



FOREST SANGHA

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Amaravati



Family Camp

Newsletter	2	Young people	8	Leaving	14
Arrival	3	Monkey Mickey	9	Last word	16
FC Dhamma	4	Spiritual friendship	10	Grapevine	18
Overview	6	Memories	12	Retreats	19

Newsletter

APRIL HAS COME, ANOTHER YEAR GONE; nature rises, birth and growth prominent. As the monastic communities in Europe emerge from their own winter retreats, movement and activity begin amongst them again, with annual meetings of the senior monks and nuns, retreats and other offerings of the Sangha which augment our day-to-day life of practice.

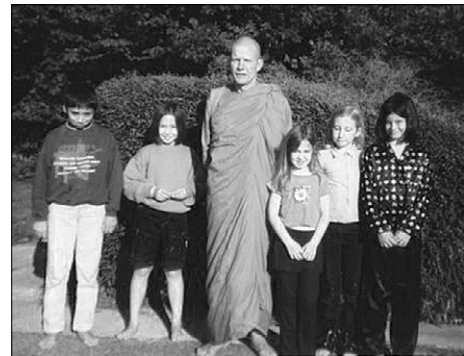
Much of this involves the ways in which Theravada Buddhist monasteries, being dependent on the involvement and support of a lay community, are not closed hideaways cloistered from the world, but are open to people of all stripes and sizes to come along in, stop for an hour or a day (or longer), make use of the sanctuary or get involved in some other way. This means families are welcome, and one of the familiar features of life in a monastery is the regular presence of people of all ages, old and young, who may each find something here all their own to value.

Part of the initial vision for Amaravati when the Sangha moved in in 1984, was that the spacious facilities would provide opportunities for more lay involvement than could take place at Chithurst. Thus the Retreat Centre became a part of Amaravati, and it has hosted retreats for much of every year since then. It has also allowed for more opportunities for families: a residential stay of anywhere from a weekend to nine days.

These Family Events revolve around the summer Family Camp: nine days in August where the area of the monastery around the Retreat Centre and into the wide-open field is full of children, families and fun. This issue of the newsletter is a special one dedicated to sharing a taste of this, and what it has meant to those involved. Samanera Amaranatho, who has been in the community nearly ten years and has responsibility for organizing and running all Family Events, and Sister Cittapala who helps him, prepared the material on the following pages.

As Ven. Amaranatho notes on p. 16, the spaces available for the Camp are limited by our resources, and by this time of year each summer's Camp is usually full. However, more information about family opportunities as well as various resources for young people can always be found by visiting the website Ven. Amaranatho maintains for Family Events: www.family.amaravati.org.

May you be well,
Bhikkhu Jayanto



Ajahn Kusalo and children in the 1990s



Note to our subscribers in Thailand

We found out recently that last year the newsletter was not copied and distributed as usual, due to a change of address for our distributor ... our apologies for that if you missed a few issues.

As always, you can find all back issues of the FSN on our website, www.fsnewsletter.org (under Back Issues).

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

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Glossary – See page 17

Family Camp



First Memories

Tim Hagyard recounts arriving for the first time at the Amaravati Family Camp

SINCE 1996 THE FAMILY CAMP HAS BECOME THE FIXED POINT around which the rest of our year is planned. We went to Amaravati Monastery, my wife Torn, daughter Justine (6) and son Francis (4) that year, excited if apprehensive, for an event that we had little knowledge of apart from the *Rainbows* magazine and some interesting accounts in the *Forest Sangha Newsletter*. A few memories of that first afternoon and evening still remain.

First, there was a warm reception from Wendy who was doing the bookings role; we registered our arrival and found out where we were sleeping and what the basic programme for the day was. I wish I could say that as bookings officer in later years I had organized such a welcome reception for new arrivals.

Then there was a helpful and polite young boy from the family staying in the bedroom opposite us. He showed us around the Retreat Centre, which he seemed quite at home with, and he also mentioned 'Puja' at 7.30 as if it was the most natural thing. What was that? Oh, when we all get together in the shrine room. That was Josh.

Finally, the gathering for our first Evening Puja. I wondered how this would work with two tired and restless youngsters. We sat together as a family that evening. The chanting started up, ninety people or so in that confined space – what a sound and resonance. It didn't need any translation. I remember Justine leaning across to me excitedly and whispering 'I love this, Daddy'. The Camp was led by Venerable Kusalo in those days and he

proceeded to expand on the Camp theme of *The Worldly Winds* and the role in life of what he coined as 'squirts' – those 'beings' (unexpected happenings) which have a habit of popping up and changing things just when we think it's settled. So not a bad first Puja; Pali chanting, squirts ... and then we heard that young Oliver had broken his nose in a corridor collision!

It would take an age to cover the memorable moments, the highs and lows of the Family Camps over the years and it would still not do it justice; but through the years, squirts and all, there has been a steady growing in awakened community that has sustained this particular family, and for that I know we have been truly blessed. Family campers are a very special group for me – as our song says, *we are all one family*.

May all beings be well and free from suffering. ཐཱ་ཨོཾ་མཆོག་ལོ་ལོ་སྐྱོད་ཤིང་།



Family Camp Dhamma

TODAY THE FAMILY CAMP ENDED. A week ago, a mushrooming of tents appeared. I had been on solitary retreat, and just as it ended the Family Camp started. As I was moving from the yurt in the meadow where I spent my retreat to my room, along the way there was an eruption of colour and children, people, bonfires, music and singing. It was a lovely way to reemerge from my time alone.

This past week I've been receiving the meal *dana* from the Family Camp and having my breakfasts there. And I've been noticing the 'teaching' that the Family Camp has given me over the years. This year is the most involved I've been in it so far; in previous years I would look in a bit, maybe come to the bonfire once or twice, and not get too involved. That was because being in the presence of so many families as someone who's renounced family life brings up a lot of different feelings.

Over the years I would hear critical voices in my mind. The Family Camp when I first came was quite organized, there were classes and you'd come to this and come to that. Gradually people realized that this is their holiday: the kids have that all the time in school, they have to come to class, they have to be accountable – and just maybe they want more freedom during their holidays. So there are still activities going on in the Camp these days, but it's become more and more creative. People's individual interests are what motivate them rather than being told now it's time to learn this or time to do that. I'd notice how my mind would judge that: 'There really should be more structure and they shouldn't be allowed to just do what they want ...' It was like the voice of my conditioning towards myself that says you should do this and you shouldn't do that. And I noticed that this year that voice did not arise once. How nice it is to be able to listen to the voices of conditioning without acting on them, enough times for them to eventually die away. Then there's a sense of freedom to enjoy things as they are.

So I noticed this year with the Family Camp how there's been a kind of healing in my own heart. There have been times I wouldn't go to the Camp because I'd see all the little children, and the part of me that will never be a mother couldn't quite cope with that. It was too strong, the sense of 'This is what I've renounced.' But I appreciate the fact that I can't hide away in the monastery and never be confronted with the things I've chosen to give up. For a little time each year it all appears, and I can really look at: what is it that I've given up, what does it mean, what does it feel like, and do I really want to? This year there's a feeling of being very happy to have done what I've done,

happy in the life that I've chosen.

And I feel great *mudita* (joy in the good fortune of others) for the families who come here. I've known some of the young adults on the Camp since they were babies or little toddlers. They've had the good fortune to be born into Buddhist families in a country which is not Buddhist, so they've had contact with the Sangha and Buddhist teachings over the years, and many of them now come to the Young Persons' Retreats and practise meditation. They are young people: creative, they wear their funky clothes and do the things teenagers do, but they also have a deep respect for the sacred and for the Sangha. Some of them have been on pilgrimage in India together and to other countries. Two of them had just been back in Britain for 11 days when the Family Camp started, and they spoke about how difficult it is to return to a society where the sense of the sacred is not present, and what a relief it is to come to Amaravati where people are living within the context of Dhamma; that how generally in society people are living within the context of consumerism and image and personality. So it's heartening to see the organic process of the Family Camp over the years, which at times can look like it's not really working. Something's touching these people on a deep level, becoming part of their lives, and as they grow they take that into the world and their relationships with the people they meet.

In the experience of the Family Camp there's the coming together of families and new members being born, but another aspect of the Camp is a reflection on death. On the last evening of the Camp, everyone there along with some of the Sangha go to the Buddha Grove together and circumambulate the little *stupa* there and offer incense. It's become a time to reflect on death. This has been so since early on, when during the Camp one of the children died. It was such a shock for this baby, so full of life, to suddenly die. The infant was brought back to the monastery and his body laid out. The parents all got together and tried to work out how they were going to tell the children about this terrible thing that had happened. And while they were talking about it ('How can we break it to them? What can we do?') the children themselves just went and had a look at the little body. They were open to the fact of death, they weren't traumatized or terrified by it. Because it is part of nature; they hadn't yet learned that this is something to be feared. Society teaches us that. So the children just took it in, drawing pictures and writing messages to the baby who had died.

There are a number of people in the Family Camp who've had a suicide in the family, or a parent or child

Ajahn Anandabodhi reflects on her own experience with the Family Camp in a Dhamma talk she gave to the monastic community at Amaravati at the end of last year's Camp



who has died. And last year, the day before the Camp ended, Alan died. Alan was one of our long-term lay residents and had many times been involved in the Camp, doing juggling and fire-breathing and Mr Clown acts, helping to entertain the children. He suffered from depression and last year didn't get involved at all. The day before he died some of the parents had learned a song about how we're all a river flowing back to the sea, and they stood outside his window and sung this song to him, bringing him a plate of cooked breakfast. The next day he took his life; he chose to leave. That evening the children drew pictures and wrote messages to Alan, and when we did the circumambulation in the Buddha Grove they brought these to the stupa, offering incense and also remembering others they'd known who had died.

Each year at the ending of the Family Camp it's a time for recollecting death, and those who've died and moved on. Even though there's almost never a quiet moment during the whole week of the Family Camp, even in the middle of meditations with just the parents (a child will come in who really really has to speak to Mum at *this* moment), at the time of the circumambulation everyone sits quietly, often for a long time, and takes in the fact of death and separation and loss. People sit together, the teenagers supporting each other, the friends of someone whose parent has died. People take care of each other, quietly.

I really appreciate this yearly visit of the families. I feel it keeps me in touch with people's lives and from being too removed as a *samana*. We can have high ideals about how a Buddhist practitioner should be, how a samana should be, how someone who's been practising for however many years should be. This can get in the way of being with the way things really are. I remember a woman on a retreat I was teaching who told me she didn't know what to do because she kept grieving for her late mother and her husband was telling her she wasn't practising correctly, she shouldn't be still grieving, she should be equanimous. She was trying hard to be equanimous from an idea of how one should be as a Buddhist practitioner. I tried to point out that as long as we're attached, as long as someone is dear to us, then we will naturally feel grief when we're parted from them. The Buddha clearly points this out: where there is one who is dear to us there will be sorrow and suffering because we have to be parted from them. Knowing this intellectually is limited; it's something we have to know deeply in the heart. It seems to me that the way we learn this is through life and death, through our direct experience of attachment, loving, separation and loss, and through knowing the pain of

separation and loss directly. Then, not by bypassing it or trying to convince ourselves that we shouldn't feel it, but by deeply experiencing that pain, this is how we can learn to let go.

The *brahmaviharas*, the four 'divine abidings', are aspects of love, of true love. *Metta*, being a sense of unconditional acceptance, applies to oneself as well as others. So as we experience our limitations and the reality which doesn't live up to our ideals, then *metta* is very important, a sense of kindness and acceptance with awareness. *Karuna*, compassion, is an obvious aspect of love. When we're not trying to defend ourselves, compassion is naturally present. Then *mudita*, joy for others' well-being – you see a lot of *mudita* on the Family Camp: sharing an experience together or appreciating someone else's drawings – and *upekkha*, equanimity, which is the highest form of love, at least this is how I understand it. It's the love that doesn't ask anything, but that accepts all things as they are.

In the monastic life we have to find a balance. If we have too much contact with family or with worldly conditions we can lose track of why we've come here and what we're doing. But also if we protect ourselves too much we can lose connection with loving-kindness, compassion and *mudita*, and we don't have the opportunity to develop equanimity in the particular areas awakened by that kind of contact with life. For myself, when entering the monastery there was a strong wish to get away from the life of suffering I had experienced before – and I could see the inherent suffering in looking for lasting happiness in the world. It was not that my life situations were so difficult but there was an inner disquiet that wouldn't leave me. I experienced a strong *vibhava tanha*, wanting to get away from, not wanting to be associated with, not wanting to be reborn.

As *samanas*, even though we leave our family, go forth from home to homelessness, from family life to living as mendicants, there is still the *kamma* we made with our families. So I feel fortunate to have had the guidance and opportunity to unravel some of the complicated knots. The holding and the guidance and support given in the Sangha enable that work to be done, if we choose to look in that direction. It gives us a chance to look deeply, let go of our attachments and move on, and not to sidestep or override them with wonderful ideals. I'd like to express my gratitude to the Sangha, and to the families who have been coming for so many years, and keep coming, and to my family also. I wish that each of us delves deeply and pulls out those knots and disentangles them. ❧

Overview



Samanera Amaranatho describes his approach to running the Amaravati Family Events

IMAGINE YOU'VE BEEN WORKING ALL DAY AT YOUR JOB, you pick up your children from school and drive along a busy motorway to Amaravati on a Friday afternoon. The Retreat Centre shrine room is full of mats on the floor, the Buddha-rupa glistening, words of encouragement on the walls, friends you can't wait to meet again and new friends to make. The heaviness of the day starts to wear off as some 60–100 people of all ages come together for up to nine days to share in community life. You'll be doing mostly the same things you do at home, wash, clean and cook, with added fun bits of singing, meditating, the odd video, a campfire and stories of the past. Imagine then lying down with all these people, old and young, and allowing the ground to support you while letting all those images float up and out, with Mother Earth to hold and witness you. So starts the Family Camp ...

Family Camps began at Amaravati soon after the monastery opened 25 years ago. As it's grown, the path the Camp has taken has followed that of the community under the influence of Ajahn Sumedho's teaching. I took over running the Camp after the very successful approach of Ajahn Kusalo, who many of the older teenagers still hold dear in their hearts. Following on from somebody can be difficult, and the Camp over the eight years I have run it has gone through some difficult times, which I think has helped us all grow in the Dhamma.

In addition to the main summer camp of nine days, we run various family events throughout the year: the Rainbows Weekend, which is used to create an online magazine; a weekend in June which provides an opportunity for new people to experience a family event; a Young



Persons' Retreat for 13–19 year-olds; and a Creative Weekend for those too old for the Young Persons' Retreat, both interested parents and older young people interested in moving towards doing a silent retreat. We also run a long weekend in Ireland for

Irish Buddhist families at the Sunyata Centre.

We usually begin each event with a welcoming puja and a way of introducing what's going to happen over the weekend, from Precepts to how heating systems work, from the Child Protection Policy to bedtimes (ho ho). We introduce the monastic and lay helpers and the theme. From the beginning I felt it was important to have a nun present so that it mirrors family dynamics for the young people, providing a container that includes both male and female energy. After many years, Sister Cittapala and I have developed a style of working together where we can support each other and the Camp.

I have been deeply influenced by Ajahn Sumedho's teaching of intuitive awareness, underpinned by psychotherapeutic models; and the more I run the Camp the deeper my understanding of how the two work together becomes. What we try to do in the Camp is share an exploration of awareness, from many different angles, using the Precepts as an agreement on how we're going to act together. We also include the 'shadow': the opposite or unsaid about something. With any theme we try to include its shadow; for example, when we explored the theme *Tradition*, which is about structure, we also acknowledged the energy of chaos. Without doing this, the theme of tradition could have been lost and chaos taken over.

We try also to facilitate an experience of awe or wonderment; to explore what the world is, or in the language of the Dhamma, what conditioned phenomena are. How do things arise and disappear? Each year Sister Cittapala and I select a theme for the family events, one which responds to the group. This year we will explore *The Four Noble Truths*. We determine the theme soon after the summer Camp and then use it ourselves for reflection during our personal retreats and the three-month monastic Winter Retreat. On the Family Camp website we provide an introduction to the theme, the *suttas* and commentaries from Buddhist teachers and anything else that might be useful, leaving it to the families to explore this before the Camp. I believe in not trying to teach Buddhism in an academic way, as there are many wonderful books on this; though at times we invite senior members of the community to give a reflection on the basics of Buddhism. Our approach is more a reflective



one. Although we may not explicitly describe the scriptural background of a theme, we use that to inform discussions and activities. Sister Cittapala has been very good at developing contemplative guided meditations, and we use these during Puja.

In the stressed, over-stimulated society they live in, what many kids and young people lack is the opportunity just to freely play and find out who they are without outside pressures. Very few activities are compulsory, including Puja; this is a parental decision. So sometimes pujas look a bit of a mess: a game here, somebody playing their Game Boy, a baby walking all around, a quiet bit of meditation, songs and so on. What is important to us is that the environment supports an open inquiry into what is. Developing this attitude of noticing things as they are allows one to be aware with whatever is happening, and this is helpful in family life (or in anybody's life).

On the Family Camp, given the number, the age ranges and the length (a hundred people, nine days), we do have a structure, timetable and activities. Last year we even had enough German speakers to do the morning chanting in German. We also have had families from Germany, Poland, the US and teachers from the Thawasi school in Thailand.

Allowing young people the opportunity to explore gives them the space to learn about freedom and responsibility. If I stay up all night, I might miss breakfast. It also gives them perhaps the first opportunity in their lives to recognize that they are already peaceful. The Retreat Centre and monastery has such a good ambience that

people attune to it. At the end of one Young Persons' Retreat we asked what some of the young people who had chosen not to attend anything had done with their time. One replied she had done her homework, since it was easier for her to do it at Amaravati because the place is so peaceful. To the critical mind, this is wrong: she has come to a Young Persons' Retreat and she should learn; whereas from my point view

what she said was good enough. Why? Because she recognized peace.

It's also useful to have some knowledge of the developmental stages of children and young people, so that you can understand their response to a situation according to where they are. Nine year old boys generally need rough and tumble and that's about all you are going to get. You can think, 'They're not learning anything, it's a bit of a waste of time.' A few years ago at the Young Persons' Retreat we had a large group of teenagers from the Family Camp and an equally large group from various schools and friends of friends. And we thought, if they're not attending anything they must know it. So we got the Family Camp young people to lead a puja and question and answer session – and it was amazing what they had picked up, about how to use the Precepts and live in a Western society and be a young Buddhist.

I don't want to paint a picture of young people all sitting in a line meditating, focusing on their breath, getting up in the morning to meditate when they're at home, even if this would be nice. What some can do is contemplate cause and effect, and try to be nice to one another and welcoming. We only see these young people for a maximum of about 20 days a year, and yet the impact of being in a compassionate space helps them. The young people are not frightened of the monastic helpers, they see the monastery as a place of refuge and peace, fun, joy and truthfulness, and this is hard to find these days.

The Young Persons' Retreat provides an opportunity to explore awareness and meditation in a deeper way. This year we had 42 young people (maybe 25 of whom had never before been to a monastery or practised meditation), eight helpers, a nurse, and much help from parents – some whose teens were too old to be there, and came anyway – in the kitchen. We just about got everybody into the Retreat Centre. So we explore with the young people how to reflect on their thinking, using meditation and activities. This then gives them an opportunity to see they don't have to just believe their thinking process, but can discover a deeper perspective. ❧



Samanera Amaranatho



About the Camp from the young people



Evening bonfire
at the Family Camp

I HAVE ATTENDED THE FAMILY CAMP ALMOST EVERY YEAR SINCE BIRTH. Therefore in the years between 1988 and 2008 the Family Camp has shaped my life. I met my best friends at Amaravati Family Camp, so even though I will probably never participate in the whole camp again, it will always remain part of my life. However far I drift away from Right Livelihood, the Family Camp always brings me back, not just through the Buddha's teachings but through the company of peers who are going through the very same experiences.

Essentially, the Family Camp has slowly injected a stream of Buddhist teaching into my life, year after year. It has allowed me to grow up surrounded by Buddhist culture. Not only have the teachings of the Amaravati

Family Camp provided a code of conduct but they have made me more open-minded through the acclimatization to Thai rituals, foods, and people. In this sense it has been a window into an alternative lifestyle that I can incorporate into my everyday life. I have strong memories from my early life at Amaravati; of the tepee and the absence of boundaries in the field, the feel of an eternal expanse. When 40 or so families gather and live together for a week in (imperfect) harmony

it shows that another world is possible. Walking into the kitchen and seeing not just a familiar face but someone you have grown up with; that feeling of comfort is rare in a world where movement and change is constant.

The Family Camp is one week of 52 when the monks and nuns, anagarikas, visitors and laypeople of Amaravati are disturbed, their patience tested, their equanimity questioned. For the monastery it is eight days of disruption; for us it is eight days of tranquillity. One of the busiest weeks in the Sangha's calendar is the week the family campers pause and reflect, stop the business of day to day life, and insulate themselves from society.

– Rosa

Campers past and present are asked, 'What is the Family Camp?'

'It was the only safe place I knew, a different vibe from school which wasn't safe and home which wasn't neutral. We were all kids and did what kids do, but we were outside of the terrifying stuff of adolescent hell and in a space where the calm was pervasive.'

'A week each year in which I belong to a group of safe hands; singing and dancing. I lie back onto the earth, tying knots into the long grass, forming a cocoon so that all I can see is my hands and the sky. My childhood woven into those reeds. We sit shoulder to shoulder, blankets enveloping us, looking into the bonfire, and I watch each of my cells replenishing. Filled with lentils and birthday cake, the circle of people lean into the heat, their faces washed in orange like embers. The mug of cocoa sits in my palms, I can hear those familiar chords again and I sit back and feel it with my whole body; compassion.'

'Amaravati Family Camp is an actual working utopia, it means for me the knowledge that it is possible to create a completely safe environment, so I will go through life knowing that there is an alternative to the way we live and it's not useless to attempt to change it.'





© nsjmetzger

Mickey



Deep in the jungles of Asia
Past the wide open Indian plain
There lives a teenage monkey
And Mickey is his name.

Now Mickey has this monkey mind
That forever jumps about
It's often full of fear and dread
And it's always full of doubt

If Mickey's given the simplest task
He'll only start to panic
He'll rant and rave and scream and shout
He really is quite manic

He bangs his chest and stamps his feet
And throws coconuts on the floor
But he really is a sad old sight
When he shouts, I can't take it any more.

You see Mickey has this type of mind
That forever seeks a thrill
He'll parachute and bungee jump
His mind is never still

One minute he's as high as a kite
The next he's in the dumps
And he plays that awful music
The kind that
thumps! and thumps! and thumps!

He plays new wave music and acid house
And punk and northern soul
Heavy metal and rhythm and blues
And rap and rock and roll.

No wonder Mickey's all stressed out
His mind can never rest
It makes him hyperactive
He really is a pest

But I feel sorry for poor old Mickey
He hasn't got a hope
The only way he gets through the day
Is by taking drugs and smoking dope

So that's Mickey's life story
And it really is a shame
But can anybody help him
Will he ever smile again

Well a very compassionate Buddha
Said to Mickey, 'You need to live a lot calmer
You don't need Prozac or Valium pills
You need a massive dose of Dhamma

But the first thing you must try and do
Is at least just level out
Do some walking meditation
And you'll end your fear and doubt

Now just take twenty paces
Along a walking track
Then turn around and take a deep breath
then twenty paces back'

So Mickey started walking
He'd walk both day and night
He would walk to try and find some peace
And end his mental plight

But it wasn't easy for Mickey
It was his hardest ever decision
But he's given up dope, and given up booze
And he's given up television

He's given up loud music
No more pop or rock or punk
Now he listens to the sweetest tones
Of a chanting Buddhist monk

Then one day the penny dropped
Now Mickey really understood
That he created all his suffering
Now he wants to do some good

For Mickey's now a very different monkey
Who loves swinging through the trees
He's always quite contented
He really is at ease

He'll help anyone who's injured
And anyone who's ill
He's given up bungee jumping
Now helping is his thrill

But if Mickey can be remembered
For just one redeeming feature
It's that he truly showed compassion
To every living creature

So if you want to change
Then there is no looking back
Just follow the Buddha's footsteps
And find a walking track

And for anyone out there
Of a nervous disposition
You don't need expensive councillors
Or some Harley street physician

Just take your example from Mickey
And you will live a lot calmer
Then throw away your potions and pills
AND TAKE A MASSIVE DOSE
OF DHAMMA !

© Gus Hales 2009

Gus Hales and his poems have become something of a hit at the summer camps. Over the years, Gus has shared with the Camp some of his personal journey from being a paratrooper in the Falklands war. At last year's Camp he showed a film of him going back to the Falklands, describing his story, along with other veterans who have suffered post-traumatic stress disorder.

The year before, Gus was given a Buddha image blessed by the Sangha and family campers and took it back to Mount Longdon where he lost many of his friends who were the same age as his daughter (17) and many of the young people on the Camp. You can read more about Gus and the video at www.family.amaravati.org/2008/summer#falk
- Ven. Amaranatho

Spiritual friendship – working with families as practice

Sister Cittapala

ONE DAY WHEN I WAS STILL AN ART TEACHER IN SCHOOL, a friend and colleague confessed to me that she wanted to resign. She felt that after 20 years of work, she had fulfilled her biological time span for caring for children. I started to wonder whether that could be true for me as well.

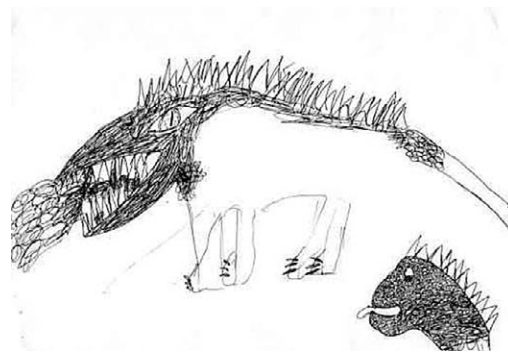
I remember how during the Winter Retreat of my second year of anagarika training at Amaravati, I suddenly realized that I didn't want to go back to school. My idea when I came to the monastery was to train as a novice for three years and then go back to school and be a wiser and happier teacher. Sitting in the Temple and meditating, it became clear to me that school was simply over – I didn't have to go back! Tears of relief flowed for days. I was surprised how strong my reaction was and that I hadn't dared to fully acknowledge or even feel my frustration with school before. How strong my identification as an art teacher must have been. After two years of monastic practice, my feeling of safety and confidence in monastic life had grown strong enough to let go of the identification with my professional life as a school teacher. It was so good to see one kind of suffering just ending. I decided to stay in the monastery and asked for ordination as a nun.

During these years, Venerable Kusalo was leading the family activities at Amaravati. I was half interested, sometimes watching how a Buddhist monk was teaching and playing with children, sometimes allowing myself to get drawn in, but always cautious not to get too involved: I didn't want to engage myself as a teacher again, as I felt that my old attitude of teaching was something to let go of. It was too painful and confusing: how can I want to teach somebody? I was tired of wanting to control and change children, making them do or learn something. Ajahn Sumedho's teaching was about 'the way it is' in this moment, not becoming or attaining anything in the future. I was learning something new, something which was

changing my attitude to life completely. Getting involved with family activities and teaching at this point seemed to be counterproductive.

Over the next years, Ajahn Kusalo left Amaravati, and Ajahn Assaji, who was supporting the Family Camp after him, left as well. Samanera Amaranatho was asked to organize the family events. He approached different Sangha members to get support. When he heard that I had been an art teacher, he asked me whether I was interested to contribute. I was still reluctant. But there was some curiosity as well: maybe it's time to experiment with how I could use my teaching and art skills as a means to allow families to explore the Dhamma?

I came up with some ideas for the Young Persons' Retreat, suggesting drawings to let the teenagers observe directly how thinking and imagination can be used to produce either fear or confidence – by first drawing the most ferocious and frightening dragon they could think of, and then drawing a sweet looking, cuddly one. This exercise was meant as an example to gain consciousness of how we actually make choices to create the world we are believing in. I was pleased with my idea. At that time Ven. Amaranatho and I were still convinced that all activities during



the Young Persons' Retreat had to be compulsory. So all teenagers had to attend this Dhamma-art activity. And of course, what happened was that some of them were interested, others weren't. Those who were interested tuned in and engaged, coming up with impressive drawings and insights and contributing with insightful conversations; those who were not interested either pretended interest when they felt watched by me and dropped the pencil when I turned my back, or even bluntly refused to participate at all and distracted those who were interested. I found myself back in a typical – and for me painful – school situation, the world which I wanted to leave behind, where I followed a system in which young people were forced to do something they were simply not



interested in. My assumption that all these teenagers were coming to Amaravati because they wanted to engage and learn the Dhamma and that my efforts were appreciated was shattered. Half of them simply wanted to hang out with each other and were not interested in exploring the Dhamma, so it seemed. I was disappointed.

After this weekend retreat, I told Ven. Amaranatho that I was not going to continue with this kind of teaching. I even cried. My old and deep frustration from teaching those who seemed not to be interested and who would dismiss my efforts welled up. Ven. Amaranatho looked at me and asked, 'Any expectations, Sister?' I looked at him in disbelief, mind blank. And then it clicked: yes – thank you – I am here to learn myself, however the teenagers respond. And thank you to the frustration, which shows where my attachment lies, where I am not open to 'the way it is'. So, with a new interest to learn for myself, I started to engage more in supporting the family activities – with quite mixed feelings, to be honest.

Since then, the family activities have been blessing me with many opportunities to meet my fears, frustrations and anger, buried under layers of a well-controlled teacher-personality, which is still in the process of reluctantly falling apart. What can I do? I can't help it, I inevitably bring in my conditioning from the past: the *trying* to make it work, resisting what I don't want, and the wish to be appreciated for what I am doing That's the stuff I have to work with. Always when this trying or resisting takes hold of me, I can feel myself getting tense and disconnected, and the pain of it. I stop criticizing myself for it. Awareness is enough, and then there can be a shift: moments of letting go, with feelings of relief and joy and freedom. Slowly I learn to appreciate the uncontrolled moments flowing along, with an experience of joy, curiosity, connection and expansiveness. Awareness of 'what is' is a remedy and allows healing to happen, knowing and trusting the not-knowing as I go along.

An example? A two-year-old boy has been crawling over to me during Evening Puja, while Ven. Amaranatho is explaining something, and he sits down in front of the bell, grabs the wooden stick and excitedly discovers

that he can hit the bell with it and produce great sounds. Not sure whether I should do something about it, I am fascinated and watch his great learning experience – until I get a stare from Amaranatho, which I interpret as 'stop it'. What to do? My first reflex is to take the stick away. That's how I am conditioned from my childhood. And yet, as my hand takes the other end of the stick, it doesn't feel right. Taking the stick away from him would not only feel unkind but would undoubtedly result in a big screaming disturbance. Not knowing what to do, I find myself in a gentle pulling-at-the-other-end-of-the-stick experiment, which he readily accepts and enjoys as a new game, beaming at me, his little body coming forward and pulling backward. I am surprised how awake and connected both of us are in this game, and enjoy it even more because I realize that I am receiving a healing session: an old controlling habit is allowed to drop away. Then I notice a parent's eyes watching the scene and a fear of being judged creeps in for a second, until I discover a smile appearing on his face. Shared awareness is holding our learning together.

It seems to me that this process of increasingly trusting awareness is moving all of us into a greater space of connectedness, the whole Camp, all who have been involved for years with 'teaching', helping, and participating. The parents struggle along with me, learning to let go of expectations of when their children have to be in bed and that they always should be friendly, always participating in Pujas and washing up. I feel hesitant to use big words, and yet it feels to me like a wonder, moving forward as a group into shared vulnerability, responsibility and love.

It dawns on me that coming to the monastery and renouncing family and school life has allowed me to face family life and the experience of learning together more deeply. Instead of trying to get away from it, I open up to it in a new way and can allow the all-embracing awareness to do the work. I am grateful for Luang Por Sumedho's teaching and for the safe space Amaravati offers to all of us. And I am grateful to the families who come and are willing to share and support our experiment of healing together and growing open. ❧

From Tom Ruijterman:

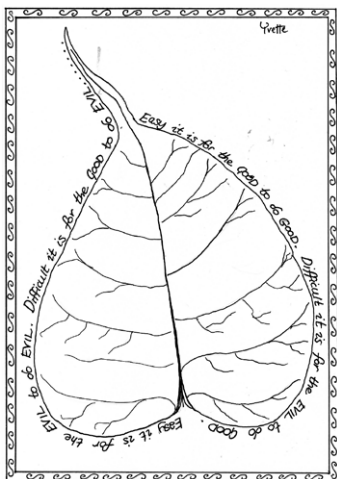
WHEN I THINK ABOUT FAMILY CAMP I IMMEDIATELY START SMILING and feel excited and warm inside. Many pleasant memories come to mind. I remember sitting around the campfire all night as a teenager and watching the mist slowly drift away across the field as the sun rose. I think of some of the amazing friends I've met over the years and I remember the chaos and joy of the Pujas with us all singing our hearts out to the Camp songs we had written.

But mainly what comes up is the feeling of being there. There was always so much energy and warmth and joy and love. It felt as if my little family had been integrated into a huge family, and suddenly I had 50 brothers and sisters to play with and 50 adults gently caring while offering me the space and freedom to explore.

When I was a little boy on the Camp I just played football, cricket and kiss chase. Then as I got into my teenage years I remember feeling incredibly at home both in the monastery and with the people on the Camp, the monks, nuns, parents and children. It was the place outside of my family where I could really be myself and where I felt accepted. The other people there felt 'like me' and I think many of us felt that. As a result many deep and lasting friendships came about.

We had Dhamma classes taught by the Sangha where I realized that the ways in which I was trying to become happy couldn't really work, that true happiness wasn't in being stimulated and excited, but that joyfulness and peacefulness were my natural state. In my later teenage years I began to feel that there was something happening in the monastery that was really worth exploring. The people seemed more open and warm and happy. I started doing Young Persons' Retreats and getting into meditation and feeling that I was 'a Buddhist'. At 19 I started going to stay at the main monastery.

I'm now 28 and I'm very happy to see the Family Camp still going on. I see the kids of each successive generation on the Camp becoming adults and many staying friends with each other. Today is the first day of the three-month Winter Retreat at Amaravati. This will be the third full Winter Retreat that I've supported as a layperson. Staying in the monastery and meeting the people I've met here has been (along with my family) the greatest blessing of my life. ☸



Family Camp moments (in no particular order) compiled by Tim

Sky meditation – we all chased the clouds away

Indian music around the bonfire

Teenagers' Puja – hallelujah

Last night circumambulation. Incense, chanting, lanterns and silence in the Buddha Grove

Bruno's percussion band playing in the dining hall amidst the merry chaos of lunch

Tibetan overtone chanting with family campers in the new Temple

Nick and Dan doing a 3-legged race around Amaravati field

Children building straw huts in the field from the cut grass

Japanese healers extending arms and helping us lift each other with our fingertips

Cutting our hair off and burning it together as a 'make it up as you go along' ceremony



Amaranatho's delightful games in the shrine room

Amaranatho's incomprehensible games in the shrine room

Indian Head Massage

Learning shiatsu and getting a shiatsu treatment

The time everyone had their hair shaved off

Fainting in the kitchen after a football accident and being rescued by the teenagers (thanks, Sammy)

Ajahn Kusalo walking barefoot on our long distant walk

Listening for the end of the bell

Laughter Yoga – 'it's the way I tell 'em' (that was funny)

5 rhythms dance in the marquee which ended with a thunderstorm finale.

Jeff banging on the window to tell children to clear off during metta meditation!

The 1000 piece mandala jigsaw finished in a day

Ajahn Kusalo talking for ages about the Dhamma and people just being patient

Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha rap by the teens

Ballet dancing children

Singing for my secret friend

Uncontrollable laughing as we sat waiting for Luang Por Sumedho to arrive in the Bodhinyana Hall – each new late arrival turned out to be just 'one of us'

Sister Anandabodhi summoning the devas for our final blessing ceremony

Hearing the children sing Family Camp songs in the car

Ges on the guitar at the bonfire

Deborah singing her 'tradition' song in the shrine room with the teenagers

Alan breathing fire at the bonfire and also dressed as the devil and refereeing the football

Nick singing 'Amore' on his last Camp farewell

Jeff's first night 'getting to know you' sessions in the marquee

Leaving

Dan Jones

I T IS VERY HARD TO LEAVE SOMETHING THAT IS MUCH LOVED. The drive home from the Family Camp is always a bit fraught; when my girls were younger it invariably involved floods of tears. Then, after some years, a group of children developed a ritual (one of very many) of hanging around together by the main gate, even running after departing cars, squeezing out the last possible moments of contact with each other. Clothes and possessions would be left behind by the bagful, which often meant delays in leaving, or turning the car round and coming back, or later negotiation with poor beleaguered Retreat Centre Managers or Sangha to try to find lost items. And then, whatever age my girls were, they would sleep on that journey, to calm exhausted young bodies and to smooth the transition from the rather magical realm of the Family Camp back to 'ordinary' life.

All of this I feel now, as my children are growing up. As a parent who has come to the Family Events at Amaravati for 18 years, I find leaving this part of my life behind a poignant experience, and I try to reflect on what this love affair has been about. I think at the heart of the Family Camp has been the experience of community, both for parents and children. One of our precious Family Camp songs is *We are all one family*, and although this is ostensibly about the human race, it feels very much also about the extended family of families who come to spend time together at a Buddhist monastery.

Of course, when I first came I did not really know anyone and neither did my children, but I knew the monastery, and I felt a deep spiritual connection with the practice and great respect for the Sangha. It was natural for me to want to get involved in this unusual-seeming experiment, that had been running for a few years at that point, of bringing together children and family life with Theravadan Buddhist monasticism.

On the surface it can look as though the two really shouldn't mix very well. Many is the time that I have worried (mostly pointlessly) over the disruption the Family Camp causes the calm of the monastery, only to be told repeatedly (and sometimes I could hear it) that the presence of children has been mostly a joy to the resident community. Although this does, of course, have its limits. The one year we tried to cope with the perennial problem



of waiting lists and overbooking by having two week-long Family Camps, it really did seem too much for the Sangha, and the pattern settled into one week and two weekends through the year.

From the layperson's perspective, I have sometimes felt there could be a reciprocal concern amongst some of the Sangha that they were not sure what they had to offer the Family Camp community because they had, by definition, left family life behind, and were often not used to relating to children. To which my answer as a parent has always been that they offer something incredibly valuable just by their presence and example, and allowing the children to see this and be close to it.

Although Theravadan Buddhism can look as though it's premised on a particularly sharp dividing line between laypeople and Sangha, one of the beauties of this arrangement has been that the ordained form has a clarity that stands out for children (and for me); if I had to choose one image of the Family Camps that encapsulates the experience for me, it would probably be of a toddler being helped to put a cake in a nun's bowl, and from this gesture of generosity so much else flows. As the Family Camp community developed over the years, I think it benefitted from including some parents who were ex-Sangha-members, and also from contact with some of the few of the Sangha who were also parents themselves.

There have also, of course, been Sangha members who have devoted themselves hugely and wholeheartedly to the Family Camps, taking on the overall responsibility and overseeing the schedule of activities, pouring immense creativity into pujas and plays and magazines and songs and all manner of games, all in the spirit of fun for children (and parents) and gentle pointing towards the truths of experience of Dhamma. This is not to say that the formal teaching of Dhamma has not also been integral to the Family Camps, but there has always been great debate about how much of this there should be, and how it should be done, and how compulsorily.

On the whole, there has been some relaxing of formality over the years (maybe connected with the broader evolution of Amaravati?); when I first went to the Family Camps the structure was more like an adult retreat with some concessions for children (like supper!), and with formal taught Dhamma Classes that were compulsory.



This was very impressive but hard work, and maybe needed to lighten up. On the other hand, can the structure lighten up too far to become more like a holiday camp in a nice field in Hertfordshire with children coming away having had a good time, but not actually knowing much about Buddhism? Maybe much more important has been the ongoing debate about how to give children some taste of meditation. So, for example, when babies and toddlers inevitably start making a racket in Pujas, this makes it harder for older children to have the experience of silent meditation. Out of these threads grew the Young Persons' Retreat.

My own two children have both been to the Camps since they were three, and are now seventeen and twenty. They have certainly learned a bit about Buddhism, and seem to feel some connection with the containment of a life lived within the holding of Precepts (whether monastic or lay), and also with the point of meditation. But I think their most obvious connection is with the friends they have made on the Camps, and this is what the monastery has meant to them more than anything else: the place where very special friendships were forged in the fun and freedom of the physical space of Amaravati – the excitement of dormitory life, the giant playground of the field. And all the time, in the background, was the sense (most of the time) of happy parents and benign other adults pleased to be with each other, and the special bald ones treated with special respect and embodying the atmosphere of peace and kindness.

The community that my children and their friends have made has extended beyond the Family Camps, and seems likely to continue. Geographically spread across the country, they keep in touch by computer and meet up when they can, and this is also true for me and my family-camp-parents-community. Like all friendship groups forged in shared good experience, especially over a number of years, there is a danger of this becoming a bit 'cliquey,' with the painful issues of in-groups and out-groups. Another thread to the discussions about the evolving Family Camps has always been around how to keep the community sufficiently open to newcomers and new ideas, while keeping enough continuity to build on the experience of how to make the most of families coming together in this unique environment.

The Camps have, of course, had their fair share of painful arguments and differences, sometimes based on high expectations based on previous good experiences. I learned some years ago to remind myself in the excitement of the days before a Camp, that I would also most likely feel hurt and upset at some point during the week, and in this respect it felt like going on retreat: that I just had to take it as I found it as it unfolded, however much I wanted it to be as good as last time. But, in a similar way, I could also leave feeling as though I had been on a retreat, even if I had had very little time for formal sitting meditation (which would often be the case, depending on the ages of my girls and my role in the running of things).

These experiences can help to build up a reservoir of emotional strength and resilience for hard times, but especially so in the formative years of childhood. I am sure that my children have internalized a sense of Amaravati as a good place that gives them a foundation in their minds, an internal refuge that connects them with the only real Refuges worth having. I am not concerned whether this is expressed in Buddhist terms for them in adult life, although I was very touched by the fact that one of my daughters, on recently hitting a rough patch, decided that she wanted to spend some time at the monastery on her own. And I am so enormously grateful to everyone involved that my children (and I) have had this experience. Thank you. *✍*





Last word

Samanera Amaranatho

ON THE LAST AFTERNOON OF EVERY FAMILY CAMP WE HAVE A PRESENTATION, or really a celebration, of what is and has been over the week. A few hours together weaving words, poetry, art, theatre, songs, movements, and spontaneous sounding together, allowing the young people to organize and present it. Just before the Camp closes, the Treasurer gets up and says his thing: that we have lived on *dana*, the generosity of other people, and if you would like to give you can.

On the last night of Camp, we have a circumambulation of the stupa in the Buddha Grove. The stupa and many of the trees in the Grove have been adopted by the family campers for loved ones who have died. Each of us holds a candle and some incense and we walk in single file, led by the Sangha to the Buddha Grove, circumambulating the stupa three times and chanting the mantra Namō Sakya Muni Buddha (Homage to the Sakyan Sage). We end in silence. To complete the Camp the next morning, we go in to the temple to share in the *Paritta* chanting that many of the Sangha offer.

Looking back over the years I have been running the family events, I thought what I was doing was in order to help others; but now I realize I was doing it to heal me. I would so dearly have loved to have had friends in the way the young people and children are to one another, to be accepted just the way they are, to be free to roam around away from my parents and just play. For the last two years my mum has come up on the last day and we have both found it a powerful experience.

Child Protection Statement

All Amaravati family events are covered by a comprehensive child protection policy which can be read online.

'There is no excuse not to report abuse'

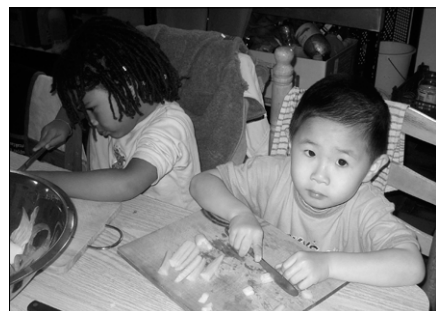
If you are unsure, please contact your local council's department for Children, Schools and Families (CSF).

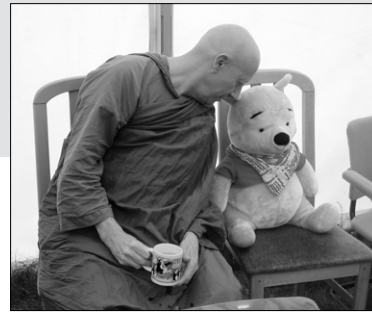
The Family Camp could not work without the great support of the parents, who take various roles from overall coordinator (thanks Ges) to people that chop food in the kitchen. To all the families and young people that come and offer your love and hearts, your tears and fears, I thank you, you are a great inspiration to me and I'm sure to all of us involved in these events. Finally I would like to express my gratitude to all the Sangha and families who kept the Camp going, and to the current community and Retreat Centre managers for their ongoing support, also to John and Ray for their support with the Young Persons' Retreat.

I would like to thank Binnie and Patrick for all their help with learning about birth, children and parenting. You can find out more about their work at www.fatherstobe.org and www.sourcebreath.com. And with gratitude to Catherine.

Finally ...

By the time you read this, spaces for most of this year's Family Events will probably be filled, as they usually are. Mainly, this is to do with the physical space and number of weekends available at the Retreat Centre. We do our best to introduce new families – coming to the June weekend is a good way to start. The Young Persons' Retreat has a capacity of 45 and fills up quickly. Once again, more information and resources for young people can be found on the Family Events website: www.family.amaravati.org ☸





The Big Questions – Young Persons’ Spirituality

More from Ven. Amaranatho:

A few years ago I went to an interfaith retreat for young leaders of faith, and ended up co-running one a few years later. Following on from this and with the support of the Sangha, I now participate in *All Faiths and None* (AFAN), as the Buddhist representative.

AFAN is a group of people representing different faiths and worldviews, including humanist, who are exploring from their personal viewpoints religion, spirituality, and worldviews in general with young people in Further Education colleges. As part of this I have been running staff development days in colleges, sharing how to facilitate dialogue with young people, using the AFAN material. I have written a number of essays on different subjects from a Buddhist point of view for teenagers which are found at www.afan.uk.net/Buddhist+essays. There is also a large selection of supportive Web material for teachers and teenagers to explore, to contemplate the various big questions in life at www.afan.uk.net.

First seeds of a new nuns’ monastery

The Saranaloka Foundation was established in 2005 to invite siladhara to visit and teach in North America, with the longer term vision of establishing a monastery for siladhara in the US. In January and February this year, Ajahns Anandabodhi, Metta and Santacitta opened a temporary *vihara* in San Francisco, on the invitation of Saranaloka Foundation. Sister Sumedha joined them for the month of February.

The project proved very successful. Everyone was delighted by the level of support and interest in the teaching and presence of the nuns. The *vihara* offered regular evening pujas, weekly Dhamma talks, Saturday meditation workshops and was well supported, with many people coming to attend. The four requisites were generously provided and gratefully received. Outside the *vihara*, the nuns went on weekly *pindapat* (almsround) in the local area, with bountiful response. In terms of teaching, many of the local Dhamma groups and centres were interested in the perspective that arises out of the monastic tradition. The ajahns had the opportunity to share Dhamma on many occasions.

Encouraged by the steady support and interest, and in line with their long-term vision, the Saranaloka Foundation have invited the nuns to return at the end of 2009. For more information and photos of the nuns’ visits, see www.saranaloka.org

Glossary – Some of the Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the *Forest Sangha Newsletter*

Please note: Pali diacritics have been omitted throughout the newsletter. Below are brief descriptions of how these words are being used in this issue of the FSN; they are not full definitions. Often used, many have not been italicized.

Ajahn (Thai): Senior monk or nun; literally ‘teacher’. Used for those with ten vassas or more, regardless of their role in the community.
anagarika: A male or female postulant in the preliminary noviciate stage.
anumodana: An appreciative acknowledgement of goodness done.
bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk
Buddha: Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.
dana: Giving, generosity; offering, alms.
deva; devata: Lit. ‘shining one’; an inhabitant of the heavenly realms.
Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.
Luang Por (Thai): A title of affectionate respect (lit. ‘Venerable Father’).
metta: Loving-kindness
kamma (Sanskrit: karma): Intentional acts that result in states of being.
parittas: Blessing chants; a particular collection of the Buddha’s words.

puja: Devotional observances such as chanting and offering incense.
samana: One who has entered the Holy Life; religious recluse or wanderer.
samanera: A novice monk.
Sangha: The community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns; alternatively, those who have realized liberation (Ariya Sangha)
siladhara: A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.
stupa: Pagoda; a devotional monument often enshrining holy relics.
sutta: A discourse by the Buddha or his disciples.
Tan (Thai): A common title of respect.
Theravada: The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.
Vassa: The three-month summer ‘Rains Retreat’; a mark of how many years (‘vassas’) a monk or nun has been in robes.
vihara: A monastic dwelling.



SANGHA

Wesak celebrations 2009 – Sunday, May 10th

This year Vesakha Puja, or Wesak, falls on the full moon of 8 May. Celebrations will be held at each of the UK monasteries on 10 May, beginning from after 10 a.m.

AMARAVATI

Temple anniversary – July 4th

In honour of the occasion both of 25 years since the Sangha arrived at Amaravati and of 10 years since the opening of the Temple, there will be an *upasampada* (ordination) ceremony held on 4 July, the same day the Temple opened in 1999. We hope to welcome four new bhikkhus into the Sangha. Everyone is welcome – come and join us for the day!

Family events

Rainbows Weekend: 26–28 June

Family Camp: Sat. 22 – Sun. 30 August

Young Persons' Retreat: 27–29 November

Creative Retreat: 18–20 December

Booking forms and further information about these and all family events can be downloaded from www.family.amaravati.org or contact: [familyevents at amaravati dot org](mailto:familyevents@amaravati dot org)

Amaravati lay events 2009

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association:

These events provide an opportunity to practise together and explore themes relevant to practice and lay life. Events are led by experienced lay teachers or the Sangha.

Days of Practice (DoP) – no need to book 9.45 a.m. for 10–5 p.m. (Please bring a ready-to-eat packed lunch)

Retreats – advanced booking essential* 5.30 p.m. Fri. – 4 p.m. on the last day.

24–26 April: Weekend Retreat *

Point of practice (Nick Caroll)

9 May: Day of Practice

A perfect relationship (Chris Ward)

6 June: Day of Practice

10–14 July: Five-day Retreat * (Chris Ward)

15 August: Day of Practice

19 September: Day of Practice

2–4 October: Weekend Retreat *

31 October: Day of Practice

12 December: Day of Practice

*Retreat booking forms and event details can be found on our website: www.buddhacommunity.org

Buddhist Women's Network

25–26 July: Weekend at Amaravati –

The fruits of our practice

Intended to run the weekend as two separate days, overnight accommodation is available at the Retreat Centre.*

23–25 October: Weekend Retreat at Ferrar House, Little Gidding –

The art of appreciation, led by Chris Blain*

13 December: Day Retreat at Amaravati – *Turning Inwards*, led by Alison Moore

*To book, contact Jenni (01986 895083) or [jennijepson at yahoo dot co.uk](mailto:jennijepson@yahoo dot co.uk)

CITTAVIVEKA

News from Chithurst

International Support Day – 14 June

Sunday 14 June this year sees the 3rd International Almsgiving gathering (*Tort Pa Ba*) at Cittaviveka, organized by some of our lay friends. The gathering is an occasion when people from many nationalities come together to offer support for the Sangha – most specifically to sponsor the construction of the covered walkway and the purchase of Rocana Vihara. Last year there were people from Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Burma and Japan to name but a few. It was a very warm and happy occasion, and groups even bussed in from France to be present for the day. If you'd like a DVD of the occasions so far, please contact one of the names at the bottom of this notice.

The walkway is designed in green oak to shelter people from the elements as they move between the Dhamma Hall and the Main House – an important function in the British climate. This year we hope to add a small belfry to the section immediately over the main entrance where people come in and out of the walled garden area.

Rocana Vihara is proving to be a blessing to the nuns' community at Cittaviveka. During the last couple of years we have been making improvements, especially in the area of energy conservation with increased insulation. We're also investigating possibilities of replacing the oil-fired heating system with a wood-fired one, as this will allow us to use our own resource of managed coppice. This would bring Rocana more in line with the principles of self-sufficiency of Cittaviveka in general.

The community is well and growing in numbers with several new candidates eager to take up the training in the Holy Life. We express great gratitude and *anumodana!* for the ongoing support that makes all this possible in this country at this time. Please come for a visit.

If you would like details on being part of the *Tort Pa Ba*, either in supporting it or

what it's about, please contact any of the following people:

Phouang – 01903 531031 or 0773 335 8225

Pichit – 01273 473906 or 0790 018 0926

Phongsak – 01273 733246 or 0794 436 1817

David Glendining – 01273 723378

ARUNA RATANAGIRI

Retreats at Harnham

Kusala House Retreats 2009

🌀 **Women's Retreat 2–6 May**

Led by Ajahn Anandabodhi & Aj. Santacitta

🌀 **Men's Retreat 9–15 August**

Led by Ajahn Jayanto

🌀 **Weekend Retreat 18–20 September**

Led by Ajahn Punnyo

🌀 **Mixed Retreat 18–24 October**

Led by Ajahn Vimalo

🌀 **Weekend Retreat 13–15 November**

Led by Ajahn Abhinando

🌀 **Sutta Study Day – Sunday, 24 May**

Professor Peter Harvey from Sunderland University has kindly accepted our invitation to conduct a series of Sutta Study Days we hope to offer in the early part of 2009. The first day will be Sunday, 24 May, from 9.30 to 16.00. Prior booking is required as places are limited. Two more Study Days may be announced later, depending on the success of the first event.

🌀 **Meditation Day – Sunday, 7 June**

Led by Ian Plagaro-Neil. Suitable for beginners.

Volunteer Cooks wanted – please let us know if you'd like to help cook for any of our retreats this year.

Kusala House, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland, UK

For information and booking contact Kath Ann Jones at:

[kusalaretreats08 at gmail dot com](mailto:kusalaretreats08@gmail dot com)

or by phone at +44 (0120) 728-3361

or see: www.kusalahouse.org

Occasional Administrator/Bookkeeper Needed at Amaravati

Supporters in Portugal have for bureaucratic reasons set up a trust in England to steward donations for what they hope will be a future monastery in Portugal. The trust is administered from Amaravati and there is now an opportunity for an administrator/bookkeeper to offer occasional sessions, perhaps once a month to begin with. A database exists and training can be given.

For information about the work or the trust respectively, please email Caroline: [buddhistmonastictrust at gmail dot com](mailto:buddhistmonastictrust@gmail dot com), or Maria Silva: geralatafundacaomaitreyadotcom

Places for Practice

Groups and contacts

England

Bath	Anne Armitage	(01225) 859217
Banbury	Sarah Wallis	(01295) 278744
Bedford	David Stubbs	(01234) 720892
Berkshire	Anthea West	(01189) 798101
Brentwood	Richard Burch	(01277) 626225
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, 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 Buddhist Society,	58 Eccleston Square, London SW1	(0207) 834 5858
London Hampstead	Caroline Randall	(0208) 348 0537
	Ann Booth	(0207) 485 0505
London West	Nick Carroll	(07973) 372 391
Maidstone – Alokabodhi Buddhist Group:	Shirley (01622) 203751	or Bee (01622) 726414
Newcastle	Ian Plagaro-Neill	(0191) 469 2778
Newent-Gloucs.	John Teire	(01531) 821902
	email: john.teire at virgin at net	
Newmarket	Richard Prangnell, Rosie Hitchins	(01638) 603286
	rprangnell at gmail dot com , www.bodhimanda.org	
Norwich	Robert Coggan	(01953) 451741
Penzance	Lee	(01736) 799170
Portsmouth	Medhavi	(02392) 732280
Redruth	Vanessa	(01209) 214031
Sheffield	Greg Bradshaw	(0114) 262 1559
	email: greg.bradshaw at btclick dot com	
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati)	(01305) 786821
Southampton	Robert Elliot	(02380) 612838
Steyping, 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 (01234) 720892
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 Coruña, Spain	David Williams (+34) (981) 432 718

Ajahn Candasiri

will lead a 6-Day retreat in the mountains of the Czech Republic, at Josefuz Dul, from July 26–1 August.

For information and booking please email:

[mangala at buddha dot cz](mailto:mangala@buddha.cz)

Amaravati Retreats

Retreat schedule 2009

R1	10–14 April	5 Days	**Ajahn Thitamedha
R2	17–19 April	Weekend	*Ajahn Gandhasilo
R3	15–24 May	10 Days	**Ajahn Jayanto
R4	29–31 May	Weekend	*Ajahn Kovida
R5	12–16 June	5 Days	*Ajahn Anando
R6	19–21 June	Thai Weekend	~Ajahn Ratanawanno
R7	3–7 July	5 Days	**Ajahn Thanuttaro
R8	17–19 July	Buddhist/Christian Weekend	Ven. Aloka & Br. Nicholas
R9	July 31–9 August	10 Days	**Ajahn Vajiro
R10	4–15 Sept.	13 Days	**Luang Por Sumedho
	<i>(For experienced meditators – must have done at least one 10-day retreat)</i>		
R11	25–29 Sept.	5 Days	*Ajahn Candasiri
R12	9–18 Oct.	10 Days	Ajahns Anandabodhi & Metta
R13	6–8 Nov.	Weekend	*Ajahn Santacitta
R14	13–22 Nov.	10 Days	*Ajahn Sundara
R15	4–6 Dec.	Weekend	To be named
R16	27 Dec.–1 Jan 2010	6 Days	**Ajahn Nyanarato

*Fully booked for women ** Fully booked ~Thai speakers only
(Applicants for fully booked retreats will be placed on a waiting list)

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 at amaravati dot org](mailto:retreats@amaravati.org)

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

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 held in the Temple



Forest Sangha Newsletter



If undelivered, please return to:

Amaravati Monastery, St Margarets, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, HERTS. HP1 3BZ England, UK

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Observance Days

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

Observance Days	Moon phase	● HALF	○ FULL	● HALF	● NEW
APRIL	2 (Thu)	9 (Thu)	17 (Fri)	23 (Thu)	
MAY	1 (Fri)	8 (Fri)*	16 (Sat)	23 (Sat)	
MAY/JUNE	31 (Sun)	7 (Sun)	15 (Mon)	22 (Mon)	
JUNE/JULY	30 (Tue)	7 (Tue)*	15 (Wed)	22 (Wed)	

* Vesakha Puja (Wesak) * Asalha Puja

This year the monasteries invite you for Vesakha Puja celebrations

Wesak 2009

on Sunday, May 10th

Beginning after 10 a.m.

Associated Monasteries

BRITAIN

Amaravati Monastery

St Margarets,
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ
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: Harnham Buddhist
Monastery Trust

Hartridge Monastery

Upton, 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

AUSTRALIA

Bodhinyana Monastery

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

www.bswa.org.au

Stewards: Buddhist Society of

Western Australia

Bodhivana Monastery

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

Vimokharama Hermitage

PO Box 152 Kallista
Victoria, 3971

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
www.birken.ca

NEW ZEALAND

Bodhinyanarama Monastery

17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Lower Hutt 5019,
tel: +64 (0)4 563 7193

www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz

Stewards: Wellington Thera-
vada Buddhist Association

Vimutti Monastery

PO Box 7
Bombay 2343
+64 (0)9 236 6816

vimutti.atba@gmail.com

www.vimutti.org.nz

Stewards: Auckland Thera-
vada 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.

Please also see the Sangha portal website:

www.forestsangha.org