

FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

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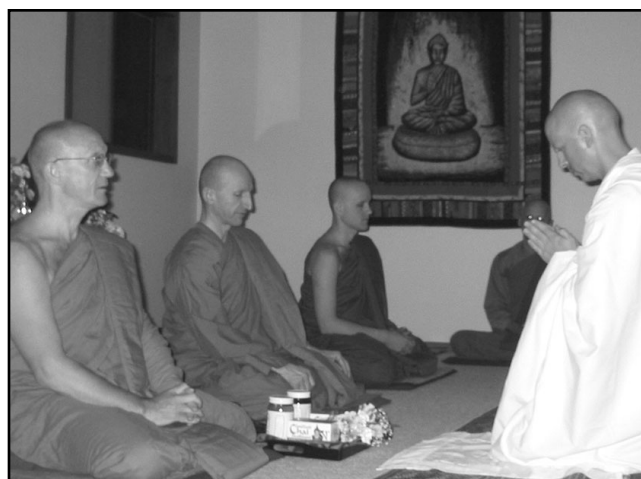
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Welcome to the Homeless Clan

by Ajahn Amaro

This article is adapted from a talk given on the occasion of the anagarika ordination of Craig Randolph (pictured here) at Abhayagiri Monastery on October 12, 2002.



In contemplating the transit from the home life to the homeless life, it is helpful to think about what we mean by “leaving home” and what it symbolizes. These gestures—of taking refuge and taking on the precepts—are designed to help us follow in the fullest way possible the guidance of the Buddha as a wise human being. One’s ordination as an anagarika is really directed toward understanding the nature of self-centered thinking, self-centered habits of life where “I am the most important person in the universe; everything else has to revolve around me.” Leaving home is symbolic of selflessness, of learning how to leave the home of “me first,” of self-centered habits of mind, self-centered attitudes.

We all feel life strongly. Each and every one of us experiences our own pleasures and pains, ups and downs, successes and failures, hopes and fears. But my pleasures and pains seem a lot more significant than yours, because I feel mine and don’t feel yours. This is understandable and natural

enough for us as human beings, but we can do better than that. At least, this is what most spiritual traditions have pointed out over the millennia. And our own human intuition tells us that it’s only the coarsest level of existence on which “I am most important and the rest of the world exists to gratify me.” The structures within the Buddhist tradition—the robes, the precepts, the routines, the gesture of taking refuge—are all tools we can use to pinpoint our self-centered habits and egotistical concerns and drives. By coming to know and understand them, we can learn to move beyond.

Taking on the life of an anagarika is one of these gestures. Of course, shaving off all your hair and putting on perfectly laundered white robes is not in itself purifying. If clean laundry were all it took, then purification would come more easily to us. The external laundry is symbolic of an

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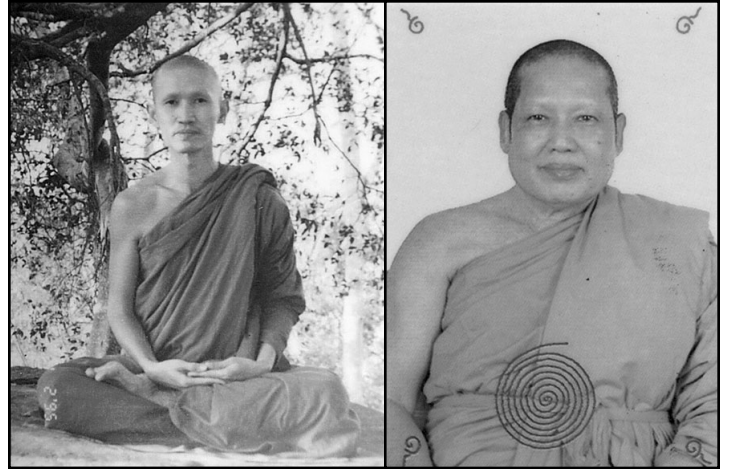
FROM THE MONASTERY

Summer has arrived once again at Abhayagiri. Baked leaves fall from the trees and crunch on the paths underfoot. The swamp-cooler hums and whirs through the afternoon, sending a cool breeze into the Dhamma hall and through the open door of the monk's vestibule. Several days reaching temperatures of over one hundred degrees have already passed, and traces of Mendocino dust can be found almost anywhere.

The community heart has been through a number of transformations and recalibrations over the last few months, as well as being a witness to many comings and goings. Perhaps the most notable of these was the illness and passing away of our beloved neighbor and companion, Mary Curran. Diagnosed with terminal cancer during the winter retreat, she soon became a bed-bound and loving host for family and friends. The gravity of her illness first became apparent while on stage during a performance in Willits. "It was like the music stopped and there were no more chairs," she remarked (referring to the game of musical chairs). After two weeks in the hospital, coming close to death several times, she was able to return home. The environment was one of love, trust, and openness.

During her five weeks at home, Mary came to a place of peace with her dying. The final few weeks were filled with many tender and joyful moments interspersed with occasional pain, and as Mary moved more and more inward, the sense of peace became predominant. On the afternoon of May 3, two months after her first trip to the emergency ward, Mary made a smooth and graceful exit. The entire monastic and lay community sat with the body in quiet reflection throughout the night. Many remarked on how serene her features appeared. How blessed we are to have had Mary as a neighbor, and what a true gift to be able to participate in her dying.

Ajahn Dtun, a disciple of Ajahn Chah and the abbot of Wat Boonyawat in Thailand visited the monastery in early



Ajahn Dtun (left) and Ajahn Jumnien

April. His reputation is as a well-practiced monk, and it showed in his quiet manner and bright presence. His short visit included trips to Montgomery Woods and the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, and a fruitful question and answer session with the Abhayagiri community. Something unique worth mentioning about Ajahn Dtun is the way his monastery is run. No morning and evening pujas are held, and there is a strong emphasis on solitary practice. However, there is also an open invitation to come and ask questions on Dhamma throughout the day. As his visit was coming to a close, Tan Ajahn turned to Ajahn Pasanno with a few words of encouragement in Thai: "The place is suitable, the people are suitable." He plans to return for a longer visit in the future.

Several members of the community went on a *tudong* (pilgrimage), heading south to join Ajahn Jumnien's retreat, which was being held at Taungpulu Monastery in the Santa Cruz mountains. Ajahn Pasanno then left to spend a few weeks in Thailand, leading retreats and catching up with friends and supporters. Upon his return, a rich account of his time abroad was given. The impressions were of activity and contrast, happening within an underlying feeling of affection and joy. Part of the time was spent in packed air-conditioned spaces giving guided meditations and answering questions on Dhamma. Lovely tales of his time at the forest monasteries in Ubon were also related—including an account of a refreshing walk around Ajahn Chah's memorial stupa with Ajahn Liam, the abbot of Wat Pah Pong, and several other well-respected elders on a calm evening after a long stretch of meetings and discussion. It was great to hear of the enduring sense of friendship and connection with the Sangha in Thailand.

Arriving on the same day as Ajahn Pasanno was Ajahn Tiradhammo, a senior western monk who also trained with Ajahn Chah and is now the abbot of Dhammapala Monastery in Switzerland. Notably easy to look after, Ajahn Tiradhammo was a pleasure to have around. His Saturday night talk, in



Mary Curran (right) and her sister, Judy Guthrie

Photo by Walter Thompson

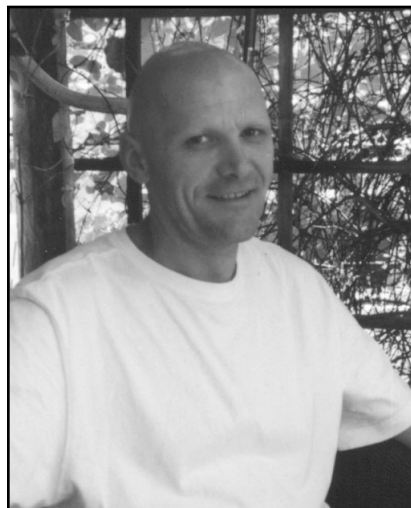
which he reflected with warmth and humor on maturing one's attitude to spiritual practice, was much appreciated by all.

Tan Sudanto, who was a member of the Abhayagiri community in its early years, also returned on the same day. Admirably, he has taken on the task of "work monk" with skill and enthusiasm, since Tan Jotipalo has left to spend some time at Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand. Tan Phasuko has also left us and will spend a year at Cittaviveka Monastery in West Sussex, England. Both have devoted much time and energy to building and maintaining the community here and will be missed by all. Despite doubts about "how many clocks to take" and "will they let me on the plane with razor blades?" their departures went smoothly and in an atmosphere of well wishing and appreciation.

Abhayagiri was also fortunate enough to have Ajahn Candasiri visit for just over a week. She is currently the senior nun at Amaravati Monastery in England, having been in the robes for some twenty-three years. The presence of herself, Ajahn Jitindriya, and Ajahn Sundara together was heartwarming, and it was a pleasure to be in their company. Together with Ajahn Amaro, they spent one midnight tea (on our weekly moon-night vigil), reminiscing about "the old days" at Amaravati and Chithurst. For the community, it was a treat to be given a window into their sense of history and shared endeavor, and also to be in the presence of such beautiful friendship.

Also passing through was Ajahn Sucitto, abbot of Cittaviveka Monastery, who came and went in a matter of days. He gave an excellent talk, which gave rise to laughter and quiet reflection. Sakula put it on tape, and some of us sent it to our mothers. It is comforting to know that Tan Phasuko will be in such good hands. Ven. Jinalankara, who trained in the forest monasteries of Sri Lanka, stayed with us for ten days on his way to Amaravati Monastery in England, where he will spend one year. His joyful, helpful attitude and kind manner made it a pleasure to have him around. We wish him all the best for the future.

The community is happy to welcome Harald Herbst, who first visited us during the summer of 2001. Having returned this April, he has decided to make a commitment to



Anagarika Harald Herbst

life as an anagarika for a year. This coincided with the *pabbajja* (going forth as a novice monk) of Leif Orbom, now Samanera Ñaniko, who completed his one year in anagarika training and went forth into brown robes. Tan Karundhammo has continued to give himself wholeheartedly to the position of "guest monk," which is no easy task. His caring, welcoming spirit and patient attentiveness are a great blessing to those who come to visit.

Lastly, on the people front, our heartfelt thanks go out to Debbie Stamp, Steve Christiansen, and Larry Restel, who continue to take care of many of our needs and administrative matters on a daily basis, as well as sharing with us with those qualities of *kalyana mitta* (spiritual friendship) that support and sustain the spiritual life.

DEVELOPMENT

The plan for this year has been to hold off from many building projects and take some time out to consider the best way in which to proceed. There has been a great momentum of planning, deadlines, workdays, and making things manifest over the last few years, which is natural for the early stage of a monastic community.

Consistent over the past several years has been a steady number of people expressing interest in coming to Abhayagiri to train as monastics, and we continue to turn away many of them. As interest in ordination continues to grow, we will need to consider building additional cabins in the near future. On the level of communal space, there is still much work to be done. Plans are being discussed for construction of a much-needed building to house offices, bathrooms, and wheelchair-accessible lodgings. Completion of such a building will allow the monastery to enter phase two of its development plan, consequently opening the door to more residents and guests. A full account of items pertaining to the development of the monastery is given elsewhere in the newsletter.

TEACHINGS AND EVENTS

The retreat led by Ajahn Jumnie was of great benefit to many people. Ajahn Jumnie is a well-respected Thai Forest master, who is also well known for his healing abilities. Ajahn Pasanno, Joseph Kappel (formerly Ajahn Pabhakaro) and Paul Breiter (formerly Venerable Varapañño) courageously acted as translators and were greatly appreciated for their clarity and stamina—Ajahn Jumnie also being famous for his boundless enthusiasm in teaching Dhamma. The focus of the retreat was the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which was appropriate in the light of the flu bug that nearly every-

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FROM THE MONASTERY

(continued from page 3)

one caught. Ajahn Jumnien was both articulate and inspiring, and we look forward to spending time with him again.

In April, Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Sundara participated in a five-day conference at Gethsemani Abbey, a well-known Trappist monastery in Kentucky. The theme of the conference, “Suffering and Transformation,” provided a rich forum for the seventy to eighty Christian and Buddhist monastic participants who spoke from a deep wealth of personal experience and insight about suffering and its power to transform their lives. The topic was addressed in contexts ranging from “greed and consumerism” to “structural violence,” from “unworthiness and alienation” to “sickness and aging.” At the beginning of the conference, a tribute was paid to Thomas Merton, who lived at the abbey for more than thirty years and was well known for his writings on religion and for pioneering East-West religious dialogues.

In mid-June, a large gathering of monastics and lay supporters headed to Fort Bragg on the West Coast to hear a Dhamma talk by renowned meditation teacher, S. N. Goenka. After spending some time at a quiet beach, we stopped off at Mettika’s house and her Three Jewels Dhamma Hall. We were all grateful for the hospitality and kindness we received. Goenka-ji’s talk, given at a local hall, covered the central themes of Buddhist practice and focused around the Four Noble Truths and mindfulness of the body. In the words of Ajahn Sundara, “It was pure Dhamma.” The monastic community was lucky enough to visit with him afterwards and to express our appreciation. It was a joy to be able to meet with such a being.

Towards the end of June, Abhayagiri hosted the second CALM weekend, which was an opportunity for the group of those in the “lay ministry” training program to gather. Themes included overviews of the *sutta pitaka*, discussions on the role of monastics and the laity, women in Theravada Buddhism, and a lecture on the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* given by Ajahn Sucitto. Though opinions differed and many perspectives on various topics were given, it felt as if all was being held within a space of compassionate listening and friendship. The result was a sense of spaciousness and ease, without the expectation of easy solutions or definite ideas of “the future.” We hope it was a useful time for the group and that the meetings and teachings may bring good fruit in the months ahead.

On regular weeknights Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Pasanno have been giving readings from *The Island*—a draft of writings inspired by sutta quotations on the nature of Nibbana. Having expressed their interest in hearing comments and criticism regarding content, form, grammar, style, and so on, a number of interesting discussions have taken place, giving rise to a feeling of shared participation in the evenings. It has been a valuable way to spend the time before our evening pujas.

In July, Ajahns Amaro and Jitindriya, accompanied by Samanera Obhaso, led a retreat in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Ajahn Amaro was on the road during the summer months and has connected with communities ranging from Louisville, Kentucky, to New York. Ajahn Sundara also travelled to various places, including the locations mentioned above. Her talk at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery was very well received. Ajahn Jitindriya has also been giving teachings in California and its neighboring states these last few months.

Finally, the community was blessed by a visit from Ruth

Denison, much loved student of U Ba Khin, who came to offer a rug for the Dhamma hall. Not just any old carpet, this piece of Afghan craftsmanship is said to have supported meditations led by D. T. Suzuki as well as musical performances by Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan. Despite being the object of some trepidation on Saturday evenings—giving rise to the perceptions of “Sacred Carpet” and hence “we couldn’t possibly sit on that”—it seems to have found its place in the center of the hall and adds color and life to the surroundings. Having just turned eighty, Ruth was as lively as ever, and many expressed their thankfulness and *mudita* for her generous offerings—both in material and in spirit. 🍀



Participants at the CALM program weekend gathering.

Photo by Mary Reinhard



Shrine room at Casa Serena

Neighboring “Casa Serena” Donated to Abhayagiri

The Abhayagiri community lost a dear friend in May when our neighbor Mary Curran, died of cancer (see page 2). Long a generous supporter, Mary left a final gift to the monastery—Casa Serena, her house and thirty acres of land adjoining the Abhayagiri property.

Many monastery visitors and residents had the good fortune over the years to meet Mary and her husband, Peter La Riviere, who preceded her in death by two years. Mary and Peter were longtime supporters of both Christian and Buddhist monastics. They had a longterm friendship with Ajahn Maha Prasert from Wat Buddhanusorn in Fremont and had helped Bhante Dhammavara, a venerable old Cambodian monk, until he passed away at 110 years of age. They also had a close friendship with the former abbot of Mt. Tabor Monastery, Archimandrite Boniface. Mary herself was a Roman Catholic nun for twenty years until the age of forty. She and Peter had a special interest in supporting women’s practice and befriended many of the nuns and laywomen at Abhayagiri.

When offering the land, Mary said she hoped it could be a place for nuns and women to practice, and the monks’ and nuns’ sanghas are currently considering ways this might be done. “This gift came as a surprise, as Mary’s illness and death came quite suddenly,” said Abhayagiri co-abbot Ajahn Pasanno. “We are grateful, and are giving careful consideration to the best ways to respond. The long-term steps will take some time to determine.”

“The nuns, too, are grateful,” said Ajahn Sundara, a senior nun in the Amaravati community.

“It is not yet clear how this gift can best be used and honored,” she and Ajahn Jitindriya explained. “Several of the senior Amaravati nuns, for example, are currently living apart from the main community, engaged in more solitary practice, or traveling on pilgrimage in the near future. So there is not such a great availability of experienced nuns at the moment. In addition, a large portion of the nuns’ community in England are junior nuns and anagarikas, so we want to be sure they are well supported, too.”

So far Ajahn Sundara and Ajahn Jitindriya have spent the Rains Retreat, or *vassa*, from July 25 to October 21, on the land. Ajahn Sundara and Ajahn Thanasanti will be in residence for the winter retreat period and into the spring.

Meanwhile, lay friends are welcome to help support the new offering. In the coming months, for example, there will be opportunities to help with maintenance, gardening, cleaning, and other work. There is also the not-insubstantial matter of a \$270,000 mortgage. Mary had refinanced the mortgage just before her death, and the mortgage company has asked that the assumed loan be repaid in a greatly accelerated manner, approximately two years. Because of Sanghapala Foundation’s (the monastery’s steward organization) normally strict policy of not taking on debt, the board of directors has decided to take on the challenge of accepting the property and repaying this loan within that two-year period. If that kind of financial support is forthcoming from the lay community, paying off the loan within that time period would greatly reduce the need to use donations to pay the interest, which is substantial.

“We were touched by Mary’s kindness in making this offering, and we trust the needed support for this new place will come,” said Sanghapala president Jeannie Bendik. “In a spirit of generosity, we are pleased that the lay community has the opportunity to support such a wonderful thing.” ♡

(If you are interested in helping with Casa Serena’s mortgage, please contact Larry Restel, the Sanghapala treasurer, at 707-485-9129 or larryrestel@pacific.net.)



Tile mosaic in the garden at Casa Serena

Photo by Mary Curran

The Homeless Clan

(continued from page 1)

intention; the internal laundering is the work of a lifetime, whether we live in the monastic form or as a layperson. Our internal work is to discover those tendencies or habits of greed, fear, selfishness, laziness, possessiveness, irritation, and so forth that stain or dirty our lives. The gesture of going forth, of taking on the Eight Precepts, of jumping in and trying out the monastic waters for a year, is a way of following through on that intention. Taking on the life of an anagarika is a firm statement: “For this year I’m going to focus my attention on internal work and see what can be done. How much difference will it make to focus my attention on the workings of the mind, on letting go of my unwholesome habits, and on bringing forth noble qualities of the heart.” It’s an experiment.

But just as our hair doesn’t stop growing even as we’re shaving it, our habits keep reforming themselves even as we are working against them. So our efforts to recognize the ways in which we can counteract our unskillful habits is an ongoing process. That is why we talk about Buddhist practice as something that we need to continually refresh. With a statement of intent, it’s important not to set an expectation of never having another nasty thought or a feeling of laziness, greed, or selfishness: “Oh my god, I’ve completely

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ruined my life as an anagarika, I’ve failed, the abbot is going to kick me out.” As soon as we launder our clothes, they don’t ask our permission to get grubby again. They just start to accumulate the dust. So we recognize, “Dust settles; this is the way life is.” We’re training the heart how to handle the unskillful things, how to recognize them and let them go when they arise, and how to cultivate and sustain the wholesome, the noble, and the beautiful.

The act of going forth and of taking the precepts every fortnight are ways to refresh our intention, to keep the flame alive. Of course, all the “rules” of living here at Abhayagiri—the ten thousand things that you should and shouldn’t do—can sometimes feel very external. It is helpful, therefore, to understand where the Eight Precepts come from. I find it very potent and beautiful to consider how the Buddha conjured these up as a form. This is described in the “Uposatha Sutta,” or the “Discourse on the Observance Day.” The Buddha thought to himself, “All their lives, enlightened

beings never deliberately take the life of another creature. They are completely nonviolent. So wouldn’t it be good for the lay community to observe this precept on the lunar quarters, just once a week? If they too refrained from taking the life of any living creature, then they would be living like the *arahants*, like the enlightened beings. That would be for their benefit and welfare for a long time.” For each of the Eight Precepts—not taking what is not given, not stealing, celibacy, refraining from false and harmful speech, and so on—the Buddha points out that when the heart is fully awakened, when it’s totally free, it has no inclination toward heedlessness, selfishness, violence. It is modest, respectful, and at ease. It doesn’t need anything; there is a completeness.

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By taking on the Eight Precepts, we are trying to set up our life according to what in our heart of hearts we are already disposed toward. We don’t really want to hurt any other creature; we really have no wish to deceive or to lie. There’s something in our heart to which sexuality has no pertinence. There’s no inclination towards finding distraction, spending our days looking for the next interesting thing to be fascinated by. From the outside the Eight Precepts may look like a lot of loss and going without and diminution, but they are really aiming to draw on the fullness of heart that is already present, letting our own purest, most divine nature be the guiding principle of our life rather than the expectations of a materialistic culture.

Again, this is an intention. In our unenlightened reality, the precepts have a very short half-life, so we must keep reminding ourselves: “Oh, yeah, I don’t really want to be selfish.” At mealtime when you see there are three apples left and five people in front of you in line and you find yourself trying to exercise your psychic powers—“take the banana, take the banana”—maybe you’ll realize that’s not very noble or very beautiful. You’ll remember that even if you don’t get the third apple, you’re still going to survive the day.

In our practice, we use the form of monastic life as a mirror that continually reflects the habits that run our lives. We learn to see the reflection and in that seeing are encouraged to keep drawing upon that heart of hearts, that true spiritual nature that goes beyond cultural forms, social forms, religious forms. It is our own nature, independent of

Tradition

by Ajahn Sumedho

Many people in the West don't really understand the use of tradition in Buddhism, having approached the teachings more through meditation practices like Zen and vipassana that have been extracted out of the tradition. In Buddhist countries both Zen and vipassana are very much integrated into a tradition.

Tradition is something that is transferred from one generation to another. We can trace our bhikkhu tradition back to the Buddha in India over 2,500 years ago. It's one of the oldest existing monastic orders in the world. The idea of tradition is that it's not something that we established ourselves. I did not establish the bhikkhu tradition. I inherited it through ordination, through taking on the precepts and living within the style and form of the bhikkhu.

Tradition also means taking all of it even though we might like to change it around. Many people interested in Buddhism want to modernize it and make it "Western Buddhism" or "American Buddhism." Westerners often have prejudices against Asian customs. "We don't want any of that hocus pocus from Asia or all those superstitious, foolish, or unnecessary ceremonies." In our arrogance and conceit, we may decide we want just this or that bit and not the rest.

But when you commit to a tradition, then you take the whole of it—what you like and what you don't like. That's very good for us, to be able to take on something as a whole rather than just pick and choose and pull out what we want and throw the rest of it away. We have to open ourselves up wide to contemplate and work with the conditions, customs, and ways of doing things that oftentimes seem irritating or pointless. This allows us to move toward a more patient acceptance.

A lot of monastic training is learning how to accept and work within the style, the structure, and the form of the ordained life. We're not trying to condition ourselves,

becoming monastic puppets or Pavlovian dogs; we are working within the limitations and structures of a given tradition in order to contemplate what arises due to our greed, hatred, and delusion. On reflection, one begins to see that nothing within our tradition has evolved from an intention to do wrong but instead from a very high level of moral commitment. We are committed to living within moral restraint, to a life of simplicity. The tradition asks us to develop virtue, kindness, compassion, gratitude, patience, honesty, and resolution.

To live within the structure and form of a Buddhist monastic requires effort. It's not just a passive "put on a robe and drag yourself through the form." We have to put our spirit into the tradition so it becomes spiritual and alive rather than just a shadow or an empty form. It's the same for laypeople. Traditions and forms have only the life we breath into them. If we don't put effort into life, we become a kind of drone, a negative, conditioned creature that goes from birth to death in a habitual way.

But sometimes we think the form has the spirit. Somehow by becoming a Buddhist monk I don't have to do anything but go through the motions, then external forces will take care of me if I'm good and obey. We call this superstition, where one is operating from a position of separateness. In Buddhist monasticism we realize that our spirit is the spirit we put into life. That is what makes a form come alive.

If you have travelled to Buddhist countries, you may have seen a lot of the tradition as being spiritless. You may have thought, "I don't want to be like that! I'll take just the spirit and leave behind the form." That might sound good, but spirit without form is impossible. It's just an idea.

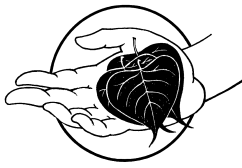
In the end, we will seek a form of some sort. Even what we call a formless form, a nontraditional form, or "my" form is still a form. Learning to put spirit into the form—that's the true practice.

Adapted from a talk given March 18, 1988.

external circumstance. Through our particular forms of Buddhist practice, we use a language, a vernacular to describe it. But that truth, that Dhamma, that reality, is obviously not confined to Buddhist terms or forms.

Our commitment to use the practices of the Thai Forest Tradition provides an access point to realize the true nature of things and to awaken to it. Then, through our efforts, we see how the forms can be of benefit to and support our-

selves as well as the people around us. What's the effect of our practice? What's the fruit? Is it working or not? How does this help me? How does this help the world? Through our own reflection, examination, and exploration, we see what is coming forth from our efforts. We let our lives be guided by that, rather than by any kind of external expectation, compulsion, or commitment to something outside ourselves. ♥

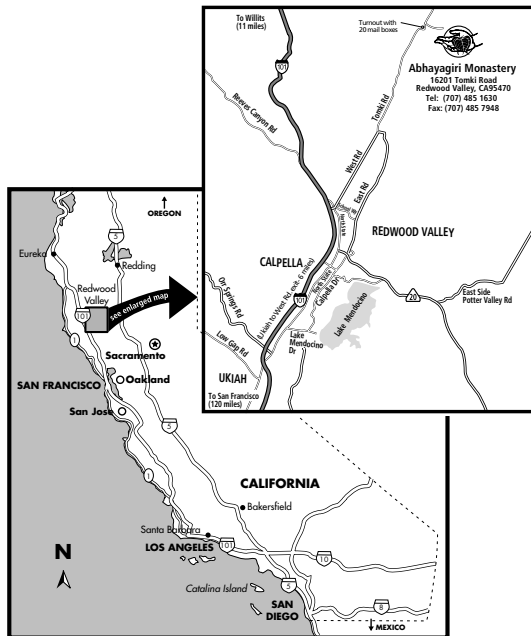


Abhayagiri Sangha Calendar

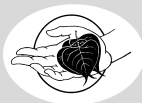
Lunar Observance Days

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
NEW MOON	SUN 6	MON 4	WED 4	THU 2	SAT 1	SUN 2
1ST QUARTER	MON 14	TUE 12	THU 12	FRI 10	SUN 9	MON 10
FULL MOON	MON 21	TUE 18	THU 19	THU 17	SUN 16	MON 17
LAST QUARTER	TUE 29	WED 27	FRI 27	FRI 25	MON 24	TUE 25
NEW MOON						

Directions to Abhayagiri



1. Take the WEST ROAD exit from 101
2. Go straight over NORTH STATE ST. and then SCHOOL WAY
3. Follow WEST ROAD till it reaches a T-junction. (3 miles from the exit).
4. Turn left at the "T" onto TOMKI RD. Continue for 4 miles. There will be a big turn-out with 20 mailboxes on your right. The monastery entrance is right there.



FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

Editor: Dennis Crean
 Assistant Editor: Kathryn Guta • Calendar: Agatha Lee
 Art/Photo Assistance: Ven. Obhaso, Ven. Sudanto

Fearless Mountain is the thrice-yearly newsletter of Abhayagiri Monastery, a Buddhist community in the tradition of Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Sumedho and Amaravati Buddhist Monastery. It is composed of materials submitted to or written at Abhayagiri Monastery and distributed free of charge to friends of the Abhayagiri community. Comment within is personal reflection only and does not represent the opinion of the Sangha as a whole. Please keep us informed of your current address.

Appropriate articles and artwork, information for fellow Buddhists, or comments from readers are welcomed. Submissions for the next issue (March 2003) should be received by January 1. For permission to reprint any materials, please contact us.

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16201 Tomki Road
 Redwood Valley, CA 95470
 Tel: (707) 485-1630; Fax: (707) 485-7948
 www.abhayagiri.org; sangha@abhayagiri.org

2002 • 2545/2546

Nov

- 5 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Amaro in Berkeley, CA (see below).
- 13 Evening program with Ajahn Amaro at Yoga Mendocino, 206 Mason St., Ukiah. Contact: Yoga Mendocino, 707-462-2580, www.yogamendocino.org.
- 18 Monday night program with Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Amaro & Jack Kornfield at Spirit Rock Center, Woodacre, CA. Contact: 415-488-0164, ext. 303.
- 19 Buddhist Year 2546 begins.
- 22-12/1 Thanksgiving Retreat with Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Sundara at Angela Center, Santa Rosa, CA. Contact: Paul Friedlander, 510-839-6690, retreat02@juno.com.
- 29 Ajahn Pasanno departs for Thailand.

Dec

- 3 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Amaro in Berkeley, CA (see below).
- 8 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
- 11 Evening program with Ajahn Amaro at Yoga Mendocino, 206 Mason St., Ukiah. Contact: Yoga Mendocino, 707-462-2580, www.yogamendocino.org.
- 22 Daylong Retreat ("Return of the Light") with Ajahn Amaro at Spirit Rock Center, Woodacre, CA. Contact: 415-488-0164, ext. 318.
- 29 Ajahn Pasanno returns from Thailand.

Jan

- 3 Monastic retreat period at Abhayagiri begins.
- 7 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley, CA (see below).

Feb

- 5 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley, CA (see below).

Mar

- 5 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley, CA (see below).
- 31 Monastic retreat period at Abhayagiri ends.

Apr

- 1 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Amaro in Berkeley, CA (see below).
- 6 Daylong Retreat with Ajahn Amaro at Spirit Rock Center, Woodacre, CA. Contact: 415-488-0164, ext. 318.
- 7-13 Retreat with Ajahn Amaro at Bellingham Meditation Society, Samish Island Washington, WA. Contact: Cindy Madigan, 360-752-1248, bellinghamvipassana@hotmail.com.
- 18-27 Ten-day Retreat with Ajahn Sundara and Sister Metta at IMS, Barre, MA. Contact: 978-355-4378, www.dharma.org.
- 20 Upasika Day (Annual Renewal Ceremony) at Abhayagiri.
- 23 Dharma teachings with Ajahn Amaro in Detroit, MI. Contact: Richard Smith, 248-642-7620, mithras1@earthlink.net.
- 27 Daylong Retreat ("Dependent Origination") with Ajahn Amaro in New York City. Contact: New York Insight, 917-441-0915, nyinsight@earthlink.net, www.nyimc.org.

May

- 2-5 Retreat with Ajahn Amaro at Bodhi Tree Dharma Center, Largo, FL. Contact: Bodhi Tree, 727-392-7698, jcameron3@earthlink.net.
- 6 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Berkeley, CA (see below).
- 6 Ajahn Amaro departs for Europe.
- 15 Full Moon Day (Visakha Puja) at Abhayagiri.

June

- 2 Ajahn Amaro returns from Europe.
- 3 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Amaro in Berkeley, CA (see below).
- 8 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
- 27-7/4 Retreat with Ajahn Pasanno in Albuquerque, NM. Contact: Life Transition Institute, 800-547-2574, www.lifetransition.com.

Every Saturday evening at Abhayagiri

Chanting, meditation & Dharma talk, 7:30 pm.

Every Lunar Quarter at Abhayagiri

Chanting, meditation, precepts, Dharma talk & late night vigil, 7:30 pm.

First Tuesday of the month in Berkeley, CA

5:00-6:00 pm, Informal tea gathering.
 7:30-9:30 pm, Meditation, precepts & Dharma talk by monastic at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, 2304 McKinley Ave.

Every Tuesday in Berkeley, CA (except first Tuesday)

7:30-9:30 pm at the Berkeley Zen Center, 1929 Russell Street.
 Meditation and Dharma program with lay practitioners.
 Arthur Levy, 510-530-1757, adl@irolaw.com

Every Sunday in Portland, OR

9:00-10:30 am at the Friends of the Dharma Resource Center, 1701 NW Thurman, Ste. 202. Meditation and Dharma discussion



Go Forth, Young Man

What's it like for a young man to leave behind the freedoms of the world and go forth into the disciplined simplicity of monasticism? *Fearless Mountain* assistant editor Kathryn Guta interviewed Samanera Obhaso, 20, (left) and Anagarika Chris Bradley, 30, (right) to gather reflections on their entry into the holy life.

Fearless Mountain: What were your lives like before coming to the monastery?

Anagarika Chris: After high school, I got a degree in English literature. I didn't have any clear career aspirations, so I decided to do some traveling. I spent the summer in Ireland, seven months in India, and a year in Japan. After my traveling adventures, I decided to go to nursing school. I graduated three years later with my bachelor's in nursing and took a job for two years working with aboriginal people in northern Manitoba. Then I decided to come to Abhayagiri.

Samanera Obhaso: After I graduated from high school, I found myself in college. I wasn't really that interested and stayed for only four weeks. And then I wrote to Abhayagiri asking to come here. I am from a nonreligious family and wasn't ever really interested in religion—in fact, I felt somewhat antagonistic towards religion—yet I was curious about Buddhism.

FM: What were your interests in high school?

SO: I was interested in music concerts, particularly punk rock. I also did a bit of public speaking and debate.

FM: Were you interested in religion when you were a kid, Anagarika Chris?

AC: Yes, I went to church from ages five to fourteen, and then I went to a Jesuit high school. I attended all kinds of churches. I was keen to go to church, but since my parents weren't religious, I went along with friends. My family only went to church with me when I dragged them on Christmas Eve.

FM: Did you find some churches more compelling than others?

AC: I liked them all. I was baptized an Anglican when I was

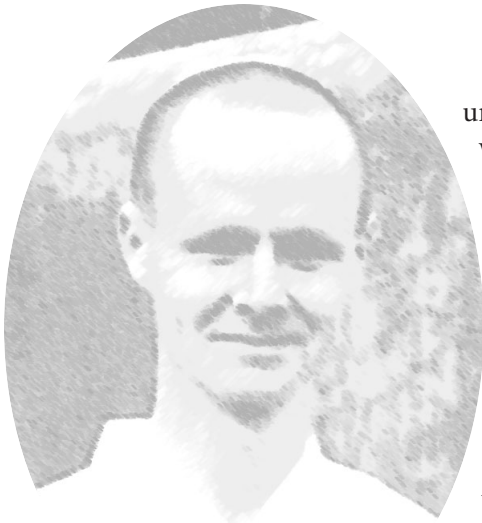
a baby. Then I went to a Presbyterian church until I was about seven. From seven to ten, I went to an Anglican church in Ontario. When we moved to Winnipeg, I went to a Pentecostal Church until I was twelve. My parents did not like the Pentecostals. It was too evangelical. So they presented me with a plan that we could go together to the United Church (an amalgam of Presbyterian and Methodist). I was confirmed in the United Church when I was fourteen. I really liked that church. Later, at the Jesuit high school, I had many questions about the religious doctrine. It seemed to me that conventional Christianity was not comfortable with ambiguity. I was taught that there was a clear right and wrong. For example, some priests are very hard line on abortion, and some are really soft on it. Yet I was told that it was an absolute truth that abortion was wrong. Or I was taught that unbaptized people who had never encountered the teachings of Christianity would go to hell. I just couldn't believe that.

FM: How did you two first encounter Buddhism?

SO: For me, it was an intellectual curiosity about different religions. Especially since I had been very antagonistic towards religion, I thought I should get to know more about it. When I learned about Buddhism, it seemed like a clear-cut way to approach life. First of all, there is suffering. I could check this out and feel it for myself. Second of all, there is a cause for suffering that I could see. The teaching applied to my own life and what I was feeling at the time.

FM: What books had you read about Buddhism?

SO: I felt drawn to the Theravadan because it wasn't so devotional. Jack Kornfield's books were the only Theravadan books available in western Kansas. One or two stuck out on the back shelf of a book store. Then the idea of Thailand nat-



urally occurred. I wrote to Wat Umong in Chiang Mai. There was an old German monk who wrote back and said I couldn't train there because he was the only monk who spoke English and he was too old to train me. He suggested Abhayagiri and gave me the website address. Later, it turned out that

no one at Abhayagiri had ever heard of the German monk.

AC: When I was twenty-two, I went to India to travel. I did a meditation retreat at Bodh Gaya with Michael Kewley. I learned a lot about myself on that retreat. I had always been interested in meditation but until that first retreat, I had never done it. I went on retreat because it seemed to be the thing to do in India. I also decided to not eat meat and not drink alcohol and not use toilet paper. So I was having fun in India and trying new things.

FM: So going on retreat was part of your "India Experience"?

AC: It was the most profound experience I have ever had before or since. I was ready to learn about myself. After the retreat, having been so affected by the experience, I wondered if I should become a monk. However, it seemed like a ridiculous idea at the time. Monasticism was too removed from everything I knew in life. I decided that I would get to know Buddhism better and moved to Japan to teach English. When I returned to Winnipeg at age twenty-four, I got acquainted with a meditation group that was associated with the monks at Abhayagiri. I met Ajahn Pasanno when he visited our sitting group, and then asked if I could spend the summer of '98 at Abhayagiri. Ordination was a gradual process of unfolding.

FM: How was it for you, Tan Obhaso, coming to live at Abhayagiri having only read about Buddhism and having been quite antagonistic to religions in the past?

SO: I felt surprisingly comfortable, intrigued and at ease with the form and the community. I was disillusioned with college. I didn't want a job. At the monastery, I found something I was interested in and felt a connection with.

FM: What were you planning on majoring in at college.

SO: Philosophy, political science and a minor in women's studies. I was pretty ambitious.

FM: How have your parents responded to your choice to enter monastic life?

AC: My mom is supportive, but she would rather I would go on to become a nurse practitioner. Through my twenties, I broke my parents in pretty well. I traveled to India, took up vegetarianism and went into nursing as a guy. All these things are foreign to my family context. I also meditated and did retreats for the last six or seven years. So they knew I was interested. After I spent the summer here four years ago, I told my mom I might need to spend more time in a monastery just to be sure. She was prepared, and I think that as a result, she is handling it really well. She's quite supportive.

FM: And your father?

AC: They're divorced. My dad and I have been somewhat estranged for about ten years. In the last five years, we have been getting a bit closer, talking a bit more. It was a wonderful surprise when he wrote me a beautiful letter a couple of months ago filled with personal reminiscences. It was something I had never received from him before.

FM: So your interest in the monastic life brought about a greater closeness with your father?

AC: I think the context was that I was doing something that was true to me, and he related to that. While I don't think my father is interested in Buddhism, he offered me some fatherly advice, which he hadn't done before. It was genuine and beautiful. I've talked to my parents about my interest in ordination in a secular sense—as in, "It's a way of understanding the world. When the mind gets more concentrated, and mindfulness increases, it makes experience more rich." I haven't talked to them in the sense of it being religious at all. I think they can relate to the psychological aspect of Buddhism.

"Having been so affected [by the retreat], I wondered if I should become a monk. However, it seemed like a ridiculous idea at the time. Monasticism was too removed from everything I knew in life."

(continued on page 12)

Go Forth, Young Man

(continued from page 11)

FM: How about your parents, Tan Obhaso?

SO: I haven't been as skillful as Chris.

AC: I've had more time!

SO: I think I spent most of my teen years preparing my parents for some pretty horrible outcome for my future. I found school very easy, so my parents had a lot of expectations and hopes. I was not interested in high school. I barely passed physical education. I did not hang out with the average farm kids. They were disappointed. They are not really excited about a religious path, especially a non-Christian path. Being from western Kansas, there are all these horrible perceptions about California. They feel unsure about what I am doing.

FM: Have they visited you here?

SO: They did. It's difficult because, even though my parents are divorced, they are still family oriented. It's hard for them to understand not wanting to have contact. For them it's important for us all to spend time together as a family. I'm an only child.

FM: How do you look at renunciation? How is it to give up entertainment, relationships, lovers?

SO: I've never been interested in drinking or partying. I had just moved to a college town and didn't have a relationship or a lot of friendships. I wasn't giving up a whole lot. The hardest thing to give up is music. There's still a juke box in my head.

FM: Sometimes you turn it on?

SO: Sometimes I can shut it off. [Laughter]

FM: How about your breakfast cereal? I understand you have a thing for Cocoa Puffs.

SO: I enjoy eating a lot. That was a major pastime of mine. At the monastery, I found out that I am affected by the environment and the atmosphere. When you are not in the kitchen or hanging around areas where there is food, the *sañña* (perception) is not there, and it's not a problem. In fact, the Ajahns have been after me to eat more!

I find that living in the forest and without the environmental triggers—not being around friends with the restless energy of always looking for something to do or not being affected by advertisements—I feel more relaxed and present. It's kind of involuntary. It's not really a conscious effort. The setting puts you in that space. The container of the community is really important.

AC: For me, it's been a process. I'd been a student for so long, and I've never had a lot of material possessions. When I moved up to northern Manitoba on a reserve, there was

one television station, no movie theaters, nothing to do but go for walks and throw stones into the lake. I've been thinking about monasticism since my first retreat when I was twenty-two. It's been in the back of my mind.

Giving up entertainment and relationships is OK. It's more difficult to give up views and opinions. As far as wearing white sheets and shaving my head, it's OK in this context. Not having a stereo is fine in a monastic context. It's not hard to do that. But when I was living in the world, not drinking alcohol with my friends was difficult because the context was different. The monastery is supportive of renunciation. It's not really that hard.

FM: Do you ever get hungry for food in the afternoon?

AC: I desire chocolate and that kind of thing more than I did as a layperson. That's just the object of craving. There are so few outlets to direct that towards here. When I was out in the world I could pick up a newspaper, have a coffee, watch TV or call up a friend. And now where does it go?

FM: Do you eat a lot of chocolate when it's allowable?

AC: I decided not to eat chocolate, and it's OK. I've made a firm decision. In the world it's encouraged to indulge your cravings. It's hard to restrain yourself. Whereas here, the momentum is in exactly the opposite direction. There is a lot more support in following restraint here.

FM: Well, that's encouraging. Many people are fearful of not satisfying their cravings.

AC: It's important to pay attention to the times when there is no craving—noticing that happiness and contentment don't depend on chocolate, stereo or TV. There's a great Pali word called *nekkhamma*. It's often translated as renunciation, but it really means an effulgence or richness within yourself—having the contentment underneath. If I renounce chocolate, it can be interpreted in a negative light implying that I don't want it or that it's bad. *Nekkhamma* suggests that there is enough right here. One day I hope to know this for myself. 🍫

“Living in the forest and without the environmental triggers — not being around friends with the restless energy of always looking for something to do or not being affected by advertisements — I feel more relaxed and present.”

A Day in the Life

by *Samanera Ñaniko*

The day starts with the high pitch of the alarm clock: beep-beep! Beep-beep! Beep-beep! Can't sleep another hour; I've got to make it to the morning chanting. The cold breeze slowly wakes me up as I walk down the mountain towards the meditation hall. Thoughts linger in my mind—remnants of what I was dreaming about during my five or six hours of sleep. About halfway down the mountain the haze of dreamy thoughts turns into thoughts about what I'm going to be doing today: get parts for water pipes; work in the kitchen; sew; write this article; pay respects to visiting Ajahns at breakfast. Then: don't worry about all this stuff, just let go; live in the present, mindfully walking; stop thinking about the future; do more meditation. . . .

The meditation hall in the morning is still and peaceful. As community members gather for the 5:00 a.m. chanting and meditation, there are no "good mornings" or "how's it going" but instead a silent recognition that "it's early, we don't need to talk right now." Candles on the shrine are lit, sitting cloths laid out, and before long one of the bhikkhus or nuns begins the chanting. We sit for an hour as the sun rises from under the eastern hills and the sky turns from black to the characteristic morning light-blue. Birds usually wake up about halfway through the sit, depending on the time of year. The quiet bell rings at the end of the sit. By this time all the birds in the forest are awake and pumping out their various calls and melodies. We do the closing chants, pay homage to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and end with three bows to the Venerable Ajahn.

By this time, depending on my mental state, I'm either half-asleep and just wanting to curl up in the fetal position under a warm blanket or wide awake and ready to spring into action. Chores happen from 6:30 to 7:00 a.m., then we have a bowl of cereal and a hot drink, usually tea or coffee. This gives us the fuel we need for the 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. work period. At 7:30 the Venerable Ajahn will give us instruction to reflect on during the work period and the rest of the day. We are encouraged to stay mindful and use every activity of the day for practice and learning.

The work period is quite diverse; one can have chores ranging from copying tapes to plumbing and carpentry projects. Sometimes we work alone, sometimes with each other. I find that working alone lets me enjoy time to myself and make my own decisions; working with others tests my patience and teaches me to let go of my view of what's "right." Working with others can bring up mental states that otherwise would go unnoticed. As Ajahn Sumedho said in one of his discourses, "Community life can quickly lead to

purity." When there is letting go, working with others can lead to a deeper sense of patience and community harmony.

After a hard morning's work, it's time for the meal. The food is offered by lay people, and we eat in silence.

The afternoon consists of four to five long hours of open time. This time can be used for meditation practice, memorizing chanting, going for a walk through the forest, studying the Buddhist canon, or finishing up pressing work projects (like fixing broken water lines or sewing robes or jackets for oneself).

The afternoons are often a time where one comes face-to-face with the hindrances, especially within the first hour after the meal. When I use the afternoon solely for meditation my mind usually spouts out things like: "You're too tired to meditate, lay down and have a rest" or "There must be something really important that you have to go do" or "I don't know if I can do it, four hours is a pretty long time." On the few occasions when I'm not moved by these mental excuses, the afternoon is very empty—it seemed like it went on forever at the time, but when evening comes it has all passed by in a flash.

When one does have chores to do in the afternoon, it can be a great time to devote oneself to service and make merit. This can also be integrated into practice, because the mind can come up with things like: "Why am I doing this and not getting paid?" or "Somebody better see me working hard like this and give me something in return." This provides a great opportunity to look at one's motivations—why are we here at the monastery in the first place?

When the afternoon struggles pass it's time for tea. This is a good time to loosen up the afternoon tensions and sit quietly or chat informally with the ajahn or a Dhamma friend. Tea is a good time to sit in the meditation hall and let the day's cares slip away. There are also difficulties at tea time. For me, sometimes I get hungry in the evening and tea can turn into a kind of "substitute dinner." I hear the mind saying, "Load as much sugar and cocoa as you can into your cup, and that'll fulfill your hunger."

At 6:30 p.m. there will usually be a Dhamma reading, which adds to the richness of the teachings here at Abhayagiri. Readings can range from teachings by Ajahn Chah to stories of the lives of the disciples of the Buddha.

At 7:30 p.m. we end the day with evening chanting and meditation. This is a good time to reflect on how the day went and to resolve any mental dilemmas that arose. We meditate for about an hour, then its back up to our kutis in the forest to either meditate some more or get some rest.

Then we start another day! ♥

Samanera Ñaniko grew up along the central coast of California. He joined the Abhayagiri community in 2001 at the age of 20.

From Blessing to Commitment: A CALM Retreat

by Jan Sheppard

From June 28 to July 2, 2002, the Abhayagiri Sangha and nine participants in the CALM (Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers) program gathered at the monastery for the second retreat of the three-and-a-half-year program. (Two participants were unable to attend.) The program began late in 2000, with the initial period of time meant as probationary, to give both the Sangha and participants an opportunity to see if this was something they wanted to continue. We were especially pleased to learn that the Amaravati Council of Elders gave unanimous support and expressed commitment to the continuation of the program through its completion in September 2004.

The lay participants in the program are: Taraniya (Gloria Ambrosia), North Carolina; Jim Cameron, Florida; Dennis Crean; California; Kathryn Guta; California; Shirley Johannesen, British Columbia, Canada; Jaya Karlson, Massachusetts; Kondañña (Barry Kapke), California; Sakula (Mary Reinard), Oregon; Santideva (Fred Kral), California; Mettika (Cindy Hoffman), California; and Janice Sheppard, Wisconsin. The following members of the Sangha have also been regular participants: Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Sundara, Ajahn Jitindriya, Tan Karunadhammo, Tan Jotipalo, Tan Phasuko, Tan Dhammadaso, Samanera Obhaso, Samanera Ñaniko, Anagarika Chris, and Debbie Stamp.

Since January of 2002, CALM has met weekly to discuss and consider assigned readings. Those living nearby attend at the monastery. Those who are distant or unable to get to the monastery are provided with taped copies of the hour-and-a-half study sessions. The first three months focused on readings having to do with breath meditation, and the second three months on readings on the First Foundation of Mindfulness, or awareness of the body. In addition to the academic study, in each three-month period we will examine specific aspects of meditation, ritual/ceremonial practices of Theravada Buddhism, and social issues of our time. We also plan to gather for a retreat each January and July until July 2004.

The lay participants share a commitment to being of service to the Abhayagiri Sangha. More generally, we are seeking to deepen our own understanding the Buddha's teachings of Dhamma/Vinaya and our grounding in the Thai forest tradition of Ajahn Chah. We are united in our appreciation for the truth of the Dhamma and the beauty

and simplicity of the monastic form. We aspire to be of help in allowing this tradition to grow and flourish in the West.

Our recent retreat was filled with warm feelings of connection and a lovely sense of caring spiritual friendship. This tone was set in our very first gathering, a blessing ceremony for the new house of participant Dennis Crean. Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro used this opportunity to also give us instructions on the logistics of arranging the blessing string and setting up a ceremony.

As part of the retreat we reviewed the logistics of the program and decided that the curriculum was excellent, but that meeting every week was too much if we were to keep up with the assignments. For the next two three-month sessions we will meet every other week for two hours. We decided that we would figure out a way for those who are at a distance to contribute and assist in making presentations, either by teleconference or video or audio-taped presentations. From July until the New Year, we will be reading on insight and the feminine in the Buddhist world, and on kamma and the realm of feeling.

Some of the highlights of the weekend included a talk on the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* and an evening Dhamma talk by Ajahn Sucitto; an overview of the Pali Canon by Ajahn Amaro and a "hands on" exercise to practice locating and searching in various published versions of scripture; and a fascinating session led by Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro on ceremony. Much to the amazement of most all of us, we spent almost the entire "ceremony" session on the fine points of bowing, and we were disappointed when it was suddenly time for tea with many questions and comments left unsaid. The emotional highpoint of the retreat was at the end when Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Amaro, and Ajahn Sucitto led us in a blessing and commitment ceremony. Following *paritta* chanting, each participant made a personal statement of commitment to participate fully and to complete the training to the best of his or her ability. Suffused with blessings and surrounded by large and happy smiles from all present, each lay participant then received a gift of a Thai medallion honoring Ajahn Mun.

By the end of the retreat, verse 328 of the *Dhammapada* seemed written just for us:

*If you find an intelligent companion
who will walk with you,
who lives wisely, soberly, overcoming all dangers,
walk with that person in joy and thoughtfulness.*

(S. Beck, trans.) ♡

Constructing Cabins

After two seasons of building cabins (*kutis*) and two different approaches to construction, we want to share this experience with our supporters in order to communicate where we've been and look at how we might approach building cabins in the near future.

It has been our intention to produce solid, quality structures that conform to the Uniform Building Code (UBC) at reasonable prices. This provides the community with safe, low-maintenance dwellings that will last for many years and satisfy the requirements of the county building department. We are very happy with the cabins, but the price was rather expensive for such small and simple dwellings. Therefore, further efforts must be made to bring down the costs of future cabins.

The building committee has been trying to find a means to construct cabins with the hope of keeping the costs between \$10–15,000. The contractors that we have consulted or asked for quotes from keep coming in at the \$25,000+ range, and these are considered “reasonable” and “moderate” quotes by many in the building trades. Several conditions have contributed to the dwellings' surprising costs: 1) current labor rates of professional carpenters and contractors; 2) building remote cabins on the steep terrain that Abhayagiri's land affords; 3) building small, individual cabins rather than multi-roomed dwellings; and 4) building in compliance with Uniform Building Codes, especially the stringent engineering requirements for the foundations on steep terrain in less than optimal soil.

Given the above experiences, all of us on the building committee feel strongly that a significant change in our approach to building must be tried for the next cabins. We have reconsidered building simpler structures under the county's less stringent Class K Builder/Owner Code. In that category, the requirements are not as great and costs can thus be held down more easily. The first five cabins regularized after we received our change of use permit were permitted under this Class K designation, but in our dealings with the county we encountered pressure to move away from building more of this type and instead build UBC-conforming cabins.

Now that we have a few dwellings meeting UBC standards, and given the desire to experiment with ways to build lower-cost structures, our immediate plans are thus to build the next cabins with Class K permits. Moreover, it is our plan to do the construction with more monastic and volunteer labor, perhaps guided by a skilled or professional carpenter. With this process we believe we can lower the unit costs while still having relatively well-built, durable structures that are more than adequate for the needs of our monastics.

The monastic and lay communities have had varying levels of involvement in the building projects of the last couple of years. The labor that we have provided is significant and varies from heavily involved, as in the construction of the straw-bale kuti, where many community members worked extensively on every phase from start to finish, to minimal, as in the wooden yurts constructed last year for which the community provided support only in planning, site selection and preparation; digging foundations; hauling in materials to the site; and minor finishing work.

Nevertheless, we are finding it exceedingly difficult to construct suitable dwellings for prices that we feel comfortable with, while balancing the resident community's workload, leaving ample time for monastic training and meditation. Our goal is to build a monastery where people can train and practice in Buddha Dhamma, rather than the carpentry and construction trades. Up to this point we seem to have been both working too much and at the same time paying far more than we would like for the necessary dwellings.

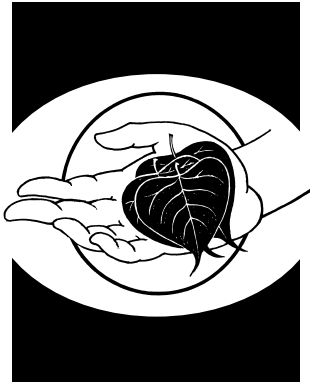
This year the community has decided not to undertake any significant construction projects for a variety of reasons. The building committee will be using this time to thoroughly plan and prepare for further construction in the spring of 2003, when we will need to construct more cabins. There are three levels of skills that the larger lay community can offer which would help support the construction of more economical dwellings: 1) one or two skilled and experienced carpenters who can oversee or manage the cabin-building project; 2) a moderate-sized group of semi-skilled workers who can saw boards or pound nails; and 3) a fair-sized group of, in effect, unskilled workers who can carry in materials, paint, help clean up the building sites or facilitate the community project in other equally helpful ways. The significant and largest cost in constructing the cabins has been labor. It is our intention to form work days or work parties that would help bring the larger community together to aid in the construction of less-expensive dwellings.

In sum, given the learning curve for all new enterprises, we believe the building committee and the monastery has done as well as possible given the circumstances and challenges to building appropriate dwellings. Although we have spent more money than we had hoped on the existing cabins, we are more than satisfied with the quality of the structures. They will provide proper shelter for the community for a long time into the future. We intend to begin our new owner-builder construction experiment within the next year. We will keep you posted as to our process and intentions. Please let us know if you would like to offer any assistance on future construction projects. ♥

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

ABHAYAGIRI MONASTERY

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Buddhist Bicyclists Roll on Through

After more than a year in the making, the “first ever” Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage saw 80 cyclists journey 150 miles over two days from Spirit Rock Meditation Center all the way to Abhayagiri, with a stop along the way at the nearby City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The event was a great success thanks to the beautiful weather, generous donations of food and drinks, a dedicated crew of nearly 40 volunteers, the enthusiasm of the riders, and the inspiration of the true pilgrim spirit. Organized under the auspices of Abhayagiri, the pilgrimage brought a unique flavor to an ancient tradition. Said one rider, “It’s a different kind of meditation. It’s a moving meditation.”



Photos courtesy of Julie Weckstein and John Schlag