

FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter

THREE REFLECTIONS FOR ONE GONE FORTH

A talk given by Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi during the ordination of Thitābho Bhikkhu and Sāmanera Cunda. Transcription by Minty Ryan.

I would like to express my great joy to be here today on this auspicious occasion. Originally when I planned my trip, I was to fly back to New York last night, but when I arrived at Abhayagiri last week I heard that an ordination was planned for today. Many people said to me, “It’s too bad you won’t be here on Sunday when the ordination takes place.” It then occurred to me that I don’t have any urgent need to be back in New York today or tomorrow, so I thought, “Let me just postpone my trip one day and stay for the ordination.” I’m very glad that I made that decision. Let me extend my best wishes, first to Bhikkhu Thitābho in his new life as a bhikkhu, a fully ordained monk, and then to Sāmanera Cunda, formerly Anagārika Lee, who has entered the monastic life as a sāmanera or novice-monk.

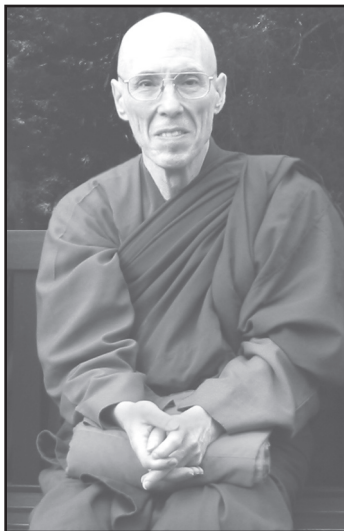
I want to base my talk on a short statement of the Buddha from the Anguttara Nikāya. In the Book of Tens, Sutta 101, the Buddha says there are three themes that should be frequently reflected upon by one who has gone forth into the homeless life. These are also the first three of the ten themes that should be reflected upon by one who has gone forth in the larger *Dasadhmma Sutta* (AN 10.108), but the first three form a distinct set. I’ll first recite each one in Pāli and then explain it.

The first one: “*Vevanniy’ambhi ajjhūpagato`ti pabbajitena abbinham paccavekkhitabbam.*” This

means, literally, “I have entered upon a classless condition: this is something that should be frequently reflected upon by one who has gone forth into the homeless life.” In the Buddha’s time, society was divided into four social classes, which were called *vannas* in Pāli, or *varnas* in Sanskrit: the brahmins, the priestly caste; the kshatriyas, the administrative or governing class; the vaishyas, the mercantile, business and cultivating class; and the shudras, the workers, the laboring class. Below these were those who performed the lowest jobs in society, the outcasts, considered even lower than the working class. In the Buddha’s time everybody within society belonged to one of the four *vannas*, unless one was an outcast. In Indian society people were extremely conscious of their class position in society. Each social class had distinct privileges, duties, rights, and claims regarding food, marriage, financial obligations, and social relations with the other classes. But when one goes forth into the homeless life, one gives up all of these social obligations, commitments, and responsibilities, and one becomes simply a homeless one. One is then totally outside the class system and has thus entered upon a classless condition. Those who take ordination into the Buddhist order become simply monastic followers of the Buddha, without class distinctions.

In one sutta, the Buddha uses a beautiful simile to illustrate this point. He says that when the waters of the four major rivers flow down and reach the ocean, they give up their separate identities as water from the Ganges River, water from the Mahi River, water from the Saraswati River, and water from the Yamuna River, and

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Bhikkhu Bodhi

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From the Monastery

The monastic community experienced the upshot of global warming during this year's winter retreat with three months of mostly pleasant, sunny and warm weather and a little snow in late February. Over the course of three months, Ajahn Amaro read the entire body of Luang Por Chah's teachings in English, ending with teachings from Ajahn Sumedho. To be immersed in the headwaters of our particular forest lineage was an opportunity to reflect on the inheritance we have received from our venerable elders.

COMMUNITY, TEACHINGS, TRAVELS

On April 4 Ajahn Pasanno returned from his fifteen-month sabbatical in Thailand. The convergence of the Ajahn returning and the emerging-from-retreat mode of the larger community gave him a relatively smooth landing. Requests for time with the Ajahn were coming in—lucky for us, Ajahn Pasanno was not at all familiar with his new office and cabin, which were brought into existence during his time away, so the aspect of his being slightly dazed provided us good opportunity to hear Ajahn Pasanno recount his time in retreat: His long periods of solitude in his cave; in his kuti on the retreat land; the delight in having “no real duties,” other than going on almsround each morning; and tales of some of the remarkable Ajahns whom he was able to visit and receive guidance from during his time back in Thailand. Ajahn Pasanno had a very meaningful visit with Luang Ta Mahā Boowa in late October and a meeting with Ajahn Baen from Sakol Nakon province, who offered some personal advice: “contemplate the four foundations of mindfulness and *anattā*.”

Ajahn Pasanno has been offering many fine teachings since his return, principally stemming from the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, namely the four aspects of *cāga*, *patinissaggo*, *mutti* and *anālayo*¹, which the Buddha proclaimed to be the Third Noble Truth; the cultivation of *mettā*² as a prerequisite to contentment and concentration; and the encouragement to view the body in terms of the four constituent elements.

Venerable Cāgānando, an American monk who was resident at Wat Pah Nanachat, arrived at Abhayagiri in April for a one year residence. We welcome him to the community and certainly appreciate his kind and gentle energy.

From April 9–13, Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Sudanto, Tan Karunadhammo and Tan Ñāniko travelled to the City of the Dharma Realm in Sacramento for the

twelfth annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering. Monks and nuns with roots in India, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Tibet, China, Korea and Japan were represented. The theme of this year's gathering was “Training with Health and Illness.” The monastics shared chants and liturgy for alleviating and/or reflecting upon sickness, aging and death, and a few shared their personal experiences with chronic illness. These annual gatherings of the Western Buddhist Monastic Sangha have led to many areas of connection and friendship amongst the attendees.

One very special attendee of the conference this year was Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, who returned to Abhayagiri with the monks and blessed us with his presence from April 13–18. Given the incredible breadth of Bhikkhu Bodhi's knowledge of the suttas, we were the glad recipients of clear, succinct explanations of Dhamma. People also had the opportunity to clear up doubts concerning Pāli grammar that had been puzzling them.

While the four monks were attending the Monastic Gathering we were visited by Ajahn Dton, the second monk at a forest monastery in Nong Khai, Thailand, founded and led by Ajahn Tui. Although Ajahn Dton stayed less than twenty-four hours, he touched and inspired those who met him with his warmth, brightness and sense of humor. The community spent time receiving advice on Dhamma practice and asking questions from this meditation master, touching on the subjects of Right Speech, *samatha* vs. *vipassanā*³ techniques, and how to deal with business. Ajahn Dton answered all of these questions by returning to the theme of mindfulness, encouraging us to “Develop mindfulness throughout the day in all of our activities. When there is a steadiness of awareness things will start to become apparent on their own.” He emphasized that even if we have a solid foundation in the theory of Right Speech, we need a strong foundation of mindfulness to really practice it.

In mid-April was the annual Upāsikā Renewal Day. It was attended by lay practitioners who have made a longterm commitment to spiritual practice in connections with Abhayagiri, and was a fine opportunity for them to gather and reaffirm their refuge in the Triple Gem and Five Precepts.

On a very rainy April 21st, the family and friends of ten-year-old Todd Tansuhaj gathered to mark the one year date of his passing away, and to inter his ashes in a niche in the “Cool Oaks” area of our forest near the confluence of three creeks. Three of Todd's young schoolmates made the trip down from Washington State and gave very moving reflections about their dear pal.

Nicholas Grueff taking anagārika ordination



1. Cāga: Giving up, relinquishing.

Patinissagga: Relinquishing the sense of self.

Mutti: Freedom, letting go within changing conditions.

Anālaya: The quality of “non-stickiness” due to the clarity and steadiness of mind.

2. Mettā: Lovingkindness

3. Samatha: Meditative tranquility.

Vipassanā: Insight / investigation.



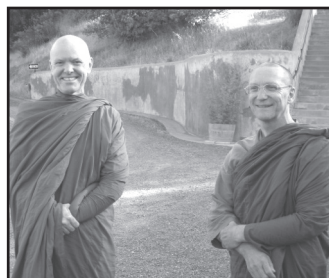
The following afternoon in the forest, under a sky vacillating between bright and clear, and ominous, battleship-grey rain clouds, the monks assembled on the open-air ordination platform to formally admit Sāmanera Thitābho into the bhikkhu Sangha, as well as to observe the going-forth of Anagarika Lee Mintz into the ochre robes of a Sāmanera, and to learn of his new name: “Sāmanera Cunda.”

In addition to the resident monastic community, we were honored to have several other senior bhikkhus join in the ordination ceremony. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi gave a talk of encouragement to the newly ordained ones (see feature article). Reverend Heng Sure of Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, Ajahn Ritthi, the abbot of Atammayatarama Buddhist Monastery in Woodinville, Washington and representatives from Wat Buddhansorn in Fremont, California also attended the ordination. Members of Tan Thitābho’s and Tan Cunda’s families assembled to observe the ordination, tour the monastery and enjoy mingling with their sons’ Sangha family.

After the ordination, Ajahn Amaro left for the eastern US and Michigan, a state which he last visited eight years ago. While there, Ajahn gave daily teachings to various groups, which were well received and greatly appreciated.

From April 25th to May 3rd, Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Punnadhammo, and Taraniya (Gloria Ambrosia) lead an eight day monastic retreat at IMS in Barre, MA. On May fifth, Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Punnadhammo conducted a daylong workshop on “The Safety of the Island: Exploring the Nature of Nibbāna” at the nearby Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. The next day, Ajahn Amaro was joined once again by Taraniya at BCBS to lead a daylong on “The Fourfold Family of the Buddha.”

On April 27–28, Ajahn Pasanno, his mother Rhoda Perry, and others attended the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco. His Holiness discoursed on Lama Tsongkapa’s “In Praise of Dependent Origination.” His Holiness delivered some very clear presentations on the Four Noble Truths, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness,



Ajahn Dick and Ajahn Pasanno

the Three Characteristics and cultivating the Brahmavihāras. Essentially, His Holiness gave a very detailed overview of the main tenets of the Theravāda path of practice, to over 4,500 people. About 250 monastics sat on the teaching platform. Much gratitude to the monks of Gyūto Vajrayana Center, who hosted the event, and to a Chinese Buddhist group who offered the meals each day for all the monastics attending the teachings.

Ajahn Sudanto and Tan Karunadhammo journeyed up to Portland from May 10–14 at the invitation of the Portland Friends of the Dhamma group. While there, they looked at possible pieces of land to “rough it” during the coming rains retreat (July 30–October 26). It “is the plan” that the two monks will spend the vassa living very simply on forest land, looked after by local lay stewards belonging to the group. Contact information for the Portland group can be found on the calendar page.

Tan Khemavāro, an American monk living at Bodhinyana monastery in Perth, Australia came to visit Abhayagiri in May. He was accompanied by several members of his family, who joined in with the monastic routine and offered dāna.

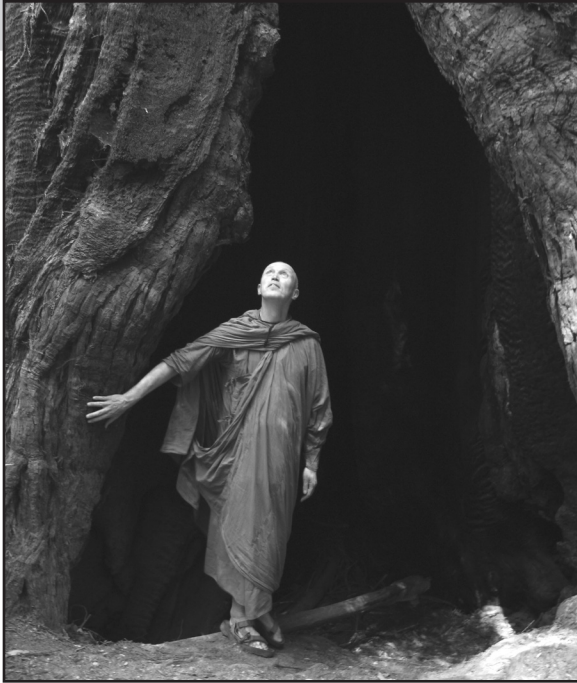
Ajahn Amaro led a three part series on the topic of “Faith in Awakening” on May 16, 23, and 30 at Yoga Mendocino in Ukiah. The series was both very well attended and received—about 80 people for each session. Locals voiced their gratitude and newcomers were moved to begin visiting the monastery.

We are happy to welcome Michael Bodman into the community. Michael served the three month winter retreat but had to leave until late May to take care of things at his home in Arizona. He has requested to stay on as an anāgarika for one year.

Ajahn Sucitto, the abbot of Chithurst Forest Monastery in West Sussex, England, came to stay with us for a week at the end of May. He had been traveling in the US giving teachings and it was our good fortune to be able to have him stay here.

The monastic community observed Vesakha Pūjā on the full moon of May. This day marks the historical Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and passing into final Parinibbāna two and a half millennia ago. The resident community and a gathering of devoted lay people convened at the ordination platform to practice and listen to teachings.

Ajahn Sucitto carried the torch that evening with a talk on developing faith. He emphasised developing sense restraint, particularly in regards to restraining the unwholesome, using the Five *Indriya*: *saddhā* (faith); *virīya* (energy, effort); *sati* (mindfulness); *samādhi* (concentration, collectedness); and *paññā* (wisdom). As he put it “when mindfulness supervises, unskillfulness breaks up, and what is left is clarity—stillness by itself.” The Ajahn also commented on how thoroughly “chilled out” the local deer population was here. Unfortunately it is not possible to replicate in this newsletter Ajahn Sucitto’s pantomime of a relaxed deer flopping its ears as it munches on leaves.



Ajahn Sucitto, Montgomery Woods

Another senior western monk, Ajahn Dick Silāratano, a disciple of Luang Ta Mahā Boowa, who has lived in Udon Province, Thailand for the past 30 years, came to visit in June. Ajahn Dick spent time with the Sangha, sharing reflections of his many years of living and training with Luang Ta Mahā Boowa. Ajahn stressed the importance of developing mindfulness in all of one's activities and on developing deep trust in your teacher, relating to teachers with absolute honesty. Ajahn Pasanno also shared some of his reflections on living with Luang Por Chah and the parallels, in terms of ways of training westerners, to those of Luang Ta Mahā Boowa. Both of these Great Elders seemed to have picked up on a particular aspect of their western students who came to train with them: "Stubborn!"

Joseph Kappell (ex-bhikkhu Pabhākarō) visited in June. We enjoyed hearing stories about the early days with Luang Por Chah. He offered Thai massage to people, and gave some Thai massage lessons to those who were interested.

In mid-June Ajahn Sudanto, Tan Ñāniko and Sāmanera Cunda went to Boulder Creek, CA to camp out with Ajahn Chandako at "Flowing Tiger Redwood Hermitage." In six days the group set up a water tank and bowl washing area in order to create a simple retreat setting for one or two monks to practice in solitude throughout the year.

The community welcomes back Jackie Miller. Jackie spent the last vassa at Abhayagiri but then left to live at Amaravati. Her intention is to take ordination, but for now she has returned to Abhayagiri to look after Casa Serena and practice on the "Fearless Mountain."

The community was happy to welcome Nicholas Grueff into the homeless life as an anagārika in June. Anagārika Nic took dependence on Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro and began on his year-long commitment to the anagārika training on June 16.

Venerable Ahimsako also returned to the community in June. He had just spent his third year as a bhikkhu at the monasteries in England. It is customary for an Abhayagiri monk to spend his third year away at a branch monastery of his choice. Tan Ahimsako's uprightness and good energy was appreciated by the Sangha in England. Luang Por Sumedho, perhaps in jest, announced that he was considering confiscating Tan Ahimsako's passport!

The first Tuesday at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, the second Wednesday at Yoga Mendocino and The Saturday night talks at Abhayagiri are still a regular feature. Thank you to Arthur Robinson for writing a website article for each of the first Tuesdays, and to Mary Paffard for drawing people in to attend Ajahn Amaro's "Faith Series" at Yoga Mendocino.

DEVELOPMENT

There is a building moratorium this year, which means we get to enjoy our new facilities, clean the monastery, and tie up loose ends that weren't important enough to tie up when large building projects were happening. The two new solar systems and four kutis are operating well and require very little maintenance.

At the end of February we had a good snowfall which downed several trees on the property, so our monthly community work days were devoted mostly to moving oak and madrone logs out of the forest and doing controlled burns. Thank you to the lay people who offered their services and muscle.

One maintenance task was the cutting of a large oak tree which was rotting at the base. The tree was looming over one of our most remote kutis, and if it were to fall the kuti would be destroyed. Anumodanā to Kun Kanchai of Santa Rosa for offering to cut down the tree for us. The 40-foot tree was felled successfully.

Plans are currently in the works to build an 8'x12' shrine platform to house the golden Buddha just above the cloister area. The Buddha was repainted two years ago and has been sitting, exposed to the elements since then. The shrine house will provide an area for people to pay respects to the Buddha image, and will allow the paint job to last much longer.

Tan Jotipālo has been hard at work on a maintenance manual. The manual shows all annual and monthly tasks to be done around the monastery and gives detailed instructions on how to carry these out.

Special thanks to Kathy Lewis for her work finishing up a new day-use meditation platform on the land at Casa Serena. This will allow women guests to get some seclusion for sitting and walking meditation during the day. 🙏

The Sangha

Tales from Varapañño

EARLY YEARS WITH AJAHN SUMEDHO, PART 2

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

After the Magha Pūjā observances, I finally got sent to stay with Ajahn Jun. While I was there, Ajahn Tieng came and told me that Ajahn Sumedho and some *farang*¹ monks were establishing a new monastery near the railroad line not far from Wat Pah Pong. Projecting my own world view, I imagined them living in a treeless expanse near the tracks, roasting in the hot season sun and enduring all sorts of unspeakable privations. Little did I know that, as one of the monks was to tell me when I was back at Wat Pah Pong, “Every time you sit down someone hands you a cup of coffee.” The area was also an established forest preserve, having been a crematorium and burial ground, fear of spirits naturally kept hunters and loggers away.

When lay people came to Wat Pah Pong, Luang Por would ask them if they’d been to “Sumedho’s monastery” yet, with the result that the food offerings became sumptuous. Of course, Ajahn Chah kept abreast of goings-on. Tan² Pabhākarō came to Wat Pah Pong a little while later and told me that one junior monk, Gary (his Pāli name never caught on), “put his foot in it” when visiting Luang Por one day. Luang Por innocently asked, “Gary! Do you have coffee and sugar at Wat Bung Wai?” Gary respectfully replied that they did. “Do you have it every day?” “Yes, sir, every day.” Luang Por soon got hold of the Bung Wai villagers, asked what was going on and told them to cool it. Still, there was little hardship in that department when I went to stay there for the *pansah*³.

Unless one has spent a few months in a monastery, it’s hard to appreciate how much importance things like coffee and tea can take on, especially in the austere monasteries of northeast Thailand, where a warm, sweet drink might be available once a week. When I was with Ajahn Sinuan, one afternoon he took a few monks to a nearby village to chant blessings for a couple that had gotten married. The next month he took a group to do funeral chanting in the village one evening. The following morning, he asked if I recalled that they had gone to bless a married couple the month before; the funeral was for the bride, who had committed suicide. My very first thought upon hearing this, fully sincere and totally free of sarcasm, was someone who is a lay person has the freedom to drink coffee whenever she wants—why would she want to kill herself?

It wasn’t all high living, though. Several of the monks got typhoid fever. One afternoon Ajahn Sumedho came to visit Luang Por, and he was telling him about Tan Pasanno, who had developed stomach ulcers, lost weight, and was feeling run down,

and shortly after became ill with typhoid. “He endures very well,” he told Luang Por. “He never complains.”

Luang Por got the gleam in his eyes, having been handed an opportunity. “Not like Varapañño. He complains about this, he complains about that, he complains all the time . . .”

The kutis, *sālā*, and *bote*⁴ at the newly opened monastery for foreigners, Wat Bung Wai, were extremely basic. There wasn’t really much there, but there was an energy and spirit of common purpose that I hadn’t experienced in any of the other monasteries. As Ajahn Sumedho put it, “We’re not here because our mothers sent us.” I remember the first evening I attended the chanting. After Ajahn Sumedho recited the lead-in verse and the rest of the Sangha joined in, I was almost blown out of my seat.

He set up a rigorous practice schedule for the *pansah* while always reminding us that the point of the practice was self-awareness, seeing the three characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*, not becoming meditation athletes or trying to attain something. His presentation of Vinaya⁵ was similar. He had no patience for nitpicking and hairsplitting over rules, but he obviously had a great reverence for Vinaya as a tool for mindfulness and harmonious living, and there certainly wasn’t any sloppiness. One time when he read the Vinaya to us, he explained that the rules weren’t absolute principles that incurred punishment if violated. “It’s not like God is watching over your shoulder, and if you pee standing up, He calls out, ‘*Abat dukkot!* (*dukkhata apatti*, a minor infraction),” and he had a good laugh at his own joke. As was to also happen later on when the Sangha had gone to England, occasionally some grumbling from the fanatical would reach Luang Por Chah’s ears, so he would come to check things out and talk with Ajahn Sumedho and then decide that everything was fine.

Ajahn Sumedho had resisted the role of mentor and teacher for some time, but at that point he was ready and willing to surrender to Ajahn Chah’s directives, realizing that the way to freedom lay in giving up everything to do with self-grasping, including wishes about how and where one preferred to live. His example in this regard was impeccable and provided an ever-present standard and inspiration for us. He also took up the challenge of being a teacher with his usual creative approach, for example reading poetry out loud in order to improve his diction and refamiliarize himself with the English language. His reading occasionally yielded nuggets he could add to his teaching; one poem he was fond of ended with the lines “. . . consume my heart away, sick with desire and fastened to a dying animal / It knows not what it is, and gather me into the artifice of eternity. . . .”

One night during sitting meditation, he started talking about burning bridges. “You have it in the back of your mind that if things don’t work out, you can ask dad for help. Then you

1. Farang: A Thai word referring to Westerners.

2. Tan: An honourific used in the Thai language which means “venerable”

3. Pansah: The Thai word for vassa, the three month rains retreat observed by Buddhist monastics during the monsoon season.

4. Bote: Comes from the Pāli word *uposathā*. The bote is where the monastics recite their rules of training every fortnight.

5. Vinaya: The Buddhist monastic code of discipline.

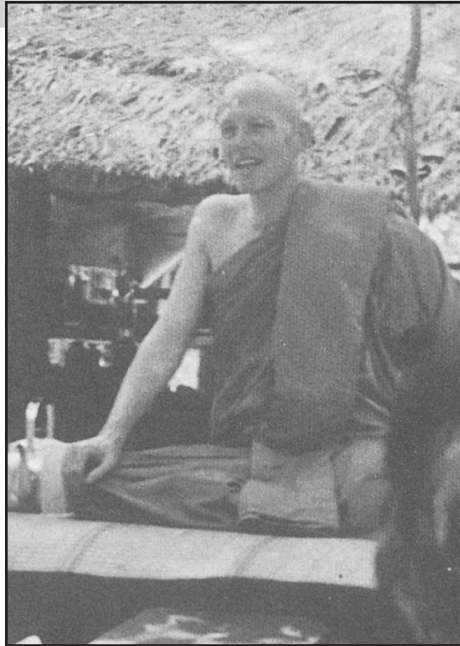
can go lead a good life; you dream about living in a nice house, doing yoga by the fireplace. . . .” He wasn’t promising a land of bliss in exchange for giving everything up, but instead wanted us to face the irrational fears that the idea of giving up brought on. He often reminded us that there was no excitement in our way of life. “Nobody is ever going to make a movie about sewing a set of robes and dyeing them in *gaen kanun*⁶,” he once said. Still, his example, and that of Ajahn Chah, told us that it was probably a good deal to stay the course and let it all go.

We presented him with various challenges, but all in all it was a time of harmony. One of the senior monks, whom I was sure had been his spouse in a past life, had a way of getting under his skin (and seemed to do so intentionally at times). When he read and explained the *sikkhāpada*⁷ section of the Pātimokkha rules to the Sangha, whatever type of behavior was proscribed, that monk would act it out the next morning: walking on toes while going pindapat, smacking his lips while eating, and so on.

After the pansah, the two of them went to Ayutthaya, to Ajahn Tawee’s monastery, at Luang Por’s directive, in order to learn how to conduct *parivāsa*⁸, an important monastic function. Ajahn Sumedho came back alone. When we gathered for tea, with eyes wide and nostrils flaring, he said, “I’ve really had it with that one!” and then did an imitation of the monk telling him off, bobbing and weaving and bending forward as he spoke: “Now Ajahn Sumedho, I want you to listen to me, because I’m going to tell you exactly what’s wrong with you. . . . The trouble with you is, you’re lacking in *sacca*⁹.” He drew himself up and with a great display of wrath said, “So I let him have it with both barrels!”

A couple of years later, after I had disrobed and was living in California, I asked another fellow who had been a novice at Wat Nanachat if he had ever met that monk. “No, I didn’t,” he said, “but I often heard Ajahn Sumedho speak about him with great feeling.”

Still, the two were joined at the hip and did actually seem to have a lot of fondness for each other. For several years, I’d always heard Ajahn Sumedho say, “This has been my best pansah ever” after the rains retreat concluded. But, after his second pansah as an abbot (which I spent at Wat Pah Pong), someone told me that one day at the bathing place he said, “This has been the worst pansah ever!”



Ajahn Sumedho, Wat Pah Nanachat, 1970s

Needless to say, Luang Por Chah was aware of Ajahn Sumedho’s weak points, which meant among other things that he liked to tweak him from time to time. “Everyone can tell when Sumedho is angry,” he once said, laughing. “His ears turn red.” One time Luang Por came to stay overnight at Bung Wai and left at dawn. As we helped Ajahn Sumedho on with his robes, we noticed that his *sanghati*, the outer robe, was a foot too short. We realized that Luang Por must have taken Ajahn Sumedho’s *sanghati* and left his.

“I can imagine the scene at Wat Pah Pong now,” one monk said.

I added my two cents’ worth. “Luang Por is probably making his jokes about how farangs smell bad from drinking milk.”

Ajahn Sumedho’s face immediately darkened, and he said, “Sometimes I wish Luang Por would keep his jokes to himself!” (Having been the first farang, he was no doubt the butt of that one for several years.)

During the first year at Bung Wai, I think we all started to get the idea that sooner or later some of us would be going to the West to establish a monastery. “When we go to the West” would often get inserted into conversations about bhikkhu life. Then in May of 1976, Ajahn Sumedho and I, accompanied by the layman Pansak as our steward, traveled to the United States to visit his family and mine, at the invitation of my grandmother.

In Bangkok he was asked to give a talk at Wat Boworn, where a number of farang monks stayed and farang laypeople came to study. In California, an old friend of mine invited him to speak at the Zen Center of Santa Cruz. There were numerous chats with monks and laypeople during the trip. It was interesting to watch him at work outside of the familiar environment of Wat Bung Wai and Wat Pah Pong. It usually took him a few minutes to warm up and get a feel for his audience, but once he got rolling the people were always thoroughly engaged. It was pretty clear to me that he was ready to teach in the West, or anywhere else.

On that trip I also got to see more personal aspects of him. He hadn’t seen his parents for twelve years and I think he felt some trepidation, unsure what it would be like. When we arrived in Los Angeles, we were met by the parents of Jotiko Bhikkhu, the Hamiltons, who hosted us for a couple of days. They then drove us to San Diego, to the home of Ajahn Sumedho’s sister. We stayed in a tent in their yard, and the next morning they took

6. Gaen kanun: Jackfruit wood, chips of which were boiled down to make the reddish-ochre dye used by many Thai Forest Tradition monks.

7. Sikkhāpada: The section of the Vinaya dealing with rules of etiquette and deportment.

8. Parivāsa: A period of probation a monk will undergo for transgressing certain training rules.

9. Sacca: Honesty, truthfulness.

us to see his parents. I felt some tension building as we arrived. We stood outside for a few moments and then his father came out, shuffled towards us, and said, “Hi Bob,” as if he dropped by every week and this was just another visit.

I was introduced and we shook hands, though he took my name to be “Warner Panyo.” When he later introduced me to one of the neighbors, without batting an eyelash at the sight of two men in saffron robes, the elderly gent said, “Hi Warner” and shook my hand.

His parents seemed pretty robust for their age, especially his mother. They offered us a meal and then left us to eat in silence. As we were finishing, Ajahn Sumedho turned to me and said, “My mother looks so old and shriveled up, it makes me want to cry.”

I was having old friends call on me, so Ajahn Sumedho started to get a little nostalgic too and started thinking about looking up some people. Then one day as we sat in the tent, he tore up his list and said, “Robert Jackman is dead.” But he also told me later on that when he took leave of his parents, he told his father (with whom he didn’t have as much of a rapport as with his mother) that he loved him and appreciated him for being such a wonderful dad.

Most monks have their food obsessions and Ajahn Sumedho was no exception, though in this as in most things, he tended to simplicity. He was always game for a cup of coffee. Once after morning chanting at Wat Pah Pong I asked him if he’d like some instant coffee with cold water and a dash of salt, and full of enthusiasm, he said, “Sure!” as if the question itself needn’t be asked. He often drank coffee at night, and I asked him if it kept him awake. “It helps me sleep mindfully,” he said. His other great love was potatoes, especially potato salad. He once blurted out, “My mother makes the best potato salad!” when we were chatting after the meal, and then became a little red-faced, as he had laid down a rule that we wouldn’t talk about food during the pansah. So he

was looking forward to potato salad on our trip, but of course would never request it, even from his own parents. When I met up with him in San Francisco, I asked if he got any potato salad, and almost pouting, he said he hadn’t. So when we were in New York and I was laid up in hospital after knee surgery, I suggested to my mother that Ajahn Sumedho would really appreciate some potato salad. The next day when she came to visit I asked if she had offered him some; she said she had, and added, “My God, he ate a whole pound of it!”

My friend had driven down from Santa Cruz with a Zen buddy and I went back with them, driving up the coast, camping out in Big Sur and meditating on a cliff overlooking the ocean,

and enjoying coffee with refills the next morning. I spent a few days at my friend’s cabin in the hills and Ajahn Sumedho flew up to San Francisco later on.

Unfortunately I tore the cartilage in my knee while I was there and the joint swelled up badly, so after picking up Ajahn Sumedho at the airport we went to see a Chinese acupuncturist in San Francisco. He had an import shop, which was basically a front as he wasn’t licensed to practice medicine; when a patient showed up he would put the “Closed” sign in the window, lock the door, and pull down the shade.

He greeted my friend sternly, seemingly taking no note of the two monks. “How you living these days? Your mind like chop suey—too many things.” Then he looked at us. My friend told him a little about us and about my problem. He started talking about the times of persecution under Mao Zedong, how while the Buddhist monasteries got wiped out, the Taoists were more clever and went into hiding or melted into the lay population. He seemed to be weighing us up, perhaps showing his disapproval, but finally asked Ajahn Sumedho to hold out his wrist so he could take his pulses. He remarked that Ajahn Sumedho was quite a healthy specimen, asked him how much he slept (five hours a night), and put some needles in his chronically swollen foot. Ajahn also managed to speak a few words of Chinese to him, as he had studied it in University years before.

He examined and treated me next (mercifully not asking how much I slept). When we were done, my friend asked what the fee was, but he just waved him off.

I stayed in New York to have knee surgery and Ajahn Sumedho returned to Thailand with Pansak via London. They stayed at the English Sangha Trust house in Hampstead.

The Trust, which had been set up years before, expressly for the purpose of establishing a monastic presence in England, had been agonizing over how to find bhikkhus to fulfill their mission, and then all of a sudden Ajahn Sumedho was there. He fit the bill perfectly.

I stopped there too a month later and everything I said to them about Ajahn Chah’s version of monastic life made good sense to them; it seemed to be exactly what they were hoping for. George Sharp, the chairman, came to Wat Pah Pong a few months later to invite Ajahn Chah England.

I spent the pansah at Wat Pah Pong and saw Ajahn Sumedho only occasionally. I visited on Christmas Day, when Luang Por gave his “Christ-Buddhamas” talk. There was a new *sālā*, mostly completed, and some new kutis, but the most striking thing about the monastery was the energy and creative spirit. One of the innovations at that time was early morning yoga. Ajahn Sumedho

He had a great relaxed, uncontrived manner, often smiling and laughing gently at things, like an infant, I thought. But there was no fuzziness involved.

Continued on page 14

(continued from page 1)

become known simply as the water of the ocean. Similarly, he says, when people from the four social classes go forth into the homeless life they give up their personal names, their family names, and their class identity, and they become known simply as samanās, ascetics, who are followers of Sakyaputta, the son of the Sakyan Clan, that is, the Buddha. In our own American society we do not have quite the same kind of rigid class system as India had, but we use many other ways to distinguish people into different types. Some have university degrees, BA, MA, PhD; some have been scientists, some businessmen, some professors, some manual laborers, some technicians, some artists or musicians, some actors, some craftspeople. Some are in this income bracket, others in that income bracket. Some are from Red States, others from Blue States. Some move in these social circles, some move in those social circles. However, when we become Buddhist monks we give up all these distinguishing marks that might have defined us in lay life, all these characteristics that make us stand out as particular individuals, shaping us as individual selves. We aim to give up these distinguishing characteristics and become simply followers of the Enlightened One.

We all imitate the appearance of the Buddha. When the Buddha left the palace to become a seeker of truth, he cut off his hair and beard, gave up his princely robes and put on the brown robes of an ascetic. And we too do the same: we shave our heads, shave our faces clean, and exchange our lay clothing for the monastic robes. From the Buddha's time until the present, there have been many changes in fashion. Every year there are four changes in fashion: fall fashions, winter fashions, spring fashions, and summer fashions. If you are fashion conscious, you need new clothes for each change of season. However, for 2500 years of Buddhist monastic history, there have been no changes in fashion. It's always been the same three robes, basically the same cut and color. If you look at a crowd of monks and your son is among them, with a shaved head and brown robes, you have to look very carefully to single him out. It's no longer the obvious head of hair, the familiar facial features; for they all look pretty much alike.

As monks, in our own minds we train ourselves to eliminate the attachment to those features and qualifications that might single us out as somebody special. In Pāli we say that the ideal for a monk is to become *akiñcano*, which means "a nothing, a nobody." In worldly life the aim is to become somebody special. When I became a monk my parents used to say to me, "What are you? You have to be somebody. You're a nothing." I would reply: "I'm not yet a nothing. That's my ideal but I still have a long way to go before I'm a nothing. In the quarters where I hang out, if I were to say, 'I'm a nothing,' that would be considered boasting."

So we constantly reflect: *vevanniy'ambhi ajjhūpagato' ti*, "I have entered into the state of one who is without any claim to special qualities, a state without distinctive marks." We aim to

divest ourselves of any claims to be someone special. Of course, we also try to be someone special in terms of our personal qualities, but we do so without attachment to them, without identification with them. We always try to be low, humble, ordinary, simple Buddhist monks simply following the example of the Buddha, conforming to the same discipline, maintaining the same appearance. At the same time, however, we also maintain the dignity of those who bear responsibility for sustaining the Buddha's teaching in the world.

The second theme for reflection: *Parapatibaddhā me jīvikā ti pabbajitena abhinham paccavekkhitabbham*. "My very life is bound up with and dependent on others': this is often to be reflected upon by one who has gone forth into homelessness." People living in the world try to be self-sufficient. One wants to be independent, to be autonomous, and even to be able to provide for many others. But when one becomes a Buddhist monk, one deliberately places oneself in a position of dependence on others for one's basic needs: robes, food, a dwelling place, and medicines. We don't work at remunerative jobs to earn money; we don't go to shops and buy things for ourselves. We depend on the offerings of others, on their generosity. We deliberately place ourselves in this position because that is expected of one who has gone forth into homelessness. One goes forth into homelessness to devote one's life to spiritual development, to the purification of the mind, to the understanding of the Dhamma, to the realization of truth. Yet this quest for truth and liberation is not a self-centered quest; it's a quest that opens to the world. We who have gone forth invite the people of the world to join us on this quest for enlightenment, we give them the opportunity to participate in this quest, and we do so by giving them the opportunity to contribute the material means to support us as we wholeheartedly seek to purify our hearts and penetrate the truth of the Dhamma.

Thus the symbol of the monastic life is the almsbowl. It is a symbol that represents the nature of our life as Buddhist monks. It might seem that living by an almsbowl means that you're a beggar, a parasite living off the hard work of others. But when we understand things through the eye of Dhamma, we see that it is the monastic person standing at the door with his almsbowl who is providing the gift to the person who has the opportunity to offer alms. In Asian Buddhist culture, when a monastic person goes on almsround, that person is extending the charisma of the Buddha's enlightenment, the spiritual power of the Dhamma to the whole society. Simply by walking silently from door-to-door collecting almsfood, he is letting the spiritual energy of the Dhamma pervade the whole world. It's through this act of going for alms, walking from door-to-door slowly and mindfully, that the monk or the nun is giving the householder the opportunity to share in this collective work of walking the way towards the goal of enlightenment and liberation. The mo-

nastic person has fully dedicated his or her life to this task. The layperson is still bound by the obligations and responsibilities of household life, but by walking for alms, by putting oneself into a position of dependence, a monastic person gives the householder an opportunity to share in that journey towards enlightenment. This gives the householder an opportunity to send down the wholesome roots of *saddhā*, of faith, to practice *dāna*, generosity, to develop the mind of relinquishment, to generate the roots of merit that will bring happiness and joy in this life and benefits and spiritual progress in many future lives. So when we live in dependence on others, we do not become helpless dependent parasites; rather, this is our way of opening to and benefiting the world, and those who help the monastics in their lives by providing them with their requisites gain many benefits in return. They're also participating in this work of liberation, developing the wholesome, virtuous qualities that will flow through their own minds, bringing joy and happiness, bringing peace and wisdom.

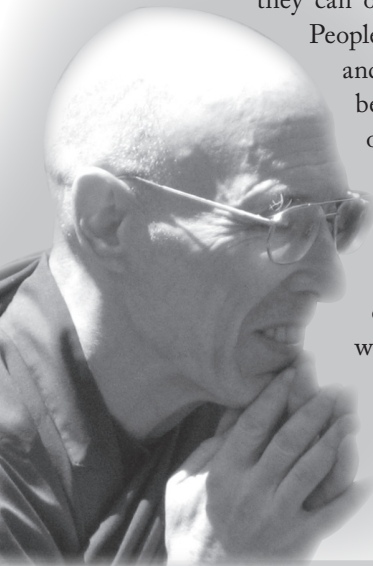
The third reflection recommended for those who have entered on the homeless life: *Añño me ākappo karaniyo ti*. "My manner must be different from others': this is something which should be often reflected upon by one who has gone forth in the homeless life." When we go forth into the homeless life, we take on a great responsibility. By wearing these robes and having the shaved head we inevitably stand out in a crowd. When we go into an airport, eyes fasten on us, "Who is that strange person?" If we are walking down the street, eyes fasten on us, "Why is this one dressed differently than others?" If we are in a subway the eyes fix on us, "Why is this one different from others?" So the monastic person dresses differently, and therefore looks differently, and people who have some knowledge will realize: "This one is a Buddhist monk." Or if it's a woman, they will know: "That's a Buddhist nun." And they'll take that person as representing the Buddha's teaching. They may know little about Buddhism, but they base their assessment of Buddhism on what they can observe in the conduct of this person.

People are prone to rush to quick judgments, and so we have this responsibility in our behavior, our appearance, our manner, of representing the *Buddhadhamma* properly, with dignity, with grandness. Our behavior, our manner, our appearance, must be on a level with the inherent greatness and grandeur of the Buddha's teaching itself. So whether we're alone, in a group of fellow Buddhists, and especially when we are out in the world among those who are not Buddhists, we have to maintain a high standard of proper deportment, of proper conduct.

That is one reason why we have a very extensive code of monastic discipline, the *Vinaya*, which lays down many rules of conduct. Some of these rules are concerned with the basic principles of ethical training, principles that pertain to the essence of the monastic life. But many rules are not concerned with the essence of the training but with maintaining proper deportment when one moves in society. For example, one doesn't go running down the street because if one runs down the street it looks undignified. If one has to move quickly, one should walk briskly, but not too quickly, keeping a moderate pace so that one never loses one's self-composure and inner dignity. When one walks, one shouldn't swing the arms back and forth but keeps one's arms at one's side. One doesn't look around at all the interesting sights, looking at what's on display in the shop windows—"What's this? What's that?"—but one should present the appearance of one who is self-possessed and has restraint over the sense faculties. So our mode of deportment, our mode of bearing, should display the characteristics of a *samana*, that is, of one who has dedicated his or her life to the training intended to develop mindfulness and inner peace.

These three themes taught by the Buddha will be good starting points for reflection for all of us today. That is, one who has gone forth should reflect, first: "I have entered upon a classless state," which we can take to mean a state where I have to give up any special claims for distinctness, for being somebody special. Instead, I should aim at being *akiñcano*, a person who is "nobody special," one who makes no claims to be somebody special based on extrinsic qualities; of course, one should strive to perfect the excellent qualities distinctive of a monastic person. Second, one should reflect: "My very life is dependent upon others." By making myself dependent upon others I am opening my life to others, and enabling others to advance in generosity and in goodness. By doing so, however, my conduct, my deportment, must be different, must be distinctive, must have the dignity that is commensurate with the greatness of the Buddha's teaching, so that when I go out into the world, I go forth as a representative of the Buddha's *Dhamma*. Those who see me should think that this is a peaceful person, a self-composed person, a person with inner dignity. This can inspire others and, in fact, has inspired many others to develop an interest in the *Dhamma* and can plant the seeds in many others for developing some curiosity about the Buddha's teaching and investigating the Buddha's teaching. In that way, the calm, dignified mode of deportment can draw others to the *Dhamma* and lead them along the way to enlightenment and liberation.

I hope these words of advice will be of help to those who have newly gone forth and newly entered on the *bhikkhu* state and will also be of some value to those who have come to observe the ordination today. I thank you all for your attention. May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you all. 🙏



By *Anagārika Whit Myers*

Most Bay Area supporters of Abhayagiri Monastery are familiar with the monthly Sanghapala Meditation Group lead by an Abhayagiri monastic at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery on the first Tuesday of the month. Less well known is the fact that a much smaller version of the same group meets on all other Tuesdays in the quiet beauty of the Berkeley Zen Center zendo. The evening begins at 7:30 PM with chanting followed by forty minutes of silent meditation and a peer-led Dhamma discussion.

I attended this group regularly from the summer of 2002 until I left UC Berkeley in May 2006 to begin training at Abhayagiri Monastery. Sharing the week's struggles and insights with other committed meditators helped me weather the ups and downs of practice amidst the busy life of a physics graduate student. Despite its small size (typically between three and seven people), I knew that past incarnations of this group had played a key role in the formation of Abhayagiri. Talking with three of the present core attendees of this group when they visited Abhayagiri for Vesakha Pūjā reminded me of my connections to this group. In gratitude, I decided to interview past and present participants and write a brief history of the group for Fearless Mountain.

The impetus for the Sanghapala Meditation Group began when Debbie Stamp vowed to meditate with others once a week after she returned from ten months of practice at Ajahn Sumedho's monasteries in England in June 1988. She began sitting each week with Marc Lieberman and Nancy Garfield in the shrine room of their house in San Francisco, despite the commute from her home in Mountain View. Shortly thereafter, Daniel Barnes inquired about a potential California monastery and the group that was to become the Sanghapala Foundation first met in September 1988. Beginning in Spring 1989, they helped organize Ajahn Sumedho's visits to the West Coast, and interest in founding a monastery increased substantially when Ajahn Sumedho, Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Sundara, and Sister Jotaka participated in a conference entitled "The Joys of Monastic Life" at Spirit Rock in 1990. The group invited Ajahn Amaro to the Bay Area for six to twelve weeks each year thereafter, and the retreats he led spurred interest in the weekly meditation group. They added chanting and informal tea discussion to the meditation program and sometimes the group would sit until midnight on the weekly Lunar Observance Days. In 1992, the group began meeting at St. Aidan's Church, Diamond Heights, to accommodate the increased attendance when Ajahn Amaro was present. However, with the opening of Abhayagiri Monastery in 1996, interest in the peer-led San Francisco meditation group began to wane as the members shifted their attention to the new monastery and to a new, more centrally-located meditation group in the East Bay.

Kondañña (Barry Kapke) started the East Bay meditation group in early 1997. They met at the Berkeley Thai Temple (Wat Mongkolratanam), and Kondañña and Santideva (Fred Kral) took

turns leading it. The group typically consisted of six to twelve people who would chant, do sitting or walking meditation, and listen to taped Dhamma talks. They occasionally invited senior teachers such as Ajahn Geoff and the abbot of the Thai Temple to give Dhamma talks. Fred appreciated the chance to practice together with like-minded people and recalls that the group helped maintain his and others' interest in the Thai Forest Tradition while Abhayagiri Monastery was taking shape.

Attending the 1996 Thanksgiving Retreat inspired Dennis Crean to join the Sanghapala Meditation Group. He was initially disappointed with the members' irregular attendance, but then realized "If I want a committed group, I need to commit myself." So when the Thai Temple became unavailable in fall 1999, Dennis coordinated the group's move to the Berkeley Zen Center, which offered its zendo space to the Sanghapala group on Tuesday nights on a *dāna* basis. Opening the zendo every Tuesday meant that Dennis needed to be on time and he found that this commitment helped bring discipline to his practice. Dennis attended the group until he moved across the street from Abhayagiri in fall 2002.

Although the faces have changed since Dennis carried the key, a small group of meditators inspired by the Thai Forest Tradition continues to share their practice on Tuesday nights. Julie Schlein finds that interacting with others around practice issues helps her to see the nature of her own mind. Virginia Forbes began attending the group following the advice of Phillip Moffitt, one of the Spirit Rock teachers. Despite negative first impressions, she continued to attend because she remembered the Buddha's advice to judge practice by its results. Later she began to appreciate the discussion because it helped her to reflect upon life in light of Buddhist concepts such as the Precepts. Art Robinson began attending the group to maintain the heart-centered quality he experienced on the 2005 Thanksgiving Retreat. He enjoys the small group format because it allows plenty of time for interaction.

Commitment is a central theme in the history of the peer-led Sanghapala Meditation Group. It takes determined effort to attend a meditation group every week, especially in the absence of a charismatic teacher. Yet each of the participants I interviewed found that the benefits of regularly sharing their practice with others were worth the effort. In addition to enriching their personal practice, the members who have committed to attending each week have kept the peer-led Sanghapala Meditation Group active for the past nineteen years. Though the attendees, location, and program have changed numerous times over the years, Bay Area friends of Abhayagiri Monastery continue to gather to share their practice together each week. ♫

The peer-led Sanghapala Meditation Group meets every Tuesday, except the first Tuesday of the month, at the Berkeley Zen Center, 7:30-9:30 pm, 1931 Russell Street (one block from the Ashby BART). The group welcomes new participants. Contact Julie Schlein at juliepgs@gmail.com or (415) 460-9918 for more details.

“The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts”

- The Buddha

THE GIFT OF DHAMMA

By Iris Landsberg

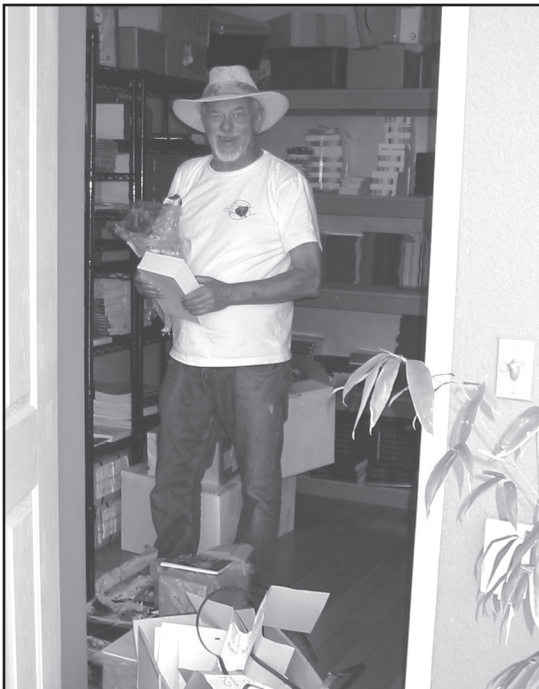
Traditionally, making teachings available to others by helping to print Dhamma books is one of the highest forms of giving. In Thailand, lay people practice this most exalted form of generosity by sponsoring publications of Dhamma teachings for free distribution often dedicated to a beloved teacher or a deceased family member.

In fact, this is just how you and I have come by so many of the books that have given us such delight, and have served as travel guides for our journeys on the Path. Monastics regularly offer the Dhamma through their teachings and by example. And as lay people, we are very fortunate to have an equal opportunity for offering this precious gift of Dhamma, particularly through sponsorship of Dhamma publications for free distribution.

My association with the world of free distribution Dhamma books began about three years ago when I had the good fortune to take over the responsibility of filling the many requests that Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery received for Dhamma books, and at that time, cassette tapes. There was also a small but growing number of requests for books coming from the prison population all around the country. Most of the requests came by snail mail. Tan Nāniko, the current book monk, patiently schooled me in the processes and procedures of recording, weighing, packaging and postage. In addition, he ran me through the hoops one has to jump through to pass prison codes, so that prisoners may be allowed to receive the packages that are sent to them. One of the higher hoops had to do with cassette tapes. Back in the old days before CDs wiped out the tape population (yes, there was a world

before CDs), I had to remove all the screws (five total) from the plastic casing, and then gingerly super-glue the sides of the cassette back together. Of course, I can look back now and say that this did indeed give me the opportunity for reflection; not only had I never been mindful enough to notice that cassette tapes had screws, but I even learned to muster mettā for my aversion to this process and for my many less than successful attempts.

But back to the books. About three months after taking on the job of book mistress, Abhayagiri completely overhauled their web site, allowing books to be requested directly at the site with the order form coming to the then newly-named “Abhayagiri Book Mailing” (no, we were definitely not ready to even consider adding “department” to the end of the title). The result was a bit like letting people loose in an all-you-can-eat Dhamma candy store. Many of the orders were quite large while my packing and handling experience was still very crude and ungainly. I most gratefully extend many thanks to the Redwood Valley Post Office for their patient endurance and words of wisdom. Until Steve Holly came to my rescue about one and a half years ago, by committing his time and energy to Abhayagiri Book Mailing, I was spending about five hours every Sunday getting out all of the books. It was thrilling to see the hunger (perhaps not the best choice of words for a Buddhist) for the Buddha’s teachings. The requests came not only from individuals but also from meditation and study groups and Buddhist centers throughout the country. The books of Ajahn Chah’s teachings were and still are especially popular with the prison population who repeatedly request his teachings.



Steve Holly, mailing books

From: GR, Washington Correctional Institution, FL

I have read many worthwhile Dhamma books lately that have been inspiring and informative. But I still consider Ajahn Chah as my teacher even though I never had the good fortune of meeting him in person. His teachings, and the teachings of those who studied with him and now carry on his legacy, are the teachings I connect with. These are the teachings which connect with my heart and inspire me to strive on. I want to thank everyone at Abhayagiri Monastery for supporting me through this most difficult time in my life.

And inmate requests continue to multiply and mature, as they put the teachings into practice. Letters come not only from individual inmates, but also from individual inmates representing sanghas in prison, and then by chaplains for their Buddhist prisoners. Steve is especially talented at outfitting the chaplains with everything needed for a portable shrine and pūjā kit—photos of the Buddharupa, chanting books, CDs, multiple copies of

books for group study, etc. While we do not engage in lengthy correspondence on our end, many inmates write long, in-depth, and very insightful letters regarding their practice.

From: OC, James Crabtree Correctional Center, Helena, OK

*To everyone at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery
From all of us of the Nembutsu Sangha
We received your most generous gift this past week. Your tradition feels so pure. "The Last Breath" is powerful beyond description. It moved me not only to tears but to much thought and contemplation as well. On behalf of all the members of the Nembutsu Sangha, a deep and sincere bow of thanks and appreciation to you all.*

Their dedication, understanding of the practice and lack of anger at their environment is awe-inspiring. Steve and I are truly grateful for the opportunity to serve this population.

Continued from page 7

had tired of seeing monks falling asleep during morning sittings, so he asked Ven. Kittisāro to give yoga instruction before the morning meeting (which would have placed it around two AM). So, when I made a plan to go *tudong* (wandering), I asked Ajahn Sumedho if I could stop at Bung Wai for a couple of days to upgrade my yoga techniques (Iyengar's *Light on Yoga* had made the rounds a few years before and we were all fairly proficient) and get a train ticket to Bangkok, where I was planning to get acupuncture to revive my knees.

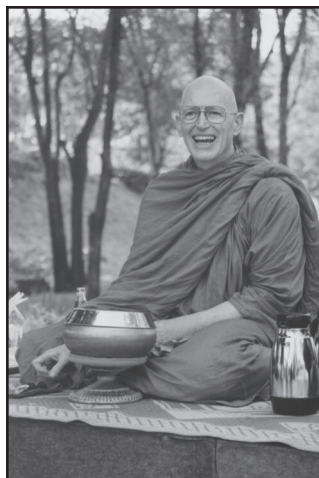
I left in March; Ajahn Sumedho went to England with Luang Por in May, and on the spur of the moment Luang Por decided to leave him there, together with Vens. Ānando and Viradhammo. Lucky for me: I decided to disrobe in the interim, and dreaded more than anything having to face Ajahn Sumedho with the news.

After disrobing, I had time to reflect on a lot of things, and one of them was that Ajahn Sumedho had been my teacher, right after Ajahn Chah in importance. I next saw him at Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts in December, 1979, about a half-year after Ajahn Chah's visit. We discussed old times and new.

"I guess you heard about Gary," I solemnly said. The monks nodded their heads. "And Mason," I added, they nodded gravely once more.

"What happened?" the IMS manager asked, sounding alarmed.

"They both got married," Ven. Ānando replied.



So the book mailing continues. As time goes by, we find ourselves in the situation where a large portion of the books that we distribute are written by teachers outside of the Ajahn Chah lineage. While we are deeply grateful for the many priceless and insightful books that we do receive from other teachers, I must say that it is with regret that we cannot share more of our own deeply revered Ajahns' guidance. Why? Because we have run out of, or are about to run out of books by the Ajahns in our lineage i.e., Ajahns Chah, Sumedho, Pasanno, and Amaro to name a few. The book storage container at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery is there to be filled. And if not by us, then by whom? 🙏

Individuals or groups who are interested in sponsoring a particular publication or publications in general, or for those whose curiosities have been piqued are invited to contact Iris Landsberg at publications@abhayagiri.org for more information.

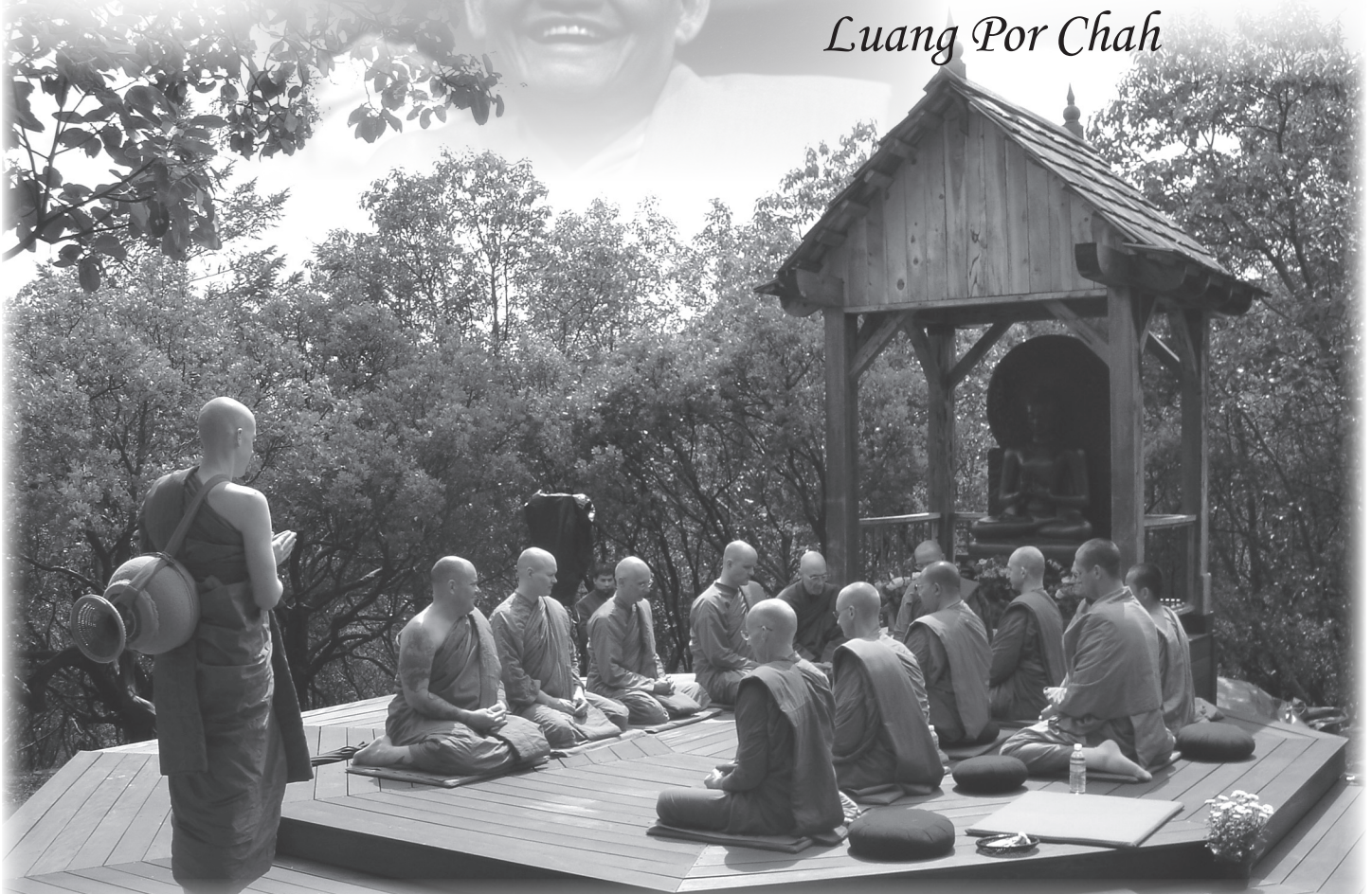
The Sangha in England were meeting teachers and groups in other Buddhist traditions. Ajahn Sumedho had his favorites, though I was to find later on that he was always open to changing his mind. During the first year at Bung Wai, when he was away for a few days, we had been reading from one of Chogyam Trungpa's books at the evening practice. When he returned, he voiced some disapproval, saying that Trungpa was of questionable morality from what he'd heard of him. But the following year he read *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* and was thoroughly taken with it. According to one monk who was visiting at the time, Ajahn Sumedho said "I don't care what anybody says about him, this is the clearest thing about Dhamma that I've ever read!"

One of the staff later told me that Ajahn Sumedho said he felt my disrobing was misguided. Indeed, I'm sure I didn't present a very impressive figure, and I did still feel a lot of kinship with the monks, but I was still certain I had done what I needed to do. I continued to correspond and keep abreast of what was going on in England and Thailand, but I wasn't about to let Ajahn Sumedho get ahold of me and cloister me away.

After that I occasionally saw him in Thailand, at Bung Wai, or in Bangkok. He put on some weight and had the glow reminiscent of Ajahn Chah or Ajahn Fun. He had a great relaxed, uncontrived manner, often smiling and laughing gently at things, like an infant, I thought. But there was no fuzziness involved, as was evident when he gave talks or answered questions. 🙏

“So I resolved to myself, ‘Okay, I’ll give up body and mind for this lifetime and try to follow the teaching of the Buddha down to the last detail. I’ll reach understanding in this lifetime, because if I don’t, I’ll still be sunk in suffering. I’ll let go of everything else and make a determined effort. No matter how much difficulty or suffering I have to endure, I’ll persevere. If I don’t do it, I’ll just keep on doubting.’”

Luang Por Chah



MONASTIC RESIDENTS

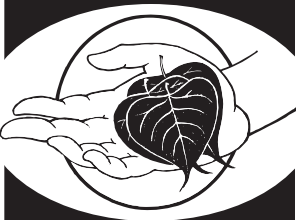
	vassa		vassa		vassa
Ajahn Pasanno Bhikkhu	33	Khemaratana Bhikkhu	4	Sāmanera Cunda	0
Ajahn Amaro Bhikkhu	28	Ahimsako Bhikkhu	3	Anagārika Whit Myers	0
Ajahn Sudanto Bhikkhu*	12	Cāgānando Bhikkhu	2	Anagārika Nick Grueff	0
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu*	9	Sampajāno Bhikkhu	1	Anagārika Michael Bodman	0
Jotipālo Bhikkhu	7	Thitābho Bhikkhu	0		
Ñāniko Bhikkhu	4	Kassapo Bhikkhu	0		

* Spending vassa in Portland

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Thanksgiving Retreat

With Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Mettā

November 16–25, 2007

Angela Center, Santa Rosa, California

For information (starting August 1), EMail: retreat07@juno.com