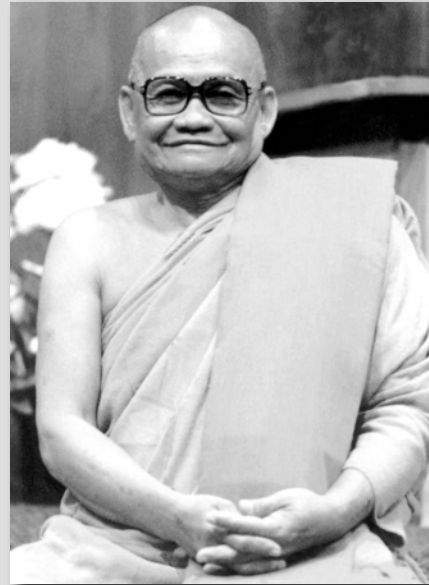
www.fsnewsletter.org

April 2008 2551

Number 83

Teaching

‘Some of us start to practise, and even after a year or two, still don’t know what’s what. We are still unsure of the practice. When we’re still unsure, we don’t see that everything around us is purely Dhamma, and so we turn to teachings from the Ajahns (teachers). But actually, when we know our own mind, when there is *sati* (awareness) to look closely at the mind, there is wisdom. All times and all places become occasions for us to hear the Dhamma (the Buddha’s teaching; the truth of the way things are). ...



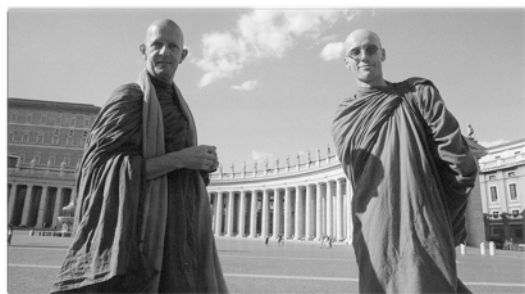
Venerable Ajahn (Luang Por) Chah

In the beginning you must rely on a teacher to instruct and advise you. When you understand, then practise. When the teacher has instructed you follow the instructions. If you understand the practice it’s no longer necessary for the teacher to teach you; just do the work yourselves. ...

Whenever heedlessness or unwholesome qualities arise, know for yourself, teach yourself. Do the practice yourself. The mind is that which knows, the witness. The mind knows for itself if you are still very deluded or only a little deluded. ...

You may wish to travel, to visit other teachers and try other systems. This is a natural desire. You will find out that a thousand questions asked and knowledge of many systems will not bring you to the truth. Eventually you will get bored. You will see that only by stopping and examining your own mind can you find out what the Buddha talked about. No need to go searching outside yourself. Eventually you must return to face your own true nature. Here is where you can understand the Dhamma. ’

Luang Por Chah



Newsletter



April 2008 (almost), and another newsletter has come together, this one taking shape during our three-month winter retreat. We focus on the theme of 'teaching', which is a broad topic for this community, and an important area in our lives. What does it take to learn? What does it require – or mean – to teach? There's a lot that can be considered, and potentially shared.

The offerings here were helpfully provided by Ajahns Munindo and Chandapalo by way of a Q&A format, and Aj. Munindo and Tan Hiriko deserve special thanks for gathering the adapted quotations from Luang Por Chah and the website guide. The winter retreat prevented the arrangement for other contributions initially envisioned, such as a perspective on teaching from the nuns' community and something about teaching retreats. Of course, there's always much more....

The ways we learn and how teaching transpires are myriad and mysterious, and not easily defined even within conventional teacher-student relationships. In the world of Buddhist training systems there are many different approaches. While all seek to 'train the mind', one might focus on maintaining rarefied conditions while another welcomes the ordinary. Though the essential task remains the same for any one of us – to uproot the cause of suffering through fulfilment of the Eightfold Path – the kind of communication and support we need to know what this requires will differ with our different characters and at different times.

Accordingly, even within our own community of monasteries one finds various approaches to training. In this

Here, with brief descriptions, are some of the websites run by monasteries associated with Ajahn Sumedho. There are more in America and Australasia; this list is limited to those in Europe. More is also in the works, such as an archive of Ajahn Sumedho's past Dhamma talks. For links to our worldwide websites please visit:
www.forestsangha.org

Portal page:	www.forestsangha.org
Internet downloads:	www.dhammatalks.org.uk
CD distribution:	www.dhammathreads.org
Sangha newsletter:	www.fsnewsletter.org
Lay community:	www.buddhacommunity.org
Amaravati:	www.amaravati.org
Chithurst:	www.cittaviveka.org
Harnham:	www.ratanagiri.org.uk
Devon:	www.hartridgemonastery.org
Switzerland:	www.dhammadapala.ch
Italy:	www.santacittarama.org

issue we hear from Ajahn Munindo on what he offers at Harnham and how he understands his role as a teacher. Ajahn Chandapalo answers a few questions too about his experience teaching in (Continental) Europe. And to let you know if you don't already about our attempts to make Dhamma more available through the Internet, a brief list is provided of the main websites currently run by the European monasteries represented by the *FSN*.

Finally, just as we were going to press we received a few words from Ajahn Thaniya (see pg. 17), in light of her recent decision to disrobe. Ajahn Sister Thaniya has been living the *samana* (religious renunciant) life with the Sangha for 17 years, most of that time at Cittaviveka, most recently as senior nun. She is respected and well-loved by those who have had the opportunity to live and practise with her, and it's with enormous appreciation for what she's given, in living this life for so many years and for her many contributions to our extended community of Sangha and supporters, that many of us will hear the news. Everything is always teaching us.

Bhikkhu Jayanto

Photographs

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Online PDF

This online edition of the *FSN* uses a convention to disguise email addresses from spam by rendering them as follows:

name@organization.com
is written: **name.at.organization.dot.com**

You'll need to alter 'at' and 'dot' back to the original format

Content

The quotations of Luang Por Chah on the cover and throughout this newsletter were adapted from published translations of his talks.

Internet

Dhamma on the World Wide Web

A guide to some community websites

Portal page: www.forestsangha.org

forestsangha.org was set up by the Sangha at Harnham at a time when various branch monasteries around the world were beginning to establish websites. It seemed useful to have a single place one could go that linked to all the Ajahn Chah branch monasteries, at least those with a presence on the Web. As well as being a portal to our worldwide community of monasteries, the site hosts Dhamma teachings including a range of Sangha publications and foreign language translations, and useful links to other websites.

Internet downloads: www.dhammatalks.org.uk

This is the place to go to find MP3 downloads. The site hosts many talks, guided meditations and chanting.

Over the years groups have requested permission to host Dhamma talks by teachers from our monasteries at their own websites. The Sangha elders agreed it would be better if we allowed others to link to one website that we could steward ourselves. Although facilities exist in the public domain like *www.archive.org*, where a huge number of talks could be hosted without any payment required, we thought that for as long as it is possible, it's better that we maintain our own Web space for the presentation of Dhamma in a context independent of more worldly material. The resulting website, *www.dhammatalks.org.uk*, is made possible at the moment through the generous sponsorship of a donor in this country.

While each of our monasteries might host talks on its own website, only the talks at *dhammatalks.org.uk* have necessarily received thorough editing attention and are released for general copying and worldwide distribution. At present the site is managed by the Sangha at Harnham and is receiving about 5000 'hits' a month. It also supplies material for a Dhamma radio station in Thailand.

CD distribution: www.dhammathreads.org

The Sangha is keen to make available the free distribution of Dhamma talks to people without a computer or who don't have access to a good broadband service, and this is done through the free distribution of CDs. A group of six people calling themselves *Dhamma Threads* receive orders, prepare, print, and distribute these discs. Currently about 3000 CDs a year are sent out worldwide. Those who use this service can make an online donation if they wish, towards the ongoing

effort to spread Dhamma. About 25% of those who request and receive CDs make a donation. The donations are stewarded by the Magga Bhavaka Trust, who cover postage costs; other costs incurred are offered as an act of dana by the Dhamma Threads group.

Sangha newsletter: www.fsnewsletter.org

As diligent readers will know, the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* has its own website. Each issue can be found there, for downloading in its published form as a PDF file, or for viewing the articles and news on separate web pages. Back issues dating back to the first FSNs published in the eighties can also be found there.

Lay community: www.buddhacommunity.org

This website is run by the Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA). It provides information and support to the extended community of lay practitioners. The site hosts the *Community Newsletter*, which is produced two or three times a year in paper and electronic form.

Amaravati: www.amaravati.org

The website for Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, as well as for the Amaravati Retreat Centre, and Family Events. The Retreat Centre is a specific area of the monastery set aside for formal meditation retreats, taught by members of the monastic community. Online booking forms are available.

Chithurst: www.cittaviveka.org

A website offering an introduction to Cittaviveka Buddhist Monastery, known also as Chithurst.

Harnham: www.ratanagiri.org.uk

A website offering an introduction to Aruna Ratanagiri Buddhist Monastery, known also as Harnham.

Devon: www.hartridgemonastery.org

A website offering an introduction to Hartridge Buddhist Monastery.

Switzerland: www.dhammapala.ch

A website offering an introduction to Dhammapala Buddhist Monastery in Switzerland. Available only in the German language.

Italy: www.santacittarama.org

A website offering an introduction to Santacittarama Buddhist Monastery in Italy. Available in Italian and English.

On Teaching

Q&A with Ajahn Munindo



Ajahn Munindo has been the abbot of Aruna Ratanagiri Buddhist Monastery, known as Harnham, since 1991. There is usually a resident male monastic community of five to ten monks, novices and anagarikas (postulants) at Harnham, as well as male and female lay visitors.

The *FSN* recently asked him questions on the theme of ‘teaching’.

How do you understand what ‘teaching’ means, in the context of our community?

Ajahn Munindo: My first thought is that teaching is about passing on the benefits of practice. As for the context of our community, I’m not familiar with serving as a teacher in any other context. Perhaps the word ‘serving’ is important here. I see teaching as an offering. It has been a great help over the years to view my role of leader or teacher as an act of conscious giving. Rather than aspiring to become a master – which as a young monk I thought I was supposed to do – I work consciously on being a good servant. In my own practice I hold an idea of Dhamma practice as ‘serving reality’; I expect this shapes how I relate with or teach others. Regarding the theoretical level of practice, or *pariyatti*, I think this is generally best dealt with through book learning. At our monastery this means that anyone wanting to join is given a reading list of Dhamma books they need to familiarize themselves with before being accepted. The same holds for the training around the rules, the *Vinaya*. Applicants are directed towards specific texts and before being accepted they are tested on their understanding.

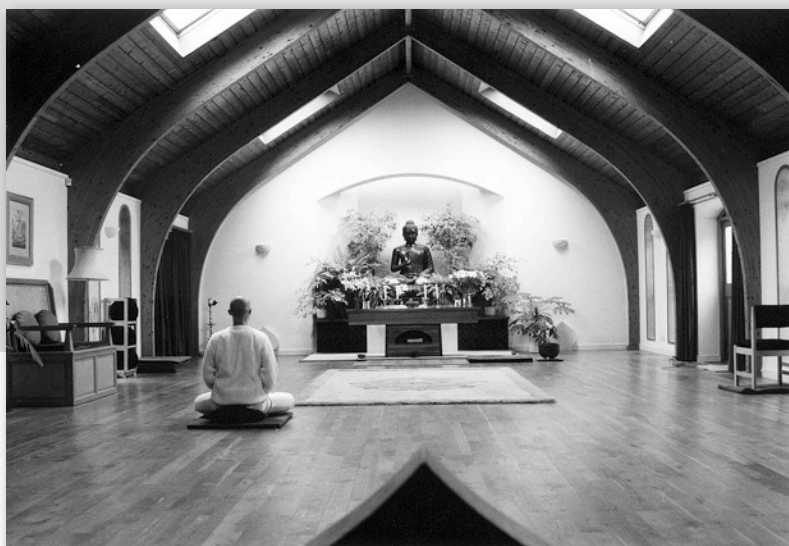
Is there a difference between ‘teaching’ and ‘training’?

AM: Not to my mind. Probably I use the word ‘training’ more than ‘teaching’, as the latter could tend to take us into our heads and have us think that because we’ve arrived at some ideas that approximate reality rather tidily, we actually know something. This is not necessarily the case. As Ajahn Chah used to say, knowing the word for ‘hot’ does not give you the experience of being burned. He also said that the reason you don’t know anything truly is because you know so much.

I emphasize regularly that this path of practice involves our entire body / mind in training. We train with an awareness that shows us how to see effectively beyond the ways we have been conditioned to see, i.e. according to our preferences. A teacher is someone who helps us see in new and relevant ways – ways that serve our commitment to live in harmony with truth, or reality, or whatever word connects with that sense we have that some things are profoundly more important than others. For instance, it’s relatively important that I stay fit and healthy so as to not be a burden on others and to maximize on the fortunate circumstance in which I find myself. Accordingly I pay some attention to healthy living; I exercise and so on. However, it’s much more important to know that I am going to die. So, to be as able as I can possibly be in meeting death when it comes, reflecting on this calls for a much greater degree of my attention. Anyone who offers help with this kind of preparation is a teacher for me.

How do you approach your role as a teacher? What kind of teaching/training do you do, or how do you help people learn?

AM: I don’t really feel that I ‘do’ any teaching or training, but I’m interested in helping people learn. The first



The Dhamma Hall at Harnham

priority, though, is to maintain perspective within myself. If I lose that then I risk getting caught in ideas about myself as a teacher. Such ideas, if not clearly understood, are a guaranteed obstruction when it comes to helping others. Cultivating this kind of effort is a lifelong project.

The next thing I'd say is that attempting to train others without the context of a harmonious and mutually respectful relationship can lead to loss of faith and even a turning away from the path. The classic texts point out the importance of this with extensive, detailed explanations of what is suitable and what is not. It would be a big mistake to see the role of the teacher as one of merely passing on information. If for instance a student doesn't feel trust in the teacher then whatever benefit the teacher might have realized for themselves, the student probably won't get it. This works both ways, teacher-student/student-teacher. It's been an important area of learning in our monastic communities, especially since we left the traditional Asian context and came to the West. These days we spend a lot more time listening to each other, being patient and kind, which generates a context of friendship that is essential. At the same time, of course, once we know how to maintain our own practice we can learn from everything and everyone, including those we might not like or even trust.

Leading a community, sometimes I see myself as being like the conductor of an orchestra, an orchestra comprised of seriously enthusiastic players, each very capable in their own way. Most people who take up the Buddhist path of practice have already stepped aside from the flow of popular culture. This is even more the case for those joining a monastery – they aren't willing to settle for the status quo. They don't necessarily need

me to tell them what to do. They need something else, and it's that something else that the conductor offers. Through the process of playing together each player is altered in how they relate with their own instrument. They learn, the conductor learns – everyone benefits.

So maintaining the right attitude is primary. Then, as I was saying, it needs to be emphasized that this training involves the entire body/mind. All aspects of our lives are included – nothing at all can be left out. In practice this usually means finding ways to highlight imbalances in our approach. We all come to training with a mixture of intentions, some wholesome and worth developing and others neurotic, by which I mean not serving our aspirations to be fully free from suffering. Part of a teacher's job is to act like a mirror, reflecting back to a student any tendencies of avoidance they might have, preferably as they occur. Of course, most tricky to spot are the ways we avoid our faults, but there can also be times when our strengths and abilities need reflecting, to make them more conscious. The Buddha pointed out in many ways how devious our deluded minds can be; left to our own devices most of us would ignore our weaknesses and overemphasize our strengths. Traditional Buddhist mindfulness training is about developing skills that eventually allow us to be our own mirror. We have a teacher so that we won't need a teacher.

There are tried and tested ways of developing these skills. I try to encourage people to be mindful of how we benefit from those who have walked the way longer than we have. When we appreciate the nature of the task we face then we can offer ourselves into it more fully, and a teacher can help us see better what we're dealing with. I needed a lot of encouragement as, although I sincerely wanted to let go of the habits that

‘If you have any questions, you’re welcome to come and ask them any time. But we don’t need daily interviews here. If I answer your every little question, you will never understand the process of doubt in your own mind. ...

Even if the teacher speaks the truth, don’t just believe it, because you don’t yet know the truth of it for yourself. ...

It’s essential that you learn to examine yourself, to interview yourself. Listen carefully to the lecture every few days, then use this teaching to compare with your own practice. Is it still the same? Is it different? Why do you have doubts? Who is it that doubts? Only through self-examination can you understand. ’

Luang Por Chah



kept tripping me up, I regularly lost it: getting caught in complaining and criticizing for instance. Here I was, living with great teachers, all my material needs were more than adequately met, yet the nature of my conditioned mind meant that I would indulge in thinking, saying and even doing things that created discontent. So although I was making a lot of effort, ostensibly to realize unshakeable peace, I was at the same time generating the causes for lack of peace. Without the patient, tolerant, consistent encouragement of my teachers, I might well have undermined my commitment and given up. It takes time to see our faults as faults. The more subtle faults can be the biggest troublemakers and they can also be the most difficult to unearth. They tend to be overgrown with a dense mass of intertwined opinions – like for instance, ‘I am already aware of all my faults’.

If the right kind of reflection comes at the right time then we see something new and meaningful about ourselves. With this comes letting go, which in turn generates an authentic interest in submitting ourselves more fully in the training. By ‘authentic’ here I mean genuine, not the synthetic kind of energy that comes from our initial idealism. And by ‘more fully’ I mean an increased willingness to take whatever comes. In the beginning we like to pick and choose, saying we need such and such conditions for practice. As we learn true letting go, we find that ‘this’ – whatever is happening here and now – is the only practice. That isn’t to say that in practising with everything we forget that we need to protect ourselves from that which is harmful. The things that harm us come from both within and without, but mostly it’s our heedlessness that undoes us. If our teachers can help us stay connected with what first brought us to practice we won’t get too far astray.

It’s only when we forget this that we indulge in complaining and so on.

Nurturing faith (*saddha*; meaning trust, rather than belief) is also something I think about a lot when considering my responsibilities as a teacher. It’s not that students necessarily lack faith; if they didn’t already trust that there is a reality to be realized behind all the confusion of distorted consciousness, they would never have got started. But until a certain point in practice it’s possible for that faith to get obscured. If we allow ourselves to become too busy, for example too much talking, too much socializing, getting excessively well known, all these things can lead to a loss of connection with faith. It shows itself when students are faced with challenges that require a surrender into total uncertainty – but they find they just can’t do it. There isn’t the well-developed sense of there being an indefinable dimension in which they can simply trust. So an important part of a teacher’s job as I see it is to protect the practice environment so a student’s faith is maintained; and it’s the student’s job to learn how important faith is, and to look after it wisely.

What do you do to encourage such faith or trust? Are there techniques?

AM: Some people find techniques more useful than others. It depends on how tricky or devious your ego is. Mine is very devious; it’s a good imitator. As soon as I learn something from practice, the monkey mind quickly starts performing it and it’s no longer the real thing. What changes over the years is that you get more alert to these antics; you don’t get so surprised or upset about it. You learn to take appropriate precautions. If you have such a mind you need to be very agile and cultivate a large repertoire of skilful means to stay

ahead of the ego's con-tricks. You can't afford to rely on one or two specialized techniques.

Regarding faith though, there aren't any sure ways. That's part of it. Living out of faith means we can't be sure, at least not sure in the way our deluded self wants to be. We have to be willing to face the fear of losing everything. But if we practise consistently, not in too much of a hurry, we won't go too far out of balance and lose our connection with what's important.

One of the things I've found I do when teaching others – and myself for that matter – is to emphasize the questions. I find that when I'm giving talks I offer the listeners more questions than I do answers. As a young monk I once heard a teacher asked what his teaching technique was: was it concentration, or investigation, or mantra repetition and so on. When he eventually replied he said, 'It is to trick you.' That instantly rang a bell for me. Not that I see myself as a teacher trying to trick people, but I do see how our clever minds will shamelessly employ any means to avoid letting go. We need help to see that.

Every moment of struggle that we find ourselves in can be resolved by asking the right question. The most fundamental question, and one that we can always ask, is: How do I get to see the resistance I am generating that turns the natural pain of life into unnatural and unnecessary suffering. This is the Million Dollar Question.

So I don't believe giving people more techniques or information about how to practise really helps. Asking the kind of questions that return us to our underlying sense of trust in Dhamma does help. Gradually faith is purified and intensified, until it becomes something we can truly rely upon. To the degree reliable faith is established it becomes easier for us to let go of the incessantly grasping, conceptualizing mind, and that's a nice thing.

Having said all that, a creative engagement with ritual practices can help support faith too. It might not be immediately obvious just how this process works. For those of us

addicted to our sophisticated ideas about reality, simply, regularly, submitting ourselves into traditional ritual practices such as bowing and chanting can be an excellent antidote. It might appear completely pointless much of the time but can nevertheless be exactly what is needed.

Training monks and novices must entail differences in relationship and expectations than teaching laypeople. How do you approach these areas? What are some of the differences and similarities?

AM: First, we are all human beings doing what we can to be free from suffering. Whatever our choice of lifestyle, basically we are all in this for the same reason. It's true there are differences in how we engage practice. And the longer one has been in the training the greater the difference – this is the case for anyone following the Buddha's teachings, Sangha and laity alike. That is to say that it's all to do with commitment: how much are we willing to sacrifice? In the first few years of training I don't expect there to be a great deal of difference. But as those practising become more firmly established they find they can take more pressure. Waking from the dreams of delusion takes energy and the amount of intensity that we can handle is determined by the strength of our container. By container I mean primarily our sense of self-respect. Self-respect is much more than an idea we have about ourselves; it's like an energetic force field and it builds up as we exercise *sila* (virtue) and renunciation. Someone who has internalized these principles to a greater degree can take a lot more pressure. And that in turn serves the process of purification.

In terms of how this approach might show itself, I always tell those new to training that whenever they have doubts about what constitutes right practice, be it meditation or observing precepts, they should feel free to ask. And for the junior Sangha members, once a year I ask them to write a report on where they are at. This gives them a chance to bring up things they might find difficult to speak about. There were times in my early years as a monk when I had the impression I wasn't supposed to have doubts, or if I did I





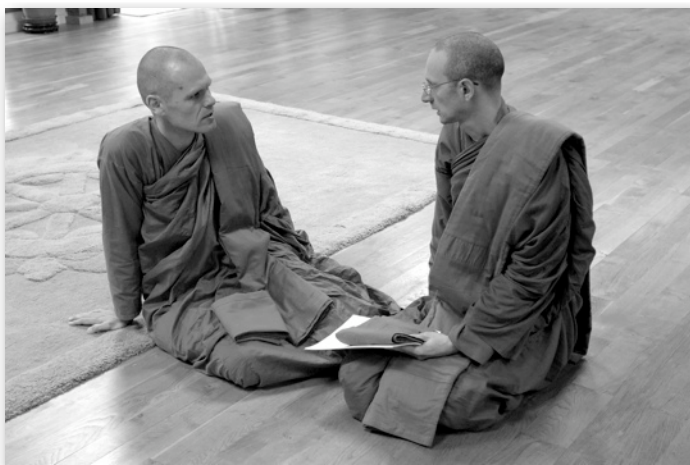
Meal offering at Harnham

should just observe them, not express them in any way. As a result I struggled for years over things that could easily have been cleared up. It's true I developed strength in patient endurance in the process, but there are endless opportunities in life to develop that virtue. Some doubts are more useful than others and to get to know this in the beginning it's right we feel allowed to ask.

For someone well established in the training it could be appropriate to tell them to simply watch the doubt; let the pressure build up, allow the agony of uncertainty to be a thorn that spurs them on in their effort – to use the heat and pressure generated to break out of old, limiting structures of self. For them the feeling of, 'this is too much too soon' is not to be believed in, but endured with resolute determination. The real thing feels like that eventually. At an earlier stage of training though, right practice might mean equipping oneself with a wholesome sense of self-worth and relative contentment; 'too much too soon' might really be that way. Enduring at their stage might cause their container to crack up.

It's also useful to consider the effects of living inside or outside of spiritual community. Obviously the Buddha recognized the benefits of supportive companionship. In setting up the Sangha he established a here-and-now, visible presence in society that could function as an example to inspire all those who seek a way out of the tedious mediocrity that is 'worldliness'.

But it's not an option for everyone to live in spiritual community, with the support that entails. I do recommend to anyone serious about their training to try and



Ajahns Abhinando and Jutindharo in the Dhamma Hall

locate themselves so they have regular access to inspiring examples of those living in accord with the Way. And in making that kind of assessment people need to exercise wise discernment; not all monks and nuns are going to be an inspiration. Just having robes on doesn't mean anything in itself.

Self-respect, intensity and support are spiritual factors that all followers of the Buddha would want to work on. Monastic or retreat situations, with their emphasis on constant mindfulness, enhance the opportunities to cultivate them.

There is one more point I would make. This is the recognition of individual responsibility ('Work out your own liberation with diligence' [the Buddha's final words]). Any ideas we might still be holding to that there is someone out there, up there, looking after us, have to go. Just as in the time of the Buddha, these days many people hold such stories as being ultimately real, if not consciously then unconsciously. The idea that there is someone taking care of things is real: it is a real movement in our minds. But the only thing ultimate about it is that it is uncertain, unsatisfactory and inherently insubstantial (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*).

Joining the Sangha or belonging to a Buddhist group does not in itself guarantee anything. If we continue our habit of projecting responsibility outwards – now onto our community, whereas previously our energy was invested in, for example, our conditioned ideas of God – we lose out. We merely swap one form of false security for another, and this will certainly lead to eventual disillusionment. When this sort of thing happens, those who become disappointed tend to blame the community for letting them down. Maybe the difficulty came from investing too much energy in an unsafe refuge. We need to remember that being a member of a great group of meditators or being ordained under a great teacher are not ends in themselves. Being individually responsible for our spiritual development was one of the Buddha's many radical teachings and something of which our teachers might need to remind us from time to time.

So for someone considering going forth and living the Holy Life*, what would you say are the benefits?

AM: Spaciousness: mental, emotional, relational. You have permission to move through the world, touch it, sense it, observe it, without being defined by it. That's the most direct answer. And three other things come to mind. The first is to do with consistency of practice. Have you ever seen someone try to start a fire by rubbing two dry sticks together? If they take a break when they get tired, the heat doesn't build up sufficiently for the fire to ignite. 'Going forth' is making a public statement of our commitment to live the celibate renunciant life for the purpose of purifying the heart. This effectively puts you in a position that makes it hard for you not to keep practising, to not keep firing up the furnace of purification. We all know what it's like to feel enthusiastic for a while and then find the energy passes, leaving us unmotivated. Having the robe on stops you from doing things that delete the goodness your practice has generated. It stops you from backsliding. I recall many years ago one teacher told us how he had been in robes for about thirty years but he had only been a monk for about nine; he had only really practised for nine of the thirty but during the intervening twenty-one he hadn't fallen backwards. So one benefit of going forth is what it stops you doing.

The second thing is what it gives you. Sangha life provides the optimum environment for delving into *dukkha* (fundamental suffering, or 'unsatisfactoriness'). If we want to wholeheartedly, single-mindedly inquire into the process of ignorance, then we need to be able to draw on a huge reservoir of goodness. Attempting to transform our suffering without access to a lot of well-being is doomed to failure. The Holy Life as set up by the Buddha is a goodness generator. All our activity – body, speech and mind – is guided towards enhanced integrity and expanded compassion. We learn to expect from ourselves, and others expect from us, that we continually increase in goodness. These expectations are helpful. The values of the casual culture in which we live condition expectations that do not accord with Dhamma. They aren't helpful – quite the opposite. Wearing the robe of a *samana* (religious renunciant) elicits free energy, so to speak, by way of what people project onto us. Even in a country like Great Britain that is not predominantly Buddhist, most people recognize a monk when they see one and expect us to be kind, patient, considerate, friendly, wise. It makes it a lot easier to live simply, harmoniously and contentedly.

**The 'Holy Life' is a translation from the Pali, brahmachariya, which referred to the living of the celibate renunciant life, and is more evocative of the true meaning of the Sangha's vocation than, say, 'monastic life', or 'renunciant life'.*



⌋If you just follow your own views and try to practise accordingly, you'll start thinking and doubting a lot. These doubts will never vanish through thinking, through theorizing, through speculation or through discussion. Nor will doubts disappear by doing nothing....

When we listen to Dhamma maybe we want to listen until all our doubts are cleared up. But doubt is not overcome simply by listening or thinking; we must first clean out the mind....

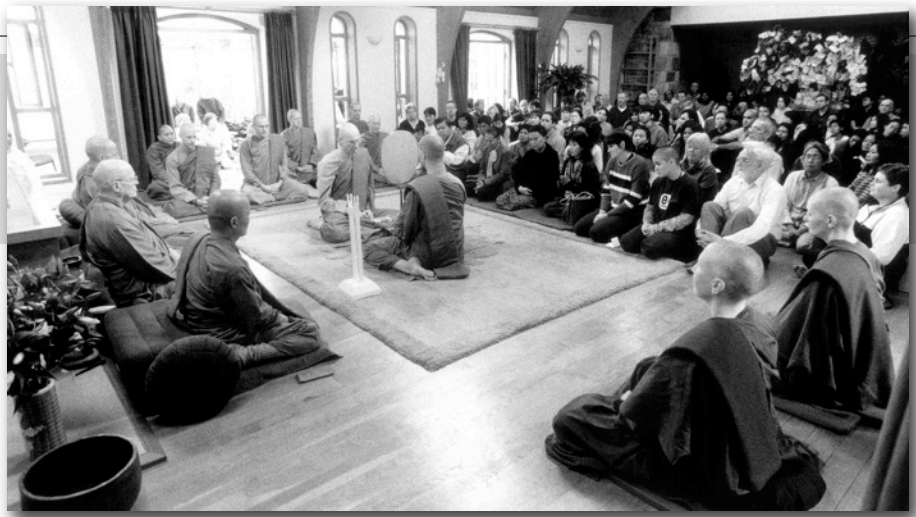
No matter how long we listen to a teacher talk about the truth we won't know or see that truth just from listening. If we did it would be only through guesswork or conjecture....

Even though simply listening to the Dhamma may not lead to realization, it is beneficial. In the Buddha's time there were those who arrived at the highest realization while listening to a discourse. But those people were already highly developed. It's like a football. When a football is pumped up with air it expands. Now the air in that football is all pushing to get out, but there's no hole for it to do so. As soon as a needle punctures the football the air comes bursting out. ⌋

Luang Por Chah



Luang Por Chah teaching disciples (above) and demonstrating reclining meditation



Gathered together for a Kathina ceremony

The third thing to consider is how living the Holy Life offers regular association with those further along the path of training than we are. At the beginning of the *Buddha's*

Discourse on the Greatest Blessings (Mahamangala Sutta) it is recommended that we 'Do not cultivate the company of the unworthy, and associate often with the wise.'

Without drifting into superstitious ideas about 'transmission', I believe there are indeed great blessings to be found in keeping the company of those who have done their work and realized the fruits of practice. If we are permeable enough, then, just as we might pick up a disease from someone who is ill, by living closely with those more virtuous than ourselves we 'pick up' something very helpful.

Aruna Ratanagiri is a single-sex community. Are there reasons for this that relate to training?

AM: It comes down to what works. We're at an early stage of translating this particular variation on the theme of a celibate renunciant life into our society, and it seems appropriate that we be spacious and big-hearted in the experiments we make. That's the principle. Speaking personally, this approach of single-sex community living seems to me less complicated. But the Sangha at Harnham was structured this way when I was invited to come here to be senior monk – I didn't set it up like this. However I am pleased it is this way.

I feel great respect and gratitude for what has evolved in our Western monasteries over the 30 years since we left Thailand. I don't believe it's unfolded like this as a result of any particular individual's good (or bad) ideas; it is just what we of Western origins have manifested in our sincere efforts to make this renunciant life possible in this social context. I think it's a misperception to think anyone is 'doing it'. There are larger forces at play. And I don't believe anyone has all the answers – we are dealing with the unknown, which is why it is wise to move cautiously and patiently. We do have the choice: what kind of difficulties do we want to work with, those that arise out of living in single-sex communities or those that arise in communities that are mixed. Individuals will decide for themselves which way works best for them.

What is important is that we don't rush; we don't rush into new ways just to be more acceptable, or dispense with old ways without showing patience and respect towards the traditions which seeded what we have now. I've always had a great admiration for the manner in which Luang Por Sumedho has held back in the face of forceful efforts to persuade him to change things just because they're disagreeable in some ways to some individuals. We can learn from things being disagreeable and unreasonable. Of course, the most important thing to learn is who it is that is objecting so strongly to the way things are. That tricky inner character comes on as if he or she will be truly satisfied if only they get their own way. I know from my own practice that there is much valuable energy contained in our desire to change things. Rather than merely follow its conditioned trajectory, we can train to embrace that energy, turn it around and employ it in the transformation of the utterly unreasonable passions of lust and resentment.

When the subject of changing the way we do things comes up, I often voice my conviction that the only change we can trust that is lasting and in accord with Dhamma is change that comes out of a sense of adequacy or strength, and equanimity. When the voices demanding change sound like, 'I can't take this any more, I just can't stand it', then we are wise to hold back. It's like saying 'I am inherently limited'. If we follow these voices then, even if our effort is successful in effecting change, I don't believe it will be beneficial in the long run. For it to be right effort it needs to be motivated by inner clarity and contentment. Passion and enthusiasm can still be there, but not in the service of 'me' and 'my way'.

The Buddha said that that which accords with contentment and modesty is Dhamma and that which does not is not Dhamma. In our case perhaps it's even more important that we pay attention to these areas of practice since the culture in which we live does not hold up contentment and modesty as praiseworthy qualities. The Buddha didn't recommend them to stifle creativity



Ajahns Kovida, Thitamedha and Sr Jotipaṇṇa, of the Chithurst community

or ingenuity but because these are the kind of qualities that conduce to letting go of the causes of suffering. A good teacher reminds us that the point of going forth is to realize inner contentment. It is from such an inner reality that truly effective, wise and compassionate action can come.

What are some of the means you use to facilitate training? For instance, how have you incorporated the need to do building work and ongoing maintenance as part of monastic practice?

AM: When I was first ordained I lived in a monastery in Bangkok where most of the monks were engaged in study or serving the ceremonial needs of the lay communities – workers from outside were paid to look after maintenance. Then I moved to live with Ajahn Tate in a meditation monastery who said (I was told, since I couldn't understand Thai at that stage) that those who have the ability to do lots of formal meditation should do that and the others can do building and maintenance work. Later I was re-ordained by Ajahn Chah. When I joined that community I heard he said he wanted the new Buddha image in the temple that was being constructed to be in the standing position because his monks practised not just while sitting, but while working too. He had us doing hard physical work on the temple from straight after the meal at 9 am right through until beyond midnight. This went on for weeks. Apparently, he purposely delayed the introduction of electricity in the monastery so we would have the opportunity to pull water from the well by hand. He told us that if we wanted to penetrate to the deepest insights in practice, we needed to cultivate mindfulness while we swept leaves each afternoon and cleaned the toilets.

In other words there are a variety of takes on this matter. Your view will be determined by the examples you've been exposed to as well as your aptitude. Here I tell monks I expect them to do community work on average five hours a day, five days a week for the first five years of training. That is the routine for eight months of the year; the other four months we are in

retreat mode. I think it's good to have it explained up front, so people are less likely to get caught in complaining when they are asked to work. I tell them that if they can give themselves into this routine for five years, they should have come to know themselves well enough to be able to really benefit

from solitary practice. From experience I know it can happen that when left on our own we can remain unaware of the gaps in our practice only to have them surface many years later, thoroughly compounded, causing a lot of trouble for ourselves and others.

The idea of running off to live in a monastery can be attractive to people wanting to avoid the irritations involved in living with other people. Yet if we're sufficiently aware, we can avoid turning the natural frustrations of human interaction into suffering by demanding this realm to be other than it is. But few of us start out that mature.

One of the best ways to become familiar with our compulsive avoidance of our weaknesses is to have to spend time with people whom we don't necessarily want to be with: having to wash dishes with someone who talks nonsense all the time or who inconsiderately splashes dirty dish water over my robes; sleeping one plasterboard thickness away from someone who stomps around in their room; trying to sit when my neighbour is blissfully ignorant of how his learning chanting out loud is giving rise to my thoughts of wanting to murder him! We are all susceptible to some degree to getting upset and the first five years of training is the appropriate time to have a really close look at what we have to deal with; those fiery upthrusts that manifest when 'I' don't get 'my' way.

It isn't hard to feel peaceful and holy when there are no irritations. I might believe all I need is to have conditions exactly how I want them for long enough, so I can quickly break through into deep concentration, cancel out the hindrances and drop into the big Enlightenment. Goodbye cruel world! It's easy to justify such ideas if all you do is read books. Well, I've seen many monks in too much of a hurry try that and end up miserably short of anything like enlightenment. Before we have a chance to really let go of the hindrances we need to get to know them. The traditional approach for flesh and blood human beings, not ideal ones, is to live under what we call 'dependence' (*nissaya*) for the first five



Geoff Jackson helping out

years (*navaka* training) and then after that, to try it out on your own terms.

So receiving an explanation of why the monastery routine is structured the way it is can help. Perhaps those who've been reared in a culture that imbues them with an automatic response of respect and reverence

towards authority might not

need the same level of conceptual clarity in these matters – I suspect that's the case. For many of us however, trust was either injured early on in life or was deprived of the conditions needed for it to fully develop. So we can use a little help. I don't think it's helpful to expect someone to follow what I say just because that's the way we did it in Thailand. They do all sorts of things in Thailand that we don't do here. I find if people understand, then generally they welcome what is offered and feel better able to let go of their conditioned resistance.

After five years an individual should be equipped to make responsible decisions about their practice. It's like any other serious training that might be undertaken – medical, legal, carpenter's apprentice – between five and seven years is what it takes to internalize the basic structures. Then they can decide for themselves how to proceed. Of course those of us who are leading the communities always hope that at least some of those who train with us will want to return and help out, but there are no deals struck. It's based more on trust and individual ability.

What about new technologies? Most of us are familiar with the ideal image of the recluse in his or her cave. Is computer use antithetical to Buddhist monastic life? What can the role of technology be in the context of monastic life and teaching?

AM: Good question. The archetypal image of the renunciant can be a powerful trigger, giving rise to faith in the possibility of freedom. This was one of the 'signs' that inspired our teacher the Buddha to go forth. I'm sure it also inspired many of us now living this life. That dimension within us which gets activated or quickened on seeing a *samana*, one who has given up everything on the outside for the pursuit of truth



Preparing the ground for walking meditation

within, is our real refuge. It is precious and needs to be guarded. Outer Buddha images, Dhamma teachings and members of the Sangha act as reflectors for that inner ability or refuge, reflecting back what is there within.

Personally I don't feel there's any inherent conflict between this and technology. I'll be open and tell you that part of me loves technology. And I think I allow myself to love it because of how it enables communication and the benefit from that. I regularly investigate my relationship with technology and I don't believe it's compulsive (at least not totally). Often when I speak with Ajahn Vajiro, for instance, he confesses how fond he is of gadgets; at the same time he refers to them all as '*Mara*' (the '*Tempter*'). What I'm saying is that having these questions out in the open is important. Technology is powerful, but in itself it's neither good nor bad. I believe it's mainly the consciousness that applies it that determines the effect.

Having said that, in the late '60s I was a fan of the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who was known for saying things like, 'The medium is the message'. He was making an important point there; some of his books are very worth reading. There is something about the speed and feel of technology that affects the message being transmitted, and it's folly to ignore that. But as always, if we just react to this without mindful investigation, we run the chance of missing out on potential benefit. I make a practice of observing how the different mediums affect me; if I listen to a Dhamma talk as an audio recording or if I watch a video recording of a monk on YouTube, it feels very different. Speaking personally I'm not convinced the latter helps get the teachings across. Even though a good rational argument might be made for engaging YouTube to spread Dhamma, what motivates my actions is more than rational thought. How it feels is as important, if not more so.

The best approach is to acknowledge that this is a shared task. If we can be open and flexible about learn-

ing to skilfully use technology, we minimize the risks. But risks certainly do remain.

Some monasteries don't allow any computers at all – that's their way of managing the issue. At our monastery, part of acknowledging the power of technology, and the possibility of it creating more problems than solving them, is the clear community agreement on how to use technology. Everyone who has been in training for less than eight years (which is the time required by the Elders' Council before any Sangha member can represent their community on the Council) has to seek permission before accessing the Internet for personal use. Using it to research timetables or building materials, etc., doesn't need permission. Only communal terminals are to be used and likewise with email addresses. Those who are over eight vassas set their own standards of use. I think that is a good middle way.

Some who join the community positively dislike computers, telephones or microwave ovens. (But no one objects to the central heating system.) Others are obsessed with computers but realize the danger and gladly accept the discipline. So taking a position for or against technology is not it. Without modern technology I could well have died during childbirth along with my mother. There have been several occasions in my

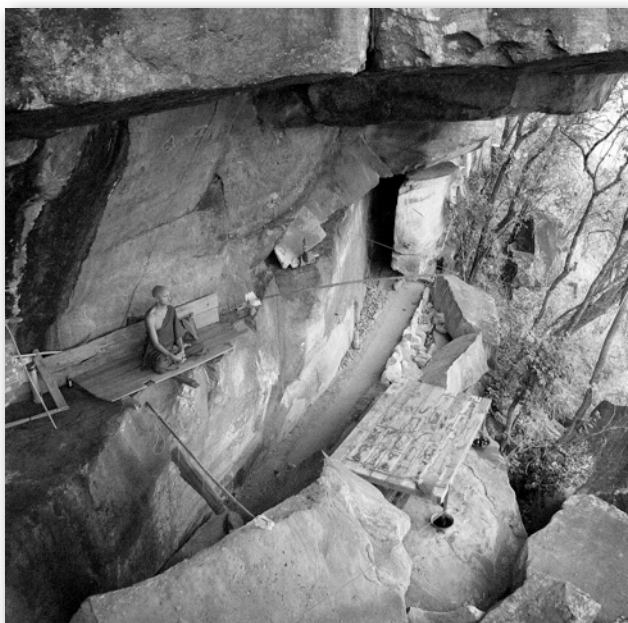


The monastery's walled garden at Harnham

life during periods of hospitalization when I wouldn't have pulled through without the intervention of technology. So I'm a hi-tech human who's glad to be still alive doing what I'm doing. We have a hi-tech sewerage system here in our monastery – despite huge efforts to have things otherwise, it just wasn't possible. It was this option or close up and leave; that's just how it is. Those who want to live in caves can live in caves. That doesn't have to be a problem. There are plenty of empty caves and I trust that the purification they realize alone in their cave will bring real benefit. I know this understanding isn't shared by all, but I have confidence in it. What matters is how conscious we are in our engagement with life. Again, it's what works that counts.

And it's what works for oneself and what works in terms of benefiting others. Somebody recently wrote to me saying he was a member of a meditation group in a town a few hundred miles south of Darwin in Northern Australia. He was expressing their gratitude for being able to regularly download Dhamma talks from the website. To access that part of the world, by any means other than electronic, would require a great deal of time and energy (I know, I hitch-hiked through there when I was twenty-two). Somebody else wrote to say they'd enjoyed sharing in a Dhamma reflection with me by way of an MP3 file on their iPod while trekking in remote regions of the Himalayas. Those are slightly extreme examples but there are many, many more; people who, without current technology would not be in contact with Dhamma. I confess I get a bit of a buzz from being a part of that.

It would be interesting to know how many of the monks and nuns we have made their initial contact with the Sangha through the Internet. Quite a few, I expect. Basically, from a practice perspective, none of it is necessary. However, since it is readily available, and since there are beings that suffer and are seeking the way out, I am keen to use it. The point is not to be intoxicated by it. Whether technology is a blessing or a curse depends on how it's perceived and used.



Cave dwelling: the 'cliff cave' over the Mekong River at Poo Jorm Gorm, a branch of Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand.



‘Don’t be in a hurry to judge whether this teaching is right or wrong. Just listen to it first. If I were to give you all a fruit and tell you it’s delicious, you should take note of my words, but don’t believe me offhand, because you haven’t tasted it yet. The teaching I give you today is the same. If you want to know whether the fruit is sweet or sour you have to slice a piece off and taste it. Then you will know its taste for yourself.’

Luang Por Chah



When I commented in the end-of-year report printed in December’s *Forest Sangha Newsletter* on how we have started a programme of emailing out a short Dhamma reflection on every new and full moon, we received a delightfully large number of requests from people wanting to be included. I suppose anyone who was likely to find such a programme an offence against the image of what was proper for a Buddhist monk would be unlikely to contact me so perhaps I’m getting a false reading here, but I don’t think so. If this stuff is used sensitively I can’t see anything inherently antithetical to the monastic life.*

**If you wish to be part of the new and full moon mailing send your email address to: [dhammasakaccha at gmail dot com](mailto:dhammasakaccha@gmail.com)*

In moving an Eastern tradition to the West, do we meet with challenges unique to the Western context that require a different approach in training?

AM: There are differences but they’re often exaggerated, I find. We only feel lost and limited because we’re ignorant of two things, the Buddha said: suffering and the cause of suffering. This is a timeless truth. The manifestations of our ignorance and the skilful means required to untangle it understandably vary from East to West. And yes, we need to be big-hearted in the approaches we make. But what’s most important is that we stay true to our deepest interest in being free. I believe it’s when we lose sight of this that we become caught in and confused by the outer complexities. So long as we attend to what the Buddha taught and, at the same time, keep coming back to this deep longing for liberation, then our heart’s natural ability will show us what we need, as we need it. I trust in this very strongly; in this, and in recollection of our teachers.

One of the most significant sources of support I’ve found over the years has been to regularly consider, ‘What would my teachers think about this?’ To some that might seem I’m stuck in old ways, but to me it’s about staying in tune with a dimension that’s not about fad or fashion or getting distracted by the demands of popular culture. Of course, considerable skill is re-

quired in translating the conventions, but I believe that will more or less look after itself if we keep our eyes open, so to speak, and stay true to that which is essential. Our love of truth is essential, and for me that is what’s nourished by recollection of my teachers – it helps keep me on track.

Your generation, the one that began their training in Thailand back in the 1960s and 1970s, are all getting older. What do you teach about ageing?

AM: That it’s a relief. The older I get, the happier I feel. Personally, since this body has never really been a great source of comfort, the physical inconveniences of ageing don’t come as a big surprise. What is most noticeable is how hugely privileged I feel. I see in a way I’ve never seen before how living in a period of human history when there is such ready access to Dhamma teachings and teachers is a very lucky thing. Maybe luck doesn’t come into it but it feels that way. There are times these days when I think back and realize how much I have accepted things as if I were somehow entitled to them: information, opportunities, access. When I see this I feel rather ashamed. But with age I’ve learned to value even feeling ashamed – I view such feelings as protectors. It is what the Buddha referred to as *hiri* – totally different from guilt, which is part of the neurotic baggage we start out with and only useful as fuel for the furnace. Feelings of remorse for past heedlessness, rightly held, lead to gratitude. I don’t recall feeling grateful when I was young, even though I always had so much; I was dazzled most of the time by my mind’s capacity to imagine how I and the world could and should be otherwise. It’s not because I’ve become complacent; rather that some of the compulsiveness has worn out. And that’s a relief. I find gratitude a more sustainable resource than much of what I turned to in the past. If it’s genuine, gratitude never fails to soften and warm the heart. And it doesn’t run out. I think it might be limitless. ☸



Teaching in Europe

Questions for Ajahn Chandapalo

You are English, and you became a monk with Ajahn Sumedho at Chithurst in West Sussex in 1982 – yet you have been practising and teaching in Continental Europe for 20 years. How has that come about?

Soon after I first became interested in meditation and Buddhism, while studying engineering at Lancaster, I was invited to a Wesak celebration at the Samatha Centre in Manchester. Not quite knowing what it was all about I went along anyway, and I saw Buddhist monks for the first time: Ajahn Sumedho, Ajahn Viradhammo and several newly-ordained novices. That was in 1978, thirty years ago. Shortly after graduating I moved to Dundee to study for a master's degree, and again I met Ajahn Sumedho, who came at the invitation of the Dhamma group there, and I saw Luang Por Chah in Edinburgh on his last visit to Britain. After a few months in Glasgow, while hesitating to commit myself to undertaking a research degree, I went to spend a week at the recently-opened Chithurst monastery. There it became evident where my heart really was.

In the following years I found myself present at the inception of the other European branch monasteries: Harnham, while still an *anagarika*; Devon, as a newly-ordained monk; Amaravati for the first four years and then Dhammapala in Switzerland. In 1991 I was offered a ticket to Thailand and so, after ten years of Sangha life, I visited a Buddhist country for the first time. It was wonderful. I stayed for a year and found it a very enriching and formative experience. Somehow, though, I felt a stronger connection to the European monasteries, having been involved from the early days, seeing how much work had gone into them and being inspired and uplifted by the goodness and benefit that had been generated. Also, I don't know if I could have endured another hot season in Asia!

I've always gone to where I've been asked to go, or to where I've been invited; for me, this has worked out

well and I feel very grateful. I like to be in a situation where I can contribute something and so be part of it. Fifteen years ago I was invited to Italy by Ajahn Thanavaro, the Italian monk and founder of Santacittarama. Three years later he disrobed, and I stayed on, initially for a year and ... here I am still!

What is your relationship with the Sangha in the UK?

Do you have regular contact? Every year I go to the UK at least twice, to visit the monasteries and attend the Elders' Council meetings, and to spend some time with my parents in York. I feel a strong bond to the Sangha in the UK, and appreciate being able to maintain a close connection.

Have you had to become fluent in Italian? Do you speak Italian within the monks' community at Santacittarama?

My Italian is reasonably good. There's room for improvement, I'm sure, but I can also see a self-deprecating tendency at work there. Generally I receive a lot of praise for my use of the language – although the English accent I can't seem to shake off tends to amuse people. Soon after arriving it became clear that if I really wished to help I needed to learn the language, and I had come with that intention. Having previously put a fair amount of effort into learning German while in Switzerland, and then Thai, but not really getting to the point of being able to put them to much use, I was determined to take it further with Italian. After less than three years I could give a simple Dhamma talk, doing my first weekend retreat in Italian – but then when I found myself in hospital and was presented with a menu I had no clue what was on it! The resident community is quite international, so we mainly speak English amongst ourselves.

As the abbot, do you teach the monks who live with you? What is your role at Santacittarama?

Usually we have several senior monks here, a middling monk who trained in the UK and one or two 'home-grown' junior



monks, novices and anagarikas trained here in Italy. My role is mainly that of senior monk – ‘abbot’ sounds a bit grand, especially in this context – but is something I hold fairly lightly, consulting with the Sangha on many things, but being a reference point for the laypeople and for overseeing the training of the junior members of the community. I feel it’s important to keep my own practice as the priority and allow everything else to flow from that, adapting to what is appropriate according to time and place, rather than identifying too much with a specific role. It’s an ongoing process of learning how to take responsibility without letting it become a burden.

In what ways do you provide teaching for laypeople? How do you find using a second language affects your teaching? People come from all over Italy and beyond to have a taste of monastic life, and often there are as many as six or eight guests at a time. So this is one way: by simply providing the opportunity to live in such a lovely and conducive setting, free of many worldly distractions, in the company of the Sangha. People appreciate this very much. There’s not a great deal of formal teaching; not having a large enough indoor space, it’s difficult to provide for that. Usually there’s an evening talk on Observance days and, during the warmer months when we use a large marquee, there are meditation classes and thematic day-long retreats. Most days I have tea with the guests and day visitors, when they may ask questions and teaching happens more informally.

Teaching in a second language does mean that I have to keep it more simple, and to be really clear about what I’m trying to say. Perhaps it also forces people to listen more carefully! You also realize how rich the English language is – often it’s difficult to find the right word in Italian. For example, there is no exact equivalent of ‘restraint’, and I still find myself struggling to translate the term ‘going forth’.

Do you spend much time teaching retreats outside the monastery or are you mostly occupied teaching the community at Santacittarama? Most of my time is spent in the monastery, and maybe I’m away about ten weeks in an average year. I think it’s important not to be away too much, to be able to offer a sense of continuity and stability. On the other hand it’s good to know

that I can be away and not have to worry about it. Several years ago I was able to take a ‘sabbatical’ of around nine months, and everything went fine, although the community seemed glad to have me back.

I do some visiting of groups and teaching retreats here and there and tend to give priority to the south of Italy, where there is not a lot happening but where there is genuine interest in Dhamma. I go to Sardinia and Bari every year, and I’ve been to Sicily a couple of times. There is a Theravada-oriented retreat centre in the North, near Piacenza, where I teach most years and I also visit Milan and Padua on a regular basis. Since 1999 I’ve been going to Slovenia nearly every year, giving public talks and leading retreats; I’m very fond of the country and people and would be delighted to see them have their own branch monastery one day.

Have you noticed differences in the way you teach when in different European countries? I do notice that temperaments vary in different countries and inevitably that affects how you feel and what you put out, but I find that it’s something more spontaneous and intuitive rather than deliberate. It feels very different if those you are talking to are friendly and receptive, or if they seem dull and disinterested; or if they’re calm and attentive rather than excitable and distracted.

How is Buddhism received in Italy? Have you met with problems? From my experience, Buddhism is held in high regard in Italy, and I haven’t encountered any problems that come to mind. It has certainly become much better known in the time that I’ve been here. The film *The Little Buddha*, made by an Italian director, triggered off a veritable explosion of interest when it came out not long after my arrival, and it was almost too much to deal with at the time. Recent events in Burma have sparked off an interest in Theravada Buddhism in particular.

The Roman Catholic Church is much more influential in Italy than, say, the Church of England is in the UK. Does that make a difference? Being in a culture where Christian monks and nuns are commonplace, how does it affect how you as Buddhist monks are received? All over the country, but especially in Rome, monks and nuns of different nationalities and wearing different coloured habits are quite a common sight. It seems to me that there’s a general sense of respect for religious



‘So whether you’re talking about the Dhamma or listening to it, you needn’t wonder where the Dhamma is: it’s right here. No matter where you go to study the Dhamma, it’s really in the mind. The mind is the one who clings, the mind is the one who speculates, the mind is the one who transcends, who lets go. ...

To talk about the Dhamma we use similes, because the Dhamma has no form. Is it square or is it round? You can’t say. Don’t think that the Dhamma is far away from you. It lies right with you, all around. Take a look ... one minute happy, the next sad, the next angry ... it’s all Dhamma. Look at it and understand. Whatever it is that causes suffering you should remedy. ...

If you practise like this you will have *sati* at all times, in all postures. With *sati*, recollection, and *sampajañña*, self awareness, you will know right and wrong, happiness and suffering. Knowing these things, you will know how to deal with them. ’

Luang Por Chah

people that goes across the board. We have made friends with Franciscan friars – there are several important sanctuaries in this province, places where Saint Francis actually stayed – and a Benedictine monk from the local abbey has become a frequent and much-loved visitor.

In the UK, school groups often visit the monasteries since religious education is required in the schools. Is it the same in Italy? It does happen, not to the same extent as in the UK, but it is growing and we get more and more enquiries. Rome’s city council sponsored the making of a documentary on DVD about non-Catholic religions, to be distributed to all schools in the area. They came here to film the Buddhist section. Every year a priest in Rome who teaches in a state school brings a large group of students; they offer the meal and stay for several hours, listening to an introductory talk and asking questions. There is also a Korean professor in a Catholic university that comes every year with a group of mature students, mostly priests, monks and nuns.

What do you find attracts people to the monastery? It’s probably much the same as the other monasteries and varies from person to person. Some only come for the major celebrations such as Wesak and Kathina, finding it uplifting to connect to the wider spiritual community and meeting old friends. Others come when it’s quieter, seeing the monastery more as a sanctuary, a conducive environment where they can allow their minds to settle and contemplate their lives, free of many of the distractions and pressures of the modern world. Some are definitely seeking to understand what it’s all about and have many questions, others wish to learn how to live more peacefully and harmoniously. At times people make it clear that they are Catholic but feel that there is something here that they can learn and benefit from. ☸



A message from Ajahn Thaniya

Friends in Dhamma,

As I am intending to leave the Monastic Community in April I wish to express my appreciation for the support I have received since I joined the community in England. These 17 years I have found fruitful and I am aware how dependent they were on so much generous support from the monastic and lay communities. My many dear friends from this time I treasure.

What brings us into the monastic life, what takes some of us out again, these are mysterious processes. Maybe it is now sufficient to say this feels the next movement in my path’s unfolding. It feels ‘right’, in accordance with conditions.

Wherever I find myself, I hope I can share in some quiet way the blessings I have received and my ever-deepening love for the Buddha-Dhamma. May the Sangha continue to thrive.

May all beings be freed from all *dukkha*,

Thaniya



SANGHA

Wesak Celebrations 2008 – Sunday, May 18th

This year Vesakha Puja, or Wesak, is on May 19th. Celebrations at the monasteries will be held on Sunday, May 18th, beginning from after 10 am.

AMARAVATI

Lay resident opportunities

Kitchen manager

If you have an interest to live and practise with the community as a kitchen manager for up to a year or more from June 2008 onwards, please apply to the Amaravati Secretary.

Retreat Centre manager

There will be a vacancy for Household / Maintenance manager from October 2008. Some DIY experience is necessary and we are looking for a minimum commitment of one year. If you are interested please email / write to the Retreat Centre, at Amaravati.

Family events

Rainbows Weekend: May 2–5th

June Weekend: June 27–29th

Family Camp: August 16–25th

To book for these three events please contact:
David Lillywhite

147 Whyteladies Lane, Cookham, Berkshire,
SL6 9LF, UK – Tel: (+44) (0)1628 810 083
email: daddydavid@talktalk.net

Young Person Retreat: November 21–23rd

Creative Retreat: December 19–21st

Booking forms and further information about these and all family events can be downloaded from

www.family.amaravati.org

or contact: familyevents@amaravati.org

Amaravati lay events 2008

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA):

These events provide an opportunity to practise together and explore themes relevant to daily life. Events are led by experienced lay-teachers. All are welcome.

Days of Practice (DoP) – no need to book
9.45am for 10–5pm (Please bring food to share)

Retreats – advanced booking essential
5:30pm Fri. – 4pm on the last day.

April 11–13 th	Weekend Retreat	(Chris)
May 31 st	DoP	(Martin)
July 11–15 th	5-Day Retreat	(Nick)
August 9 th	DoP	(Alison)
September 6 th	DoP	(Martin)
October 17–19 th	Weekend Retreat	(Martin)
November 1 st	DoP	(Nick)
December 6 th	DoP	(Chris)

Please check for late programme changes on our

website: www.buddhacommunity.org

Retreat booking forms may be downloaded from there.

CITTAVIVEKA

Tort Pa Ba – June 15th

Support for the Cloister

Last year a group of Lao and Thai supporters picked up the project to complete the cloister that runs between the Dhamma Hall and the Main House at Cittaviveka. Apart from the material construction, they hope this will provide an opportunity for supporters of the monastery to come together as a community. Which is what is happening. Last year, due to the good will and



efforts of many folk, not only were funds raised, but also ad hoc work parties tiled the roof of the new structure. So the Cloister is gradually creeping along a few metres at a time to provide cover and a lovely meditation space around the walled garden. This year an almsgiving ceremony (Tort Pa Ba) dedicated to funding the Cloister project is planned at the monastery on June 15th.

If you'd like to help out, please contact:

Pichit Rhatdanaglang 01273 473906

Phongsak Kaewsakun 01273 733246

Phouang Prasith 01903 531031 or 0773 335 8225

David Glendining 01273 723378

Kampi Phomla 01202 394060 or 778 304 0518

Dr Thisara Niyadurupola 01903 238343

Or come for the day to meet Sangha and friends, meditate and look around the monastery.

SANGHA WALKS

Return to the long road

This year is the 25th anniversary of the walk made by Ajahn Amaro and Nick Scott from Chithurst to Harnham, an account of which was published in the book *A Long Road North*. Ajahn Amaro and Nick intend to repeat some of the walk this year and would like to revisit anyone they met on the original walk. They are also open to invitations from anyone living on the route who would like them to stop by. Please write to Nick at nickscott@amaravati.org.

Walking Retreat at The Sneepe,

Tarset, Northumbria, 14–20th September 2008.

Led by Ajahn Abhinando. Three full days meditation alternating with 3 full days walking in the Northumberland hills. For information and booking please contact Micky Macgregor at mm@gibbonsolicitors.co.uk

or by post at The Sneepe, Tarset, Hexham, Northumberland NE48 1RN.

ARUNA RATANAGIRI

Auditor

The Trustees of Harnham Monastery are looking for a volunteer chartered accountant to audit the Trust accounts once a year. If you are interested, please contact the monastery on (01661) 881 612 or by email at sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk.

Caretaker/guest house manager

At Aruna Ratanagiri we are looking for a new caretaker / guest house manager. Applicants need to be male, fluent in English, comfortably familiar with Theravada Buddhist monastic practice, and able with general repair work. Also, they will need to have a clean driver's licence and be able to commit for at least one year. The caretaker will receive without charge: a single room, two meals a day, the opportunity to participate in retreats and the opportunity to participate in daily meditations. Email us from our contact page on www.ratanagiri.org.uk or phone us on (0166) 188 1612.

Retreats

With the new Kusala Guest House functioning we are now able to offer more retreats and other events at Harnham. For information and booking please visit www.kusalahouse.org

Kusala House Retreats 2008

Women's Retreat * May 2–5th

A retreat for women will be offered from 2–5th May. Led by Ajahn Anandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta from Amaravati.
FULLY BOOKED

Men's Retreat * May 25–31st

A retreat for men will be offered from 25–31st May. Led by Ajahn Munindo and Ajahn Abhinando. Volunteers for cooking are needed. *CAMPING SPACES ONLY*

Weekend Retreat * July 4–6th

A weekend retreat will be offered from 4–6th July. Led by Ajahn Jayanto.

Summer Retreat * August 3–9th

A summer retreat will be offered from 3rd–9th August. Led by Ajahn Munindo and Ajahn Abhinando. *RESERVE LIST ONLY*

Women's Retreat * Sept 26–30th

A retreat for women will be offered from 26th–30th September. Led by Ajahn Candasiri.

For information and booking for all retreats please contact Kath Ann Jones at :

kusalaretreats08@gmail.com
or by phone at 0120 7283361

CONTACTS AND PRACTICE VENUES

AMARAVATI RETREATS

ENGLAND

Bath	Anne Armitage	(01225) 859219
Banbury	Sarah Wallis	(01295) 278744
Bedford	David Stubbs	(01234) 720892
Berkshire	Anthea West	(01189) 798101
Brighton	Sam Halter	(07888) 821524
Bristol	Lisa Daix	(0117) 935 0272
Cambridge	Dan Jones	(01223) 246257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	(01227) 463342
Carlisle	Jean Nelson	(01228) 546259
Chichester	Tony Halter	(01243) 672126
Cookham, nr. Maidenhead	Emily Tomalin or David Lillywhite	(01628) 810083
Hemel Hempstead Bodhinyana Group:	Chris Ward	(01442) 890034
Kendal Fellside Centre, Low Fellside:	Sumedha	(01539) 729793
Leeds Area	Daniela Loeb	(01132) 791375
	Anne Grimshaw	(01274) 691447
Liverpool	Ursula Haeckel	(0151) 427 6668
London Hampstead, 1 Hillside (Rm. 6)	London NW5, (Entrance in Highgate Rd):	
	Caroline Randall	(0208) 348 0537
	Ann Booth	(0207) 485 0505
London Buddhist Society,	58 Eccleston Square, London SW1	(0207) 834 5858
Leigh-on-sea	Liamanda Webb	(01268) 654923
Newcastle	Ian Plagaro-Neill	(0191) 469 2778
Newent-Gloucs.	John Teire	(01531) 821902
	email: john.teire@virgin dot net	
Newmarket	Richard & Rosie Pragnell	(01638) 603286
	email: rpragnell@gmail dot com	
Norwich	Robert Coggan	(01953) 451741
Penzance	Lee	(01736) 762135
Portsmouth	Medhavi	(02392) 732280
Redruth	Vanessa	(01209) 214031
Sheffield	Greg Bradshaw	(0114) 262 1559
	email: greg.bradshaw@btclick dot com	
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati)	(01305) 786821
Southampton	Robert Elliot	(02380) 612838
Steining, Sussex	Jayanti	(01903) 812130
Stroud	John Groves	(07967) 777742
Surrey-Woking	Rocana	(01483) 761398
Taunton	Annie Fisher	(01278) 457245
Teeside	John Doyle	(01642) 587274
Totnes	James Whelan	(01803) 865667

OUTSIDE ENGLAND

Co. Clare, Ireland: Sunyata Centre		(+353) 61 367 073
Cork, Ireland	Paddy Boyle	(+353) 21 462 2964
Dublin	Rupert Westrup	(+353) 01 280 2832
Edinburgh	Neil Howell	(0131) 226 5044
Glasgow	James Scott	(0141) 637 9731
Machynlleth, Wales	Angela Llewellyn	(0165) 051 1350
Pembrokeshire, S. Wales	Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson	(01239) 820790
A Coruna, Spain	David Williams	(+34) (981) 432 718

INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

Workshops at AMARAVATI
Saturday afternoons 2–4 p.m.

Meditation instruction for beginners,
with an opportunity for questions and dialogue
Feel free to come along — no booking is necessary

Classes are in the Bodhinyana Meditation Hall

Retreat Schedule 2008

R1	18–20	April	Weekend	*Ajahn Gandhasilo
R2	25–29	April	5 Days	*Ajahn Ariyasilo
R3	9–18	May	10 Days	**Luang Por Sumedho
R4	23–25	May	Weekend	*Ajahn Anando
R5	6–15	June	10 Days	*Ajahn Vimalo
R6	20–22	June	Thai Weekend	*Ajahn Ratanawanno
R7	4–8	July	5 Days	*Ajahn Thanasanti
R8	18–20	July	Weekend	*Ajahn Santacitta
R9	1–5	August	5 Days	*Ajahn Jayanto
R10	12–24	Sept.	13 Days	*Luang Por Sumedho
R11	3–12	October	10 Days	*Ajahn Candasiri
R12	24–28	October	5 Days	*Ajahn Anandabodhi
R13	7–16	Nov.	10 Days	*Ajahn Sucitto
R14	28–30	Nov.	Weekend	*Ajahn Karuniko
R15	12–14	Dec.	Weekend	Ajahn Thitamedha
R16	27–1	Jan 2009	6 Days	*Ajahn Sundara

* Retreat full – waiting list in operation ~ Thai speakers only

**Retreat full – waiting list closed

General Guidelines

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat.

Booking Procedure

Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form, which can be obtained by:

- Downloading from the website;
- Emailing or writing to the Retreat Centre.

Please note that bookings **cannot** be made over the telephone.

Start and Finish Times

Registration is from 16.00 – 19.00 on the first day of the retreat. The orientation talk is at 19:15. Weekend retreats end at 16.00, longer retreats at lunchtime. Attendance is expected for the whole retreat.

Donations

No advance booking fee is required. The Retreat Centre is funded solely through donations. Donations are invited at the end of the retreat.

Contact Information

Retreat Centre, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 3BZ UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1442 843 239

Email: retreats@amaravati dot org

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

A Study of The Majjhima Nikaya by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Dhamma Threads is pleased to announce the release of a course of 123 lectures on the Majjhima Nikaya, given by Bhikkhu Bodhi, editor and translator of many of the works of the Pali Canon.

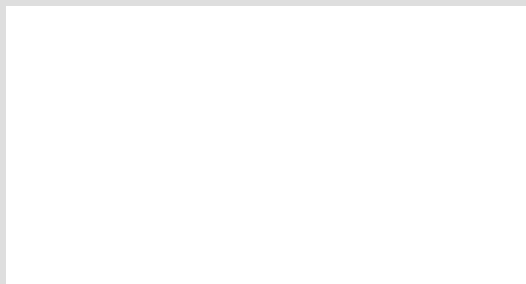
The course is available on a DVD containing all 123 talks in MP3 format and additional material such as course notes to accompany the talks. The discs are available at no charge from the website www.DhammaThreads.org and are available either as 1DVD, or a set of 3 CDs which can be played with an MP3/CD player.

Ajahn Candasiri

will lead a **6 Day Retreat** in the Czech Republic at Josefuv Dul, North Bohemia from **20–26th July, 2008**
Contact: Buddha Mangala, Churanovska 5, 150 00 Praha 5, Czech Republic
email: mangala@buddha dot cz



Forest Sangha Newsletter



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

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OBSERVANCE DAYS Moon phase ● NEW ◐ HALF ○ FULL ● HALF

These days are traditionally given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome: contact the individual monasteries for specifics, as routines vary.

Month	Day	Phase		
APRIL	5 (Sat)	13 (Sun)	20 (Sun)	28 (Mon)
MAY	4 (Sun)	12 (Mon)	19 (Mon)*	27 (Tue)
JUNE	3 (Tue)	11 (Wed)	18 (Wed)	26 (Thu)
JULY	2 (Wed)	10 (Thu)	17 (Thu)*	25 (Fri)

* Vesakha Puja (Wesak) * Asalha Puja

This year the monasteries invite you for

Vesakha Puja Celebrations

WESAK 2008

on Sunday, May 18th

Beginning after 10 am

ASSOCIATED MONASTERIES

BRITAIN

Amaravati Monastery

St Margaret's, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ
Office:

Tel: +44 (0144) 284 2455
Fax: (0144) 284 3721
Retreat Info: 284 3239

www.amaravati.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust

Aruna Ratanagiri

Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland
NE20 0HF

Tel: +44 (0166) 188 1612
Fax: (0166) 188 1019
www.ratanagiri.org.uk
sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk
Stewards: Magga Bhavaka Trust

Hartridge Monastery

Upottery, Honiton, Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (0140) 489 1251
www.hartridgemonastery.org
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust

Cittaviveka

Chithurst Buddhist Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield, Hampshire GU31 5EU
Tel: (0173) 081 4986
Fax: (0173) 081 7334
www.cittaviveka.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust

ITALY

Santacittarama

Località Brulla, 02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)
Tel: +39 (0765) 872 186
Fax: +39 (06) 233 238 629
www.santacittarama.org
Stewards: Santacittarama Association

SWITZERLAND

Dhammapala

Buddhistisches Kloster Am Waldrand, CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 6 752 100
Fax: 033 / 6 752 241
www.dhammapala.org
Stewards: Dhammapala 31921-201-5

U.S.A.

Abhayagiri Monastery

16201 Tomki Road, Redwood Valley, CA 95470
Tel: +1 (707) 485 1630
Fax: +1 (707) 485 7948
www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: Sanghapala Foundation

CANADA

Tisarana Buddhist Monastery

1356 Powers Road, RR #3 Perth, Ontario K7H 3C5
Tel: +1 (613) 264 8208
www.tisarana.ca
Stewards: Tisarana Buddhist Monastery

Arrow River Forest Hermitage

Box 2, RR 7, Site 7 Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 5V5
Tel: +1 (647) 477 5919
www.arrowriver.ca

Birken Forest Monastery

PO Box 5 Knutsford, B.C. V0E 2A0
Tel: +1 (778) 785 6059
meditate@birken.org
<http://birken.ca>

AUSTRALIA

Bodhinyana Monastery

216 Kingsbury Drive, Serpentine 6125 WA
Tel: +61 (08) 95 252 420
Fax: +61 (08) 95 253 420

Bodhivana Monastery

780 Woods Point Road, East Warburton, Victoria. 3799
Tel: +61 (0) 359 665 999
Fax: +61 (0) 359 665 998

Dharmaloka Buddhist Centre (Perth)

18-20 Nanson Way, Nollamara 6061 WA
Tel: +61 (08) 9345 1711
Fax: +61 (08) 9344 4220
www.bswa.org.au
Stewards: Buddhist Society of Western Australia

Santi Forest Monastery

Lot 6 Coalmines Road, PO Box 132 Bundanoon, 2578 NSW
tel: +61 (0)2 4883 6331
fax: +61 (0)2 8572 8286
website: <http://santifm1.0.googlepages.com>
santioffice@gmail.com

NEW ZEALAND

Bodhinyanarama Monastery

17 Rakau Grove, Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt 5019,
tel: +64 (0)4 563 7193
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz
Stewards: Wellington Theravada Buddhist Association

Vimutti Monastery

PO Box 7 Bombay 2343
+64 (0)9 236 6816
vimutti.atba@gmail.com
www.vimutti.org.nz
Stewards: Auckland Theravada Buddhist Association

THAILAND

Wat Pah Nanachat

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

To receive the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* in Thailand, please write to Amaravati.