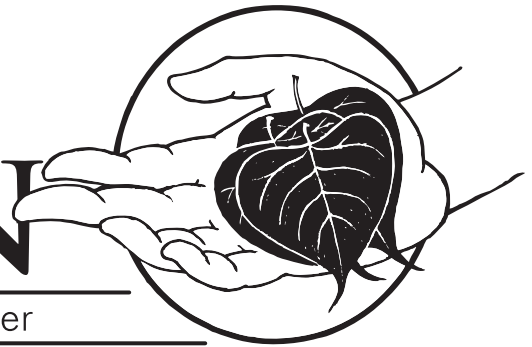


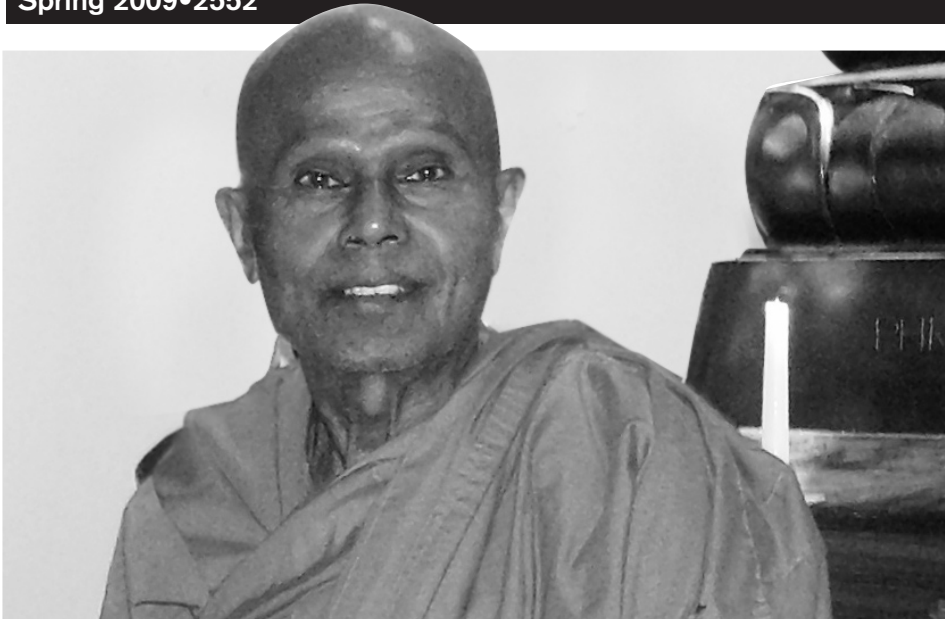
FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter



Spring 2009 • 2552

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Bhante Gunaratana visiting Abhayagiri in July 2008

The Essential Eights

A talk by Bhante Gunaratana

Given at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery on July 10, 2008

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa

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Dear Venerable Monks, Friends,

This evening I'd like to speak on other aspects of Dhamma, which are naturally supportive factors of Dhamma, and that when we mindfully reflect on them we can see how they are related very clearly to each other. There are eight such Dhammas. Number one is called "the root of all dhammas." Buddha said that all dhammas have their root in desire, "*chandamūlakā, āvuso, sabbe dhammā.*" Chanda is either will, or desire. Will is a very important aspect of Dhamma. When we develop effort—make effort—one of the factors in making effort is will.

When we practice the four bases of accomplishment, one of them is will or desire. Buddha said that will is the root of all dhammas. Now, when we make effort, the root of making effort is will, *chanda*. And when we practice the bases of accomplishment the root of them is dhamma. When I say this, you might certainly get confused: What is the root of accomplishment? What is the accomplishment? So let me make it as simple as possible by saying that all the Dhammas have their root in desire, and desire itself has two sides—wholesome desire and unwholesome desire. Unwholesome desire is desire to perpetuate desire, to increase desire, to linger in *samsāra*, to continue

existence in *samsāra*. That is desire, or unwholesome desire. Wholesome desire is desire to be desireless. We have to keep these two differences in mind very clearly. Wholesome dhamma arises from unwholesome desire. Unwholesome dhamma arises from unwholesome desire. Then we have greed, hatred and delusion. From greed, hatred and delusion arise all unwholesome thoughts, words and deeds. When wholesome desire is there, we have thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of friendliness, and thoughts of compassion. When unwholesome desire arises, from that unwholesome desire jealousy, fear, anger, rivalry, competitiveness and resentment—all these things arise from unwholesome desire. When wholesome desire arises, mindfulness, investigation, joy, tranquility, concentration, wisdom and total liberation all arise from the wholesome desire. Therefore, desire is the root of the arising of all the dhammas, whether they are wholesome or unwholesome.

What are these wholesome or unwholesome dhammas? They are various mental states. We know when unwholesome dhamma arises, we express this unwholesome dhamma through our thoughts, words and deeds. When wholesome dhamma arises in our mind, we express it through wholesome thoughts,

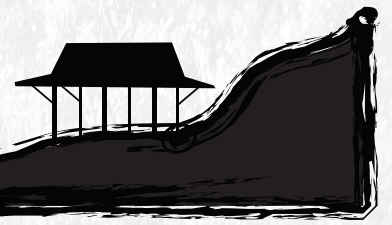
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Contributors: The Sangha, Bhante Gunaratana, Ajahn Thanissaro, Mettika and Sondra Jewell

From the Monastery



Longer days and blooming wildflowers signal the arrival of spring at Abhayagiri Monastery. Each spring, the resident community emerges from the stillness of the three-month winter retreat to meet the opportunities and challenges of a new year.

Winter Retreat

During the months of January, February, and March the Abhayagiri residents relinquish their work responsibilities to a team of laypeople and undertake noble silence in order to focus on meditation, sutta study, and chanting practice. The formal work schedule ended December 24, giving the community nearly two weeks to finish tasks and repair requisites before the retreat began on January 4. Robert, Jason, Jim, Brian, Tess, and Khmla formed this year's retreat help crew, and Jeet, Alex, Danny and Julianne each spent one month assisting them. The Abhayagiri community extends its heartfelt thanks to both the retreat crew and the donors who nearly

overwhelmed us with food offerings this winter. May they receive the blessings that flow from meritorious action.

The retreat teachings began with two weeks of meditation instruction from Ajahns Pasanno and Amaro. For the remainder of the retreat, the abbots read selected suttas from the Samyutta Nikaya. The readings spanned a wide range of topics, including dependent origination, the five aggregates, the six sense bases, the fruits of stream entry, and the fundamentals of monastic life. The ajahns found so many sutta "gems" in the Samyutta Nikaya that they decided to continue these readings after tea in April and May.

Siladhārā (nuns) from Amaravati visited Abhayagiri Monastery twice during the retreat season. Ajahns Anandabodhi and Santacitta spent Christmas at Abhayagiri, and Ajahns Metta, Anandabodhi, Santacitta, and Sumedha joined us for Magha Pūja. The winter retreat concluded with a picnic at Clear Lake State Park.



Ajahn Anandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta visiting Abhayagiri during Christmas and New Year's

Community

Fourteen monastics participated in the Abhayagiri winter retreat: the two abbots, eight other bhikkhus, one sāmanera, and three anagārikas. Ajahn Sudanto spent a silent and snowy winter at Sītavana (Birken Forest Monastery) and returned to Abhayagiri on April 15. Tan Ahimsako departed on April 19 with the intention to spend at least two years at Amaravati Monastery. We will miss both his cheerful spirit and his contributions to the monastery as work monk and webmaster. Tan Gunavuddho arrives from Thailand and England to join the Abhayagiri community on May 5.

Just before the retreat ended, Sāmanera Thitapañño requested bhikkhu ordination; his upasampada ceremony is scheduled for June 13. Anagārikas Ian, Carl and Louis have all requested to go forth as sāmaneras, and the ceremony has been scheduled for July 22.



Community Photo from the picnic at the end of Winter Retreat 2009

Bhikkhu Bodhi's visit

The last day of the retreat marked the beginning of a series of eight lectures at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas given by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi entitled "The Path to Liberation in Early Buddhism." Each afternoon, most of the Abhayagiri community shuttled to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to hear Bhikkhu Bodhi expound on three suttas from the Majjhima Nikaya (MN 27, MN 2, and MN 7). Many of us have listened to recordings of Bhikkhu Bodhi's sutta lectures, and we deeply appreciated the opportunity to hear his knowledge and insights in person.

After the lecture series concluded on April 9, Bhikkhu Bodhi spent the next three days visiting Abhayagiri. Shortly after arriving, he presided over the fortnightly recitation of the patimokkha (the monastic code of discipline). He stayed in the recently completed Elder's Cabin and enjoyed the beautiful spring landscape while walking to and from his dwelling. Bhikkhu Bodhi hosted several question and answer sessions during afternoon tea and gave the April 11 Dhamma talk. His talk (available online) described the benefits of three forms of meditation that are often unfamiliar to Westerners: awareness of death, recollection of the Buddha, and reflection on the non-self nature of experience.

Travels

Ajahn Pasanno spent most of December 2008 in Thailand, visiting Wat Pah Nanachat and giving numerous teachings, including two retreats. Ajahn Pasanno's annual trip to Thailand helps to maintain Abhayagiri's Thai roots.

On April 5, Ajahn Amaro flew to England to visit Amaravati for five days. From there he traveled to Japan for an 18-day tour with Luang Por Sumedho, Ajahn Nyanarato, Edward and Ead Lewis and Richard Smith. He returned to England to visit family and arrived back at Abhayagiri on May 2.

Visiting teachers

This spring, Abhayagiri Monastery has the privilege of hosting a number

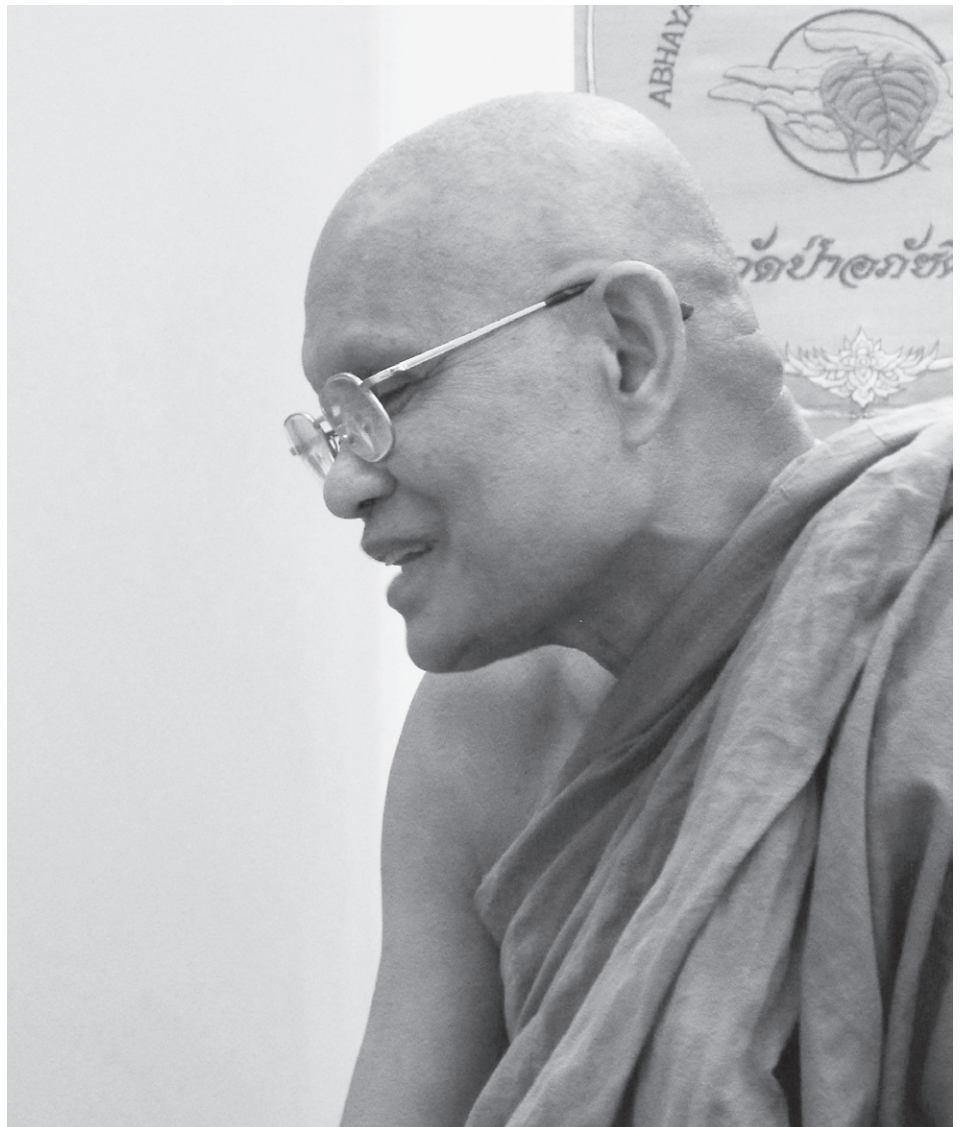
of eminent Thai Forest monks. Ajahn Liam, an elder student of Ajahn Chah who has served as abbot of Wat Pah Pong for over 25 years, will arrive on May 12. He will be accompanied by Ajahn Kevali, the present abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, Ajahn Anek and Ajahn Siripaño. While the Ajahns will spend most of their time at Abhayagiri, they plan to visit Portland from May 18 to May 21 and spend May 30 to June 3 visiting Bay Area meditation groups, including the June 2 First Tuesday group. The Abhayagiri web calendar contains a detailed schedule of their activities. The Ajahns will return to Thailand on June 8.

Ajahn Jayasaro, former abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, will arrive shortly after Ajahn Liem's departure. Ajahn Jayasaro will spend June 11 to June 22 at

Abhayagiri and be present for Sāmanera Thitapaño's ordination and the Upasika Renewal Day on June 21.

Development

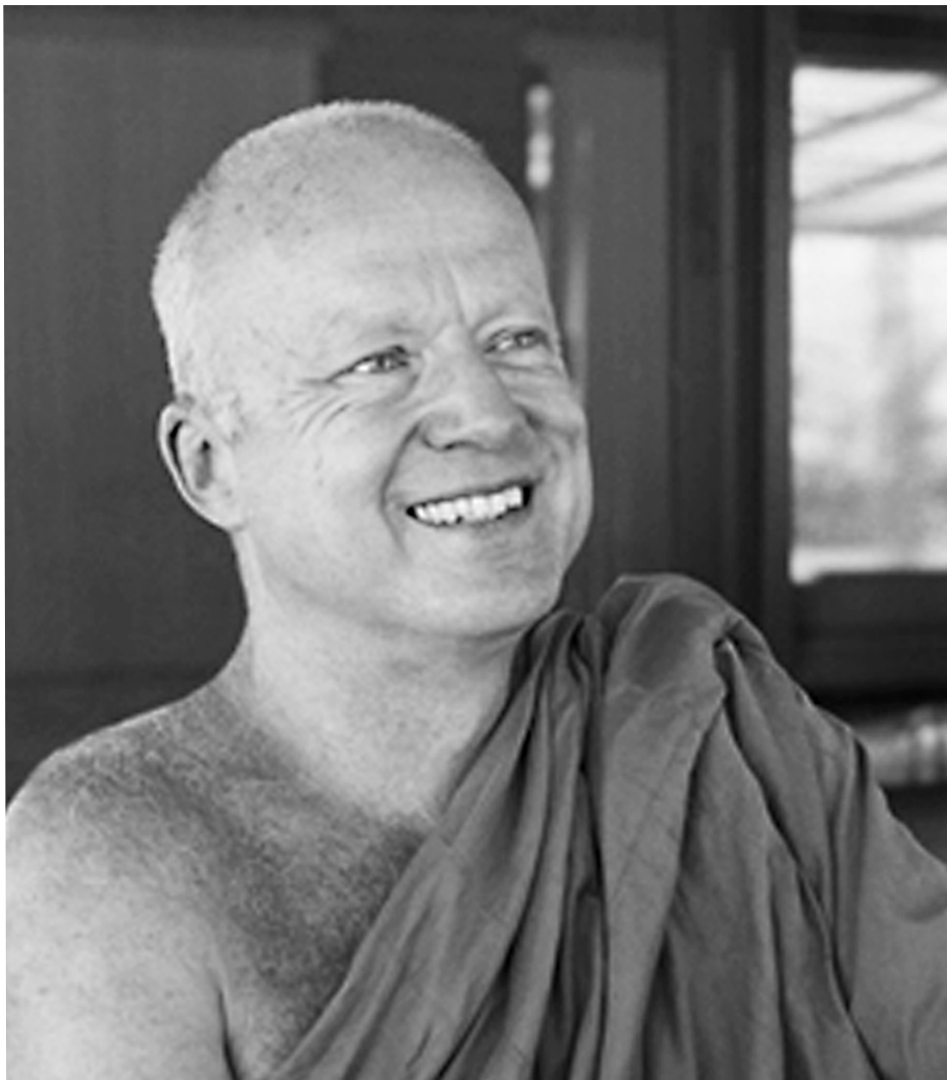
The major building project of 2009 is the construction of the Monk's Utility Building. Situated in a meadow near the ordination platform, this building will include showers, laundry and dyeing facilities, a sewing room, an office, and meeting rooms. On the evening of April 5 the Abhayagiri monastics chanted parittas at the building site for the living beings who would be killed or displaced by the construction, and the excavators broke ground the next day. Construction will continue through the summer... 🏗️



Luang Por Liam visiting Abhayagiri in May 2009

Skillful Effort

Adapted from a talk given by Ajahn Thanissaro at Abhayagiri Monastery, September 2007



Ajahn Thanissaro

One of the Thai terms for meditating—*tham khwaam phien*—literally means “making an effort.” When I mention this to people here in the West, I often get some raised eyebrows. They’ve been taught that “efforting” is an enemy of meditation. And that’s because they’ve also been taught that there are only two ways of approaching the practice. The first way—the ignorant way—is to try very hard, exerting a strenuous effort, miserable and neurotic, with all your thoughts focused on a goal that keeps receding into the future. The more enlightened way is to relax into the present, into the Dhamma that’s already here.

Now, if those were the only two choices, relaxing would obviously be the wiser choice. It’s certainly the more inviting. Everyone likes the idea of relaxing. It’s built into American culture. I was reading a biography of William James recently, and it mentioned a movement during James’ time that he called the Gospel of Relaxation. The central tenet of this movement was that American culture is much too tense, and what everyone needs to do is to learn *repose*: the ability to systematically relax all the muscles in the body that you’re not using, and to maintain that sense of relaxation as you go throughout the day. That was the 19th Century, and things haven’t changed.

People have been relaxing since the 19th Century and they’re still miserable.

Which suggests that there may actually be four choices: You can relax and be happy; you can relax and be miserable; you can make an effort and be miserable; or you can make an effort and be happy. The fourth alternative—how to find joy in effort—is the one that really deserves to be explored. As the Buddha himself says, the causes of suffering come in two kinds: those that will go away if you simply watch them with equanimity, and those that go away only when you exert a fabrication, or a *sankhāra*, against them. We may prefer the first approach, but for our practice to be complete, we need to master both.

That phrase “exerting a *sankhāra*” sounds strange, but it actually points to some very useful tools. In the Buddha’s analysis of the causes of suffering, *sankhāra*, or fabrication, comes right after ignorance. We tend to fabricate intentions out of ignorance, and that’s why we suffer. But if we learn how to fabricate those intentions with awareness, they can become tools in the path to the end of suffering.

So what exactly are these fabrication tools? Altogether there are three major types: bodily fabrication, verbal fabrication, and mental fabrication. Bodily fabrication is the breath, verbal fabrication is directed thought and evaluation, and mental fabrication is feeling and perception. These fabrications can cause suffering or they can be our tools for overcoming the causes of suffering. The question is whether we use them ignorantly or with knowledge.

The knowledge here is not simply book knowledge; it’s the kind of knowledge that comes from developing a skill. This is why it’s useful when you meditate to reflect back on the skills you’ve mastered in the past: the things you’ve enjoyed mastering, that you’ve enjoyed learning how to do well. Whether cooking or

carpentry, or a sport, or music: If you've learned how to do it well, you've mastered many of the mental skills you're going to need as a meditator.

One of these skills is how to deal with desire in a skillful way. We often hear that desire is the bad guy in the Buddha's teachings. But when the Buddha talked about the causes of suffering, he mentioned only three kinds of desire: craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, and craving for non-becoming. Sensuality means your plans and obsessions about sensual pleasures. Craving for becoming means wanting to take on a particular identity. Craving for non-becoming means wanting to annihilate the identity you've got. These are the types of desire that cause suffering.

But there are other kinds of desire as well. In particular, the Buddha has you focus on the desire to be skillful. Instead of focusing on wanting to become an enlightened person or to become annihilated, he tells you to get yourself out of the picture for the time being and simply look at where there's stress, where there's a cause of stress, and what can be done to put an end to stress. The desires focused around these issues are skillful desires—especially when you focus on understanding the causes for the ending of stress. If you focus your desires

exclusively on what you want to gain out of the meditation, without paying attention to the causes, it's like driving down a road toward a mountain. If you spend all your time looking at the mountain on the horizon and forget to look at the road, you're going to drive off the road. You're going to run into people. You'll never get to the mountain. But if you focus on the road, and every now and then check your rear view mirror to make sure that the mountain isn't receding away behind you, the road will lead you to where you want to go.

That's how you use desire in the practice. You want the mountain, but you learn to want the road as well. Without that kind of desire, you're never going to get anywhere. It's the first *iddhipada*, or basis

for success. The second *iddhipada* is persistence, the ability to stick with something over time. Then there's intent, your ability to give total attention to what you're doing and the results of what you're doing. And finally there's a quality called *vimamsa*, which translates as analysis, discrimination, the ability to notice what's working and what's not, and the ingenuity to come up with new ideas about what might work when you find yourself banging your head against a wall.

These are the qualities necessary for developing a skill, and you want to bring them to the practice—particularly the element of desire, as that's what energizes the rest. And the best way to spark desire is to find a way of making the practice enjoyable. Ajahn Fuang often said, "When you meditate, play with it." Now, by the word "play" he didn't mean fooling around in a desultory way. He meant playing the

Ajahn Fuang often said, "When you meditate, play with it." Now, by the word "play" he didn't mean fooling around in a desultory way. He meant playing the way Michael Jordan would play basketball: You keep doing it, keep trying to figure out new ways of tackling problems...

way Michael Jordan would play basketball: You keep doing it, keep trying to figure out new ways of tackling problems, but at the same time enjoying what you're doing. Make a game out of it.

This issue of playing relates particularly to that first kind of fabrication, the breath. You can use the breath in lots of ways to deal with the causes of suffering. If you know that breathing in ignorance leads to suffering, try to breathe with some awareness, some knowledge. Notice what you're doing as you breathe. Where do you feel the sensation of the breath coming in? Where do you feel it going out? What kind of breathing feels good? What kind of breathing maintains a sense of good, gratifying energy in the body? What kind of breathing wastes away the energy in the

body? Have you ever stopped to notice?

If you pay attention here, you begin to notice aspects of the breath that are hard to put into words, because the breath is such an immediate, visceral experience. But you'll also begin to notice that when you breathe comfortably there can be a sense of ease in different parts of the body. Well, take those patches of ease and allow them to connect up. There can be a sense of fullness here or there. Allow that sense of fullness to connect up in the different parts of the body, so that when you breathe in, the whole body feels full, the whole body feels at ease. Experiment to see what works.

In this way you're engaging all three kinds of fabrication in full awareness. You're focusing on the breath, you're directing your thought to the breath, you're evaluating it, you're maintaining that perception of breath, and you're trying to induce a feeling of ease. You're working with whatever feelings of blockage or discomfort there are, and then seeing what different ways of breathing will help. As this begins to capture your imagination, it's fun.

When you're fabricating in full awareness, you have some very useful tools to deal with uncomfortable or unskillful mind states. Say, for instance, that lust has arisen in the mind.

The standard way of dealing with lust is to focus on the 32 parts of the body, but you can use the breath to deal with it as well. Ask yourself, "What do you lust for?" You lust for pleasure. So can you create a sense of pleasure in the body right now? When lust is filling the body, where do you feel tension? Some people feel it in the back of the hands, and then spreading from the back of the hands up the arms throughout the body. So how about relaxing the back of the hands? Breathe in a way that feels full and at ease in the back of the hands. This can give rise to a sense of immediate, visceral pleasure that helps take away some of your hunger, some of the charm and appeal of that lust. You realize, "Why would I bother with lust when I've got

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words and deeds. For example, when unwholesome dhamma—unwholesome desire—arises we want to say something to hurt somebody. That carries from that desire. Or we want to say something unpleasant, or sometimes we might even tell a lie because underneath that we have unwholesome desire.

Why do we want to tell a lie? Either to please others, get something from others, make ourselves impressive, or to cover something. Underneath all of them, there is desire, and it is called *chanda*. The word *chanda* is used therefore for wholesome things as well as unwholesome things. Wholesome *chanda* is generating wholesome thoughts, words, and deeds. Unwholesome *chanda* is called biases. There are four types of biases. One of them is *chanda*, *dosa* (aversion) is the second, *lobha* (greed) the third, and *moha* (delusion) is the fourth. But the beginning of all of them is *chanda*.

The Buddha said that all the dhammas, wholesome or unwholesome arise from desire. This means unwholesome dhammas arise from unwholesome desire and the wholesome arises from wholesome desire. Then, the second is “*manasikārasambhavā sabbe dhammā*,” that is, all the dhammas arise from reflection, from paying attention. Many things are happening to us but we don’t know them. Why? We don’t pay attention to them. When we pay attention to them, we know that they are there. Although they are there all the time, until we pay attention to them, we don’t know them. We are totally unaware of them, totally ignorant of them. Only when we pay attention to them do we become aware of them. Their true manifestation becomes clear to us. For example, there are certain dhammas that Buddha mentioned, not certain dhammas but true real Dhamma exists whether the Buddha comes into existence or not. The true Dhamma always exists. What is that true Dhamma that always exists whether the Buddhas come into existence or not? That all conditioned things are impermanent. Buddhas don’t come into this world to make things impermanent.

As I mentioned the other day, they are permanently impermanent. But until

we pay attention to them, pay attention to our experiences, we don’t know that they are impermanent. We simply take for granted that they are always perpetual, continual, permanent, eternal, and so forth. Our body is impermanent. Our feelings are impermanent—perceptions, volitional formations, consciousness are all impermanent.

Many a time when we talk about impermanence, people ask us, “But how can we know impermanence? Things seem to us to be permanent. How do we understand impermanence?” They say this because they do not pay attention to what they experience every single moment of every day. Body is impermanent. How can the body be impermanent? Only when we pay attention to the body do we experience impermanence. When we pay attention to the body, we look at our hands—turn them—doesn’t seem to be anything impermanent with them. We touch our body—it seems to be always there, doesn’t seem to have anything impermanent. Touch our head—the same head that we had this morning is still there. Doesn’t seem to be impermanent. But how can we understand this impermanence of the body? By paying attention. Attention also has two aspects: mindful attention and unmindful attention, or qualitative attention and unqualitative attention.

All living beings have unqualitative attention. Even animals have attention. Predators, for example when they want to catch their prey, they must pay total attention to the movement of their prey so that at the right moment they can catch it. These are very normal things. If you ring a bell at a certain time, you train a dog to listen to the sound, and then the dog comes and you feed him. And then he goes out. Sometimes when you ring the bell, the dog will salivate. Why, because he pays attention. He knows that when he hears the bell, food will be there. So he keeps his attention on the sound of the bell, to the sounds, and so forth.

We human beings also pay attention to various things. But with that kind of low quality of attention we don’t understand impermanence. We pay attention to external things, various things outside

our body. Even when paying attention, when we look at our body, we don’t see this impermanence. If we look at our body in the mirror, we don’t see the impermanence. A mirror itself is not reflecting the correct image. For example, if you write ‘MAY,’ and hold it in front of the mirror, we will see ‘YAM.’ If you write ‘KEY,’ and hold it in front of the mirror, you will see ‘YEK.’ Even the mirror will not show us the real true understanding of the nature of our body, of anything, of any form. But we have to pay mindful attention. There’s a big difference between mindful attention and unmindful attention.

There’s a very famous simile that the Buddha has given to show the difference between mindful attention and unmindful attention. The simile is of the Dog and the Lion. Have you heard of it? When you throw a rock or a stick or a Frisbee to a dog, the dog will run after it, pick it up, bite it or bring it back. If you throw a rock or a stick to a lion, the lion will not run after the rock or stick, the lion will run after you! This is because lions always want to go to the root, the source.

Mindful attention is the attention that always goes to the root. So, when we pay attention to the body, feeling, perceptions, volitional formations, and consciousness, we can see the true Dhamma arising; impermanence arising from them.

For example, when we meditate and pay attention to the breath; breath is the body, and that is why Buddha mentioned very clearly in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118) and Venerable Dhammadinna in the *Cula-vedalla Sutta* (MN 44), explaining or defining the body. They say that *Assasa* or *Passasa* (inhaling or exhaling) is a body, one of the bodies. We can see impermanence in this body when we pay attention to the breath. Nothing is so clear as this, where you can see impermanence as in the breath. When we pay attention to the breath then we see impermanence in the breath, we see this breath-body is impermanent. It is always changing. When we look at this superficially, we understand that since the breath is impermanent—we breathe

so many thousands of times everyday—if it is permanent we would have to breath only once. Only when we pay total, undivided, mindful attention to the breath, can we see this true Dhamma very clearly in that breath. If we do not pay mindful attention, we take it for granted and we never know the impermanence of breath.

So Buddha said, “*manasikārasambhavā sabbe dhammā.*” All the dhammas—even in these other subtle aspects of Dhamma, not only impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness, they are not the only dhammas, there are many other dhammas; feelings, perceptions, volitional formations, consciousness—all these are the materials that we have within us to see the true Dhamma arising from them. Greed can arise, hatred can arise, delusion can arise; or non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion can arise from all these experiences in our body. These are very big subjects. I just want to touch on all the eight aspects of this very beautiful Dhamma discourse that Buddha delivered in the Anguttara Nikāya for us to reflect and think.

Then he said, “*vedanāsamōsaranā sabbe dhammā,*” all the dhammas converge, meet in feelings. We have all kinds of feeling; pleasant, unpleasant, neutral feeling associated with greed, hatred and delusion; feeling not associated with greed, hatred and delusion; feeling related to sensual pleasure, feeling not related to sensual pleasure, and so forth. There are all kinds of feelings that Buddha listed in the *Bahūvedaniya Sutta* (MN 59), 108 kinds of feelings. And the entire Dhamma is based on, or converged in feeling. The entire Four Noble Truth begins with feeling, *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness). So when we look at feeling, beginning with feeling arises clinging, or greed. If the feeling happens to be pleasant, greed arises. If the feeling happens to be unpleasant, rejection, anger or resentment can arise. Because of the feeling, clinging can arise.

It is interesting. Even in Dependent Origination the Buddha did not say very specifically that dependent on feeling, hatred arises, or rejection arises. He said,

dependent upon feeling, clinging arises. Isn't it interesting? In Dependent Origination, dependent upon feeling, clinging arises. When you look at it, when you expand this compact message of Dhamma and decompress it, then you can see the other side of the Dhamma itself. When feeling arises, if the feeling happens to be pleasant, there naturally arises clinging, craving.

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It is always changing.*

If the feeling happens to be unpleasant, then also desire, or craving, arises. When the unpleasant feeling arises, we always very impatiently look forward to getting rid of unpleasant feeling because we want to cling to wholesome, pleasant feeling.

So Buddha put them all together and simply said in a few words, “Dependent upon feeling, craving arises.” When unpleasant feeling arises, on the one hand we want to reject it for gaining a pleasant feeling, so that we can cling to it. So you can see, the Buddha said, “All the dhammas converge in feelings.” Pleasant dhammas, unpleasant dhammas, and neutral dhammas, all converge in feelings.

The next thing he mentioned is “*phāssasamudayā sabbe dhammā.*” All dhammas arise from contact: contact through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. All the dhammas, the whole world open to us, is exposed through these six doors; eyes, ears, nose and so forth. And from there, wholesome or unwholesome dhammas arise. For example, when we see an object, if the object happens to be pleasant, pleasant thoughts arise

in our mind. If the object happens to be unpleasant, unpleasant thoughts arise in our mind. Similarly, when we hear a sound the same thing happens. So when pleasantness or unpleasantness arises, along with that all the others arise: greed, hatred, delusion can arise, or non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion and so forth can arise. The entire doors for dhammas to enter the mind will be open through contact. Then *vedanā* arises, all the feelings, all the dhammas converge in the feelings.

And the next thing is “*samādhi pamukhā sabbe dhammā.*” Samādhi is concentration. Concentration is the leader of all dhammas. I say that concentration is the crown of our meditation practice. Concentration also has two sides: one is wholesome concentration, the other is unwholesome concentration. Wholesome concentration is the concentration supported by seven of the Noble Eightfold Path, the seven previous steps: right understanding, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Right concentration arises depending on these seven factors, and that is the crown of our meditation. So Buddha said all the dhammas, the leader or chief of all the dhammas, is concentration. Why did he say that? Because a concentrated mind can see things as they really are. And therefore concentration is the head or chief of all the dhammas.

Then, he said, “*satādhipeṭṭeyyā sabbe dhammā.*” Mindfulness is the head of all the dhammas. You know, when we say mindfulness is the head of all the dhammas, then one might wonder, ‘how about unwholesome dhamma?’ Is mindfulness the head of even unwholesome dhamma? What it means is that only when we are mindful can we make the distinction between wholesome dhamma and unwholesome dhamma. When we are not mindful we don't know the difference between wholesome dhammas and unwholesome dhammas. So when we are mindful, we can make the distinction, make effort to cultivate wholesome

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Also visit our online calendar at www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/days for the most up-to-date information.

LUNAR OBSERVANCE DAYS

2552	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
	FRI 1					
	FRI 8¹	SUN 7	TUE 7²	THU 6	FRI 4	SUN 4³
	SAT 16	MON 15	WED 15	FRI 14	SAT 12	MON 12
	SAT 23	MON 22	WED 22	THU 20	SAT 19	SUN 18
	SUN 31	TUE 30	THU 30	FRI 28	SUN 27	MON 26

1. Visākha Pūjā 2. Āsālhā Pūjā 3. Pavāranā Day

DIRECTIONS TO ABHAYAGIRI

- Take WEST ROAD exit from HWY 101.
- Go straight over NORTH STATE ST. and SCHOOL WAY.
- Follow WEST ROAD **3 miles** until you reach a T-Junction.
- Turn left at the T-Junction onto TOMKI ROAD. Continue for **4 miles** until you reach a turn-out with 20 mailboxes. The monastery entrance is on the right.

June

- 1-7 6-Day Sesshin at Great Vow Zen Monastery. Led by Ajahn Amaro and Chozen Bays, Roshi.
- 2 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 10 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA.
- 11 Ajahn Jayasaro to visit Abhayagiri until June 22.
- 14 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri.
- 17 Ajahn Chah's Birthday.
- 20 Daylong at Spirit Rock—"High Summer" with Ajahn Amaro.
- 21 Upāsikā Renewal Day at Abhayagiri.

July

- 7 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
- 7 Āsālhā Pūjā.
- 8 Vassa (traditional 'rains retreat') begins.
- 8 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA.
- 12 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri.
- 18 Meditation and yoga daylong with Ajahn Pasanno and Cator Shachoy—"Mindfulness of the Body." Bija Yoga Studio, San Francisco, CA. www.youthyogadharma.org.
- 25 Daylong at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA—"Upekkha (Equanimity)" with Ajahn Amaro.

Aug

- 4 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 5-9 Spirit Rock Family Retreat with Ajahn Amaro, Gil Fronsdal, Betsy Rose, and Heather Sundberg. For information visit www.spiritrock.org.
- 8 Upāsikā Day at Abhayagiri.
- 9 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri.
- 12 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA.
- 21-23 Spirit Rock Teen Weekend. For information visit www.spiritrock.org.
- 25-28 Ajahn Amaro offers teachings at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, Carmel Valley, CA.

Sept

- 1 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 9 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA.
- 13 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri.
- 26-27 Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage from Spirit Rock to Abhayagiri—www.dharmawheels.org.
- 27 Daylong at Spirit Rock—"Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness" with Ajahn Amaro.

Every Saturday evening at Abhayagiri
Chanting, meditation & Dhamma talk, beginning at 7:30 pm.

Every Lunar Quarter at Abhayagiri (see calendar on this page)
Chanting, meditation, precepts, Dhamma talk, and late night vigil, beginning at 7:30 pm.

Second Sunday of each month at Abhayagiri (April through December)
Community work day, 8:00 am–4:00 pm.

First Tuesday of the month in Berkeley, CA
5:00-6:00 pm, Informal tea gathering. 7:30-9:30 pm, Meditation, Precepts & Dhamma talk by monastic at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, 2304 McKinley.

Second Wednesday of each month at Yoga Mendocino
7:30 pm–9:00 pm: Meditation and Dhamma talk by Theravāda monastic. During the months of Jan, Feb, Mar, the evening will be led by an Upāsikā.

Every Tuesday and Friday at Portland Friends of the Dhamma
7:00 pm–9:00 pm: Meditation and Dhamma discussion with lay practitioners.

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www.bsua.org

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For a comprehensive directory of branch monasteries please visit www.forestsangha.org

ABHAYAGIRI BUDDHIST MONASTERY COMMUNITY LIST
Vassa (Rains Retreats/years as a monk) Updated April 8, 2009

Pasanno Bhikkhu	35	Thitābho Bhikkhu	2
Amaro Bhikkhu	30	Kassapo Bhikkhu	2
Yatiko Bhikkhu	16	Cunda Bhikkhu	1
Sudanto Bhikkhu	14	Kaccāna Bhikkhu	0
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	11	Sāmanera Thitapañño	1
Gunavuddho Bhikkhu	9	Anagārika Ian Hillard	1
Cāgānando Bhikkhu	4	Anagārika Louis Gegenhuber	1
		Anagārika Carl Braun	1

dhamma, and reject unwholesome dhamma. Therefore, for this reason, for the sake of discernment, for the sake of understanding, for the sake of liberation, mindfulness is the head. And also the Buddha said that all wholesome things begin from mindfulness. Therefore, mindfulness is also the thing that makes wholesome things of a high quality.

In our religious activities we use two words: one is called *puñña*; the other is called *kusala*. People sometimes don't understand the difference between these two. Even to be able to see the difference between these two, we should have quality attention and we should have mindfulness. *Puñña* is that which makes us happy. Buddha said it in several places, "*Puññassetam bhikkhave sukhasa adbhivacanam*". *Puñña* or wholesome thoughts, words and deeds are used synonymously with happiness; that is, wholesome thoughts, words, and deeds are equated with happiness. But this happiness can be either of low or high quality. And this quality of happiness is controlled by *kusala*. *Kusala* is the quality controller of happiness or *puñña*. Giving *dāna* is *puñña*. Practicing meditation is *puñña*. Observing *sīla* is *puñña*. Helping others is *puñña*. But all these *puñña*, all these wholesome thoughts words and deeds, can have certain underlying unwholesome tendencies. When we are mindful, we can see that these unwholesome tendencies are those which weaken our *puñña*, which weaken our wholesome thoughts, words and deeds. When the *kusala* or skill intervenes, then this *kusala* can remove the underlying tendency of wholesome thoughts, words, or deeds we commit. For example, when you give *dāna*, offer *dāna*, give something with a generous thought. When you are giving something, if you have a certain unwholesome tendency which you may not be quite aware of, for example if you give *dāna* thinking that this person, this venerable monk or this nun or this so and so is my friend. He appears to be noble, holy, observing precepts... Therefore, if I give *dāna* to this person, I will get more merit. And my merit bank will be very big. I can actually earn a lot of merit for future use. So you give

dāna as an investment of your merit so you can have more things in the future. I have heard people say, when giving things to me, "Bhante, please pray for me to become more prosperous, so that I can give more." The person's motive is to get more, to give more. But when we very mindfully, skillfully look at that very motive, you can see the underlying tendency of desire. That kind of motive can be removed when we do it with skill, with *kusala*. So when we pay mindful attention to our motive of intention,

Wisdom is something very special. What is wisdom? Wisdom should be able to bring peace, happiness and total, complete liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion.

then we can see whether our wholesome thoughts, words, and deeds are going to be weak wholesome thoughts, words and deeds, strong wholesome thoughts, words and deeds, or pure wholesome thoughts, words and deeds. The wholesome thoughts, words and deeds can be purified, cleansed by using skill. Skill is called *kusala*.

And to see this difference we have to use mindfulness. That is why the Buddha said, "*satādhīpateyyā sabbe dhammā*." Mindfulness is the head of all dhammas, whether they are wholesome or unwholesome. When mindfulness is the head, it can see very clearly what is wholesome or what is unwholesome, and then they won't do the unwholesome and they will do the wholesome.

Next thing, Buddha said, "*paññuttarā sabbe dhammā*"—the highest of all Dhammas is wisdom (*pañña*). This is difficult to understand. What is wisdom? Is it intelligence? If intelligence is wisdom, then all intelligent animals can be wise. The animals are intelligent. And many intelligent people discover many, many things to promote greed, hatred, and delusion because they are very intelligent.

Anything they think, no matter how beneficial or useful it is, is produced, generated, or invented by intelligence. If that is harmful to us, harmful to others, or harmful to both, then the one who produced it is not wise. But it may be very intelligent. Wisdom is something very special. What is wisdom? Wisdom should be able to bring peace, happiness, and total, complete liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion. Buddha compared wisdom to the embryo in an egg. When the egg is properly hatched, the embryo inside the egg slowly grows and becomes hardened. Then the chick inside, using its tiny little beak and very tender claws, breaks the egg and comes out. Similarly, we all have wisdom as one of the wholesome roots. There are six roots: three are unwholesome, three are wholesome. One of the three wholesome roots is wisdom, *amoha*. This root of wisdom slowly grows, becomes strong and mature, and breaks through the shell of ignorance. In this metaphor the wisdom is inside this egg. Wisdom is like the embryo in the egg. And just like the chick, the embryo grows gradually, and becomes strong to break the egg and come out. Wisdom also slowly, gradually grows and becomes strong and powerful, and then shatters our ignorance. And, we come out of the jail, prison. We are in the prison of ignorance. And therefore, "*paññuttarā sabbe dhammā*." Buddha said that wisdom is the greatest of all the dhammas. Wisdom is the greatest. When we have wisdom, we don't become proud, don't become arrogant, don't become egotistic. When we have wisdom, the more wise we are, the more humbled we are, more soft we are, more gentle we are. No arrogance is there. When we are wise, the ego-notion will not affect our mind, the very notion of ego will not arise in our mind.

So wisdom is something very special, which not every intelligent person has. The difference between intelligence and wisdom is that an intelligent person or being can do many, many things which may be materially helpful, materially profitable, but what it eventually does is increase their greed, hatred and delusion. Intelligent people created television.

The Essential Eight (continued from page 10)

What does it do? Promote greed, hatred and delusion, and give us examples of greed, hatred and delusion. Watch TV. What do you see? Examples of greed, hatred and delusion create many machines in science and technology, like the atomic bomb. Somebody had to be very powerfully intelligent to make the atomic bomb. What does it do? What has it done? Bombs, guns, chemicals... intelligent people. But, a wise person?

That is why Buddha said, “*Yo sabassam sabassena sangāme mānuse jīne ekañca jeyyamattānaṃsa ve sangāmajuttamo*.” One wins, defeats thousands upon thousands in the battlefield, but the one who conquers themselves—gets rid of their own defilements—is the real victor. The other is not the victor. He is defeated. Why? He may have intelligence, but no wisdom. One who has wisdom will conquer themselves. One with wisdom will be able to get rid of greed, hatred and delusion, which are the causes of our suffering, of existing in *samsāra*. If we are wise, our wisdom should be able to liberate ourselves from suffering. That is the difference between wisdom and intelligence. Intelligence can push you into *samsāra*; increasing greed, hatred and delusion. Wisdom gets you out of *samsāra*, liberates yourself from *samsāra*. This is the difference between these two.

And the last thing Buddha mentioned in this category is that all these are a graduated teaching, beginning with one thing and ending with the highest. Ending is “*vimutti rasā sabbe dhammā*.” The tastiest of all dhammas is liberation. *Vimutti rasā*; *rasā* means taste. Liberation is the taste of all the dhammas. That means that even when we are liberated from wholesome dhamma, that is the time when we experience the greatest, highest taste: the taste of liberation (*vimutti rasā*). And that is the taste of Dhamma. That means our wisdom takes us even beyond wholesome dhammas—*puñña-pāpa* (merits and demerits), the mind liberated from both. And that is the time when we attain full enlightenment, attain *Nibbāna*. That is the greatest, highest taste of all the dhammas that we learn and practice.

This is merely a list that I mention

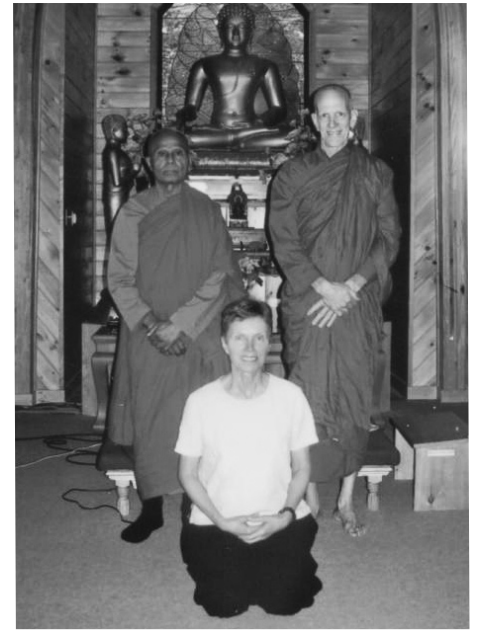
here, but we must take each of them separately. Each of these on this list is a topic for a one-hour Dhamma talk. But I have no time to give an eight-hour Dhamma talk on these eight topics, so I put all of them together! When we try to put many things together, nothing is clear. But when we take one and focus the mind on that, then we can make at least that clear. Unfortunately I am not ready for that, nor are you. Therefore, I conclude this little Dhamma talk this evening. Thank you very much for your patient listening. 🙏

Being with Elders Bhante G's Influence on My Life by Sondra Jewell

For me 1997 held an important event: I saw Bhante Gunaratana for the first time when he visited my home town of Sacramento and gave a Dhamma talk. Seeing someone who was soft-spoken with a quiet, serene demeanor was unusual for me. At that point in my life, I was very unhappy and hardly knew what the word Dhamma meant. This positive first impression, as well as my subsequent listening to Bhante G's Dhamma talks on tape, prompted me two years later to attend my first-ever ten-day retreat, which was led solely by him and which had the theme of *Mettā*, or as he translates it, loving-friendliness. That endeavor made an enormous impact on me, and afterwards, I lengthened my daily meditation sessions and began including daily *Mettā* practice.

As the years passed, I watched my life slowly improve from depression to enthusiasm for the Dhamma. My life had become focused on Theravādan Buddhism and included weekly interaction with, and training by, monastics. During that period, several personal encounters with Bhante G at Abhayagiri Monastery also left lasting, favorable impressions on me.

Then it was my good fortune to be able to spend the three-month rains retreat in both 2006 and 2007 at Bhāvanā Society in West Virginia, which gave me an unequalled opportunity to observe Bhante G during many and varied situations as



Sondra Jewell with Bhante Gunaratana and Bhante Rahula

he graciously interacted with different types of people. I noticed that he always displayed calm compassion and equanimity, traits that were wonderful to watch in action.

During those six months at Bhāvanā Society, other activities that left indelible marks in my memory were Bhante G's inspiring Dhamma talks and classes on “Sutta Studies” and the Dhammapada, as well as several ten-day retreats led by him. All these and many other experiences made it easy for me to conclude that his knowledge of the Dhamma was inexhaustible and his confidence in Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha, unshakeable.

The Buddha instructs us to evaluate a teacher by observing him over a long period of time. After 11 years of watching Bhante G's unchanging and composed attitude, unhurried and gentle speech, unflagging energy and hard work to share and preserve the Dhamma, and his deep devotion to the Buddha's teaching, I have developed boundless respect and gratitude for his spiritual guidance.

All in all, the personal example of the way Bhante G has lived his own life has been a great inspiration to me of how I should try to live a simple, contented, and happy life.

Sondra Jewell moved to Redwood Valley in late 2007, in order to be closer to the Abhayagiri community.

pleasure right now?” And sometimes the lust goes away. This doesn’t uproot the lust but it gives you some ammunition to weaken it.

The same with anger: When anger arises in the mind, you’ll feel it in the body as well. If you feel tension in the middle of the chest, breathe around that. Develop a sense of fullness and ease. And then ask yourself, “Do I really want to indulge in the anger? What kinds of pleasure do I get out of the anger? Maybe it’s better just to have a sense of ease right now.” This helps to take the edge off the anger, the part of the anger that says, “I’ve got this horrible feeling in my body and I have to get it out of my system right now.” Usually we get it out of our system by giving vent in our words or deeds, but that’s not very skillful. A more skillful way is to get the tension out of your system by breathing through the chest, out the hands, out the feet. When you’ve weakened the power of the anger in this way, you can look at it with a lot more equanimity. You can ask yourself, “What is actually wrong in the situation right now? What would be the skillful thing to do? What would be the skillful thing to say?” You’re in a much better position to decide whether you need to act right now or if it would be better to act later.

So what you’re doing is using this process of fabrication as an aid in overcoming the causes of suffering. These three things—breath, directed thought and evaluation, feeling and perception—are tools you can use in almost any situation, not only in creating a state of concentration in the mind, but also in counteracting anger, counteracting lust, whatever the unskillful mind state may be.

For instance, if you’re feeling lust you can ask yourself, “What perception are you holding in mind about that body that makes it attractive?” Learn to analyze that perception and you’ll see that it’s focusing on only certain details of the body. There are huge blank spots—in particular, everything inside the skin. So you might ask yourself, “What if I were to allow myself to hold on to some perceptions of what’s inside the body as well?”

Now, I know a number of people who say that the analysis of the body in this way creates a negative body image, but there are unhealthy negative body images and there are healthy ones. Unhealthy ones say, “My body is ugly and everyone else’s body is beautiful.” Healthy ones say, “Everybody’s body is ugly.” Even with Miss America: If you asked her to take out her liver, what would it look like? We’re all pretty much equal in that regard. If you lined people’s livers up on the stage to see who’s got the best looking liver, nobody would come to see. Nobody would even turn on the T.V. except for a few sickos. When you’ve been thinking in this way, you can ask yourself, “Is that what I really want?” Well, no. You’ve used the power of perception to help fight off the causes of suffering.

Or you can focus on how you perceive feelings of pain. Have you ever stopped to analyze the relation between feeling and perception? To start out, it’s good to develop as much ease in your concentration as you can around the pain, so that when you look into the pain you’re not looking with a sense of desperation or with the desire to make it go away right away. You’re looking from a position of strength. You’ve got most of the body at ease with the breath, but there’s still this section where there’s pain. When you’re not feeling threatened by the pain, you can look at it with the right purpose, which is to try to understand it. As the Buddha said, your duty with regard to suffering or stress is to try to comprehend it, not to make it go away.

So you might ask yourself, “What perceptions do you have around the pain?” This is an excellent way of seeing what’s going on in the mind. Some people object that the Buddha’s focus on suffering and pain shows an unduly negative outlook on life. Well, he’s not trying to give a total outlook on life. He’s trying to give you skills for overcoming the big problem in life, which is suffering. He’s like a doctor. When you go to the doctor and the doctor says, “Where does it hurt?” you don’t accuse the doctor of being negative. The doctor’s doing his or her job. In the same way, when you learn to look at pain in the

body, it’s because lots of interesting things gather around the pain.

It’s like that image in *A Still Forest Pool*. As Ajahn Chah says, when you get the mind very still it’s like a still pool of water, where all sorts of rare and wonderful animals come gathering around the pool. Well, actually, those rare and wonderful animals are all your crazy neuroses that have gathered around your pain. The pain is the watering hole where all your strange and weird ideas about pain and suffering come gathering. When you can stay with the pain, you get to watch them—and really to see them for the first time.

After all, when was your first experience of pain? It was right after you were born. Actually when you were still in the womb it was bad enough to begin with. And then suddenly you got pushed out through that narrow canal and found yourself surrounded by air, which attacked your skin. Someone pulled you out and spanked you. You had to deal with all that pain, with nobody to explain what was going on. For your first couple of years, before you could even learn how to speak intelligently, you had to deal with pain with no one to explain it. So you came up with a lot of preverbal attitudes toward pain, many of which are still hanging around in your mind.

So if you learn how to focus steadily on the pain and look at what’s coming around the watering hole, you see lots of strange perceptions and ideas. You can ask yourself, “Do you still believe in those ideas?” If you see that those ideas are adding unnecessary suffering on top of the pain, you learn how to drop them.

Take for instance the perception that you’re on the receiving end of the pain. You can switch that perception around. How about perceiving the pain as receding away from you? As soon as you perceive the pain, you’re seeing it going away, going away. You’re not on the receiving end. It’s like sitting in the back end of an old station wagon in a seat facing back, watching things go away, go away, go away behind you. What if you were to have that attitude toward the pain? You’d find that the mind would immediately feel a lot less stress around the pain, because you’re not

on the receiving end.

Or you can ask yourself, “Where is the sharpest point of the pain right now?” As you watch it move around, you begin to realize that some of the variations in the pain are caused by physical causes, but some are caused by variations in the mind. You see that the sense of being oppressed by the pain will go away for a second, and then it’ll come back. Well, what else happened when it went away? What was the change in the perception, what was the change in the thought accompanying the pain? Sit there and watch. It’ll come back again, so you can watch it come and go, come and go.

After a while you begin to realize that there was a certain perception you held for a moment that made the physical pain a burden on the mind. When the perception stopped, the sense of burdensomeness stopped as well. What was that perception? The next time it comes up, can you drop it immediately?

Or say that there’s a sense of pain in your knee. How do you perceive that? Do you have a sense that the pain is eating up the knee, or has occupied your knee? That the whole knee is pain? There are actually lots of different sensations going on there. There are the body sensations, such as the breath and the other physical elements of warmth, coolness, and solidity. And then there’s the pain, which is a different type of sensation entirely. Can you separate them out?

What often happens is that the sense of solidity and the sense of pain get glommed together, which makes the pain seem a lot more permanent and lasting than it actually is. If you learn to apply the perception of earth to the solid sensations, and the perception of pain to the sense of sharp sensations around the earth, you see that that sense of sharpness flits around. It’s not nearly as solid and lasting as you might have thought. And it’s much more manageable that way.

So this is how you play with your perceptions. You’re playing like Michael Jordan, and Michael Jordan plays to win. You begin to see the power of your perceptions. When you change a perception, you learn how it changes the amount

of suffering you feel. This gives you an excellent tool to use against the causes of suffering.

So remember: As you’re working with the breath, you’ve got all these forms of fabrication working together. You’ve got the breath, you’ve got directed thought, evaluation, perception, and feeling. And as you develop concentration based on the breath, you’re learning how to use these things in a knowledgeable and helpful way rather than as part of the cause of suffering.

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This is one of the reasons why there’s no clear distinction between concentration and discernment, or concentration and wisdom, in the teachings of the forest masters—or in the Buddha’s teachings, for that matter. The skills you develop in the course of concentration practice are precisely the skills you’re going to need to turn around and look at pain. Prior to your practice, these processes of fabrication were done in ignorance, which is why they contributed to pain. But when you learn how to use them with knowledge, and try to develop that attitude of finding joy in working on a skill and learning how to master it, they become part of the path.

The important point is that you learn how not to get discouraged by setbacks, that you learn to use your setbacks as an opportunity to gain new knowledge. I had a friend once who was learning to be a potter, and she had the opportunity to go to Japan and study with one of their living national treasures. At first she found the

experience very discouraging. She would throw her pots, put on the glaze, get them into the kiln. The next morning she’d come back and they’d all be broken, or burnt, or destroyed in one way or another. Whereas the living national treasure would put his pots in, and the next morning they’d come out perfect every time. This had her discouraged, until one day they opened up the kiln and found that his pots were all burnt and destroyed. She noticed, though, that he didn’t get upset. He just went in and tried to figure out what had happened. And she realized: That’s how you become a living national treasure. You don’t beat yourself up over your failures. You use them as an opportunity to learn.

So you have to realize, as you’re approaching this problem of suffering in the mind, that some of the causes go away simply by watching them. Those are the ones where you can just relax and watch. They’ve been allowed to fester simply because you haven’t really looked at them. With others, though, you need to exert a fabrication—which doesn’t mean simply exerting brute strength. It means gaining finesse in learning how to master the tools you’ve got. As you master them through concentration, you begin to see their power. Ultimately, of course, you’ll run into the limits of concentration. After all, what are you doing as you get the mind concentrated? You’re pushing against the three characteristics. You’re taking things that are inconstant and trying to make them constant. You want the mind to stay still. You take things that are stressful—this body here has lots of stress—but you’re learning how to make it pleasant by the way you breathe, by the way you relate to the energy flows in the body. You take things that are ultimately out of your control and you try to exert some control over them. And you find that you can do this to a certain extent.

And you *have* to do it. If you simply say, “Well, this concentration is inconstant, stressful, not self, so I’ll just give up my attachment to it,” you’ll never get anywhere on the path. The path is something you develop, not something you simply watch arising and passing away. You’ve got to

(Continued on page 15)

From Māra's Desk

By Cindy Mettika Hoffman

I have been busy, lately, selling my products to the aging population who want to look young and vibrant. Now I am back home —up here with all these so-called great beings who think they are the cat's meow, especially that Lord Brahma Sahampati, who acts like Mr. Goody Two Shoes himself. Then there's Lord Yāmā, the King of Death; Kwan Yin, the feminine goddess darling of Asia; Lord Buddha and moi, Lord Māra, Master of Suffering, King of Deceit, Deception, Fear, Pride, Ego, Vanity, Shame and Delusion. Oh, and I forgot to mention the one known as The Laughing Buddha who appreciates me because my traps give him a good chuckle as he holds his arms aloft watching humanity's foibles.

I have decided to keep busy for the next endless eons, watching the untrained and half-trained minds of worldlings caught up in the snare of the worldly winds. I have watched and interfered in human lives in every age of the past 33 Buddhas. Everyone suffers, except for a few in each age. Even the greatest kings and queens throughout history have suffered. Worldlings crave this and don't want that. Because of these four pairs—Praise and Blame, Gain and Loss, Pleasure and Pain, and Fame and Disrepute—humans spin endlessly on the wheel of life and death. Sometimes it is so fast it is like watching a Ferris wheel spinning out of control at 1,000 miles per hour as people are hurled off into space. It doesn't matter how old, young, rich, poor, famous, wealthy, spiritually inclined or materialistic people are—they could be kings, queens, beggars, hawks, doves, Republicans, Democrats, judges, communists, socialists, dictators, brain surgeons, scholars, thieves, lawyers, students, factory workers, beauty queens, morticians, gardeners, teachers, musicians, dentists, farmers, psychologists, bankers, secretaries, presidents, monks, nuns, writers, poets, artists, plumbers, brokers, jewelers, rocket scientists, yoga teachers, idolaters, free thinkers, vegetarians or omnivores—I lure them all with tasty bits of Praise and Blame, Gain and Loss,

Pleasure and Pain, Fame and Disrepute. Everyone grabs the bait—hook, line, and sinker—each time they get the tiniest whiff. My job is so easy—I have plenty of time to do some eavesdropping on the latest bargaining with the Buddha Realm gods and goddesses.

*Praise and Blame,
Gain and Loss,
Pleasure and Pain, and
Fame and Disrepute—
humans spin endlessly
on the wheel of life
and death.*

These gods and goddesses that people believe they talk to have lofty names like Buddha, Sāriputta, Mahā Mogallāna, Brahma, Vishnu, Kwan Yin and Indra, to name a few. I sneak peeks at their text messages, emails, cell phone message boxes and cosmic telephone conversations. Everybody wants something from them, mostly to cut some kind of deal. This past kalpa—which equals four billion years—I listened day in and day out to people begging for this and that. The wealthy wanted more money and were afraid to lose what they had; those who felt neglected wanted more fame; the pleasure-seekers wanted more pleasure; the “oh-so-special” people wanted to be recognized over and over again. I heard people beg to live longer or to be cured of their incapacitating disease or illness. Sometimes they wanted to get a girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe they could get that divorce. Maybe they could marry the man or woman of their dreams. Maybe they could become a stream-enterer. Maybe they could win the math/beauty/drama/swimming contest. Maybe they could pass their oral exam. Then there were others at the gaming tables who wanted just one big winning hand or the slot machine jackpot

or a win in the lottery. Just listening in was exhausting.

My favorite pastime is to slip into meditation halls and lure meditators. Now that can be a challenge because I cannot usually get into the mind/thought/heart process of those that are concentrated or practicing *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā*. However, there are plenty of practitioners in the room fidgeting on their cushions or in their minds—so easy to set the bait for them. Some of them are grasping and striving after a concentrated mind. They forget about me altogether. FYI—these folks are my favorite victims. Before they know it they are onto some old resentment, wounded pride, jealousy or something that gave them pleasure; or they're scripting the scenario for their next sexual encounter or writing the great novel or planning how to get more money to get the new iPod to listen to more distractions. Another meditation session down the tubes. Then they feel bad that their resolve for perfect concentration failed again. Heh-heh-heh! Sometimes I lurk around and listen into the hearts of the plea bargainers at the famous Buddha Rupa statues in Asia. I heard a woman who had become extremely religious and meditated at the local wat (monastery) every day as her illegal business was failing. She promised the Reclining Buddha 2,000 hard-boiled eggs and a hog's head for the monks and abbot if he would save her business. She lit incense and prayed and meditated every day. With some mystic mojo working there was bound to be a miracle and sure enough, the business must have turned around because there she was offering boiled eggs, fruit, flowers, incense and hogs' heads to the monastery for the next month. Now that was a tricky piece of karmic banking for the gods to work out.

To have to manage all those deals, and to keep accurate karmic accounts must be hell for these great gods. All I have to do is whisper sweet nothings in humanity's ear such as: she is prettier, he is smarter,

you are getting fat, they have more money, she is more famous, you are going to lose everything, who do you think you are, they are having a nicer vacation, you are going to get found out, your clothes are a little shabby, you are so good, you deserve it, what if you don't get the job or house of your dreams, what if you can no longer afford the place where you live, what if you join the great hordes of the homeless and shop at food banks, what if the austere monastic life is not what you want now, and on and on it goes. They bite. They suffer. They spin. I smile.

Māra's advice to wheel spinners: If you think you don't suffer, then you don't. Resent and blame the person who blames you. Take no responsibility for your part whatsoever. Get puffed up with pride when you are praised. Worry yourself sick chasing gain and running from loss. Connive to be famous by associating exclusively with well-known special people at your job or in your social network. Shun the plain and boring folks. Seek endless pleasures and do not think of the consequences. Be sure to run as far as you can from pain—yours and others. If you run fast enough or deny it, you are free.

My favorite advice for the pleasure-seekers is: How much is enough? Always answer: One more. Most importantly, do not seek any of the Buddha's teachings, as it will only confuse your mind/heart.

Well, it's back to lurking, sneaking, and eavesdropping. Ta-ta for now.

Your Good Friend, Māra

Skillful Effort (continued from page 13)

push against the three characteristics. When they push back, notice *where* they push back. That's where the skill comes in the practice. You don't have to make fabrications absolutely constant, absolutely pleasant, absolutely, totally under your control. You want just enough control to give you the strength you need to let go.

True letting go is when you let go out of strength, not out of weakness. If you let go out of weakness, it's because of desperation. There's a sense of sour grapes around the whole thing. "I could never get my mind to settle down," you say. "Well, that's simply because the mind is totally out of control. So I let go." Letting go like that, as Ajaan Lee said, is letting go like a pauper. A pauper doesn't have anything to let go of to begin with, so his letting-go is all in his imagination.

But if you learn how to develop a sense of ease, a sense of well-being through your concentration, it may not be absolute, but it's relatively strong enough and pleasant enough that when you begin to see the things that are totally out of your control, you let go not out of frustration, but out of a sense of contentment, a sense of balance.

So you try to use the processes of fabrication, even though they are stressful, inconstant, and not-self, to gain this sense of ease that can come from the concentration. And from that vantage point you can use your tools to uncover something that lies deeper still.

This relates to another common misconception around the issue of effort and relaxation. A book I once read said that there are two ways of approaching Awakening. One is trying to create the unconditioned through your practice, and the other is realizing that the unconditioned can't be brought into being; it's already there and all you need to do is relax. Well, this interpretation ignores the third possibility, which is that the unconditioned is already there, but it's not attained simply by relaxing.

The image Ajaan Lee gives is of salt water. As he says, there's fresh water in

salt water, but if you simply take the salt water and let it sit there, you can come back a hundred years later and it's still salt water. It doesn't separate out on its own. You have to distil it. The effort we put into the practice is the distilling. Sometimes it's simply the effort of watching with equanimity, and sometimes it's the effort of exerting a fabrication: the breath, directed thought, evaluation, feelings, and perceptions. But if you learn how to take joy in the process of learning how to be skillful with these fabrications, you finally do realize there is something unfabricated here as well.

That's where the practice gets really good. So when you think about the issue of effort, don't think of that poor neurotic fool who's trying, trying, trying and never going to get there because he's so miserable and deluded in his effort. Think more of the person who has taken joy in learning how to master a skill. The skill takes effort, it takes time, but in this particular case there are results all along the way—and the ultimate results more than repay all the effort put in. With this thought in mind, you can make your effort with a sense of good-heartedness, a sense of good humor, and you'll find that this path of fabrication really does lead to the unfabricated. That's the Buddha's promise, and he wasn't the type of person to make promises in vain. 🙏

Fearless Mountain Production Team

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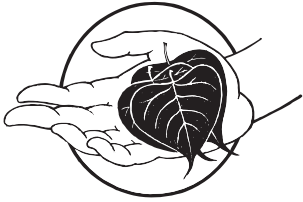


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