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Inner Foundations and Social Action

A talk by Ajahn Pasanno to a lay Buddhist group in Caspar, California in 1998.

The term 'social action' commonly implies large-scale efforts to improve the material aspects of society. The Buddha however, stressed the importance of the mind. So, from a Buddhist perspective, even small-scale activity that involves other people that is based on skilful motives is also part of social action: how you relate to others, to the world around you, to individuals who are close to you, to family, neighbours and society at large.

To understand what social action is, we must realise that it is not a case of 'me with society around me' as if the two were self-sufficient things; the two are interrelated. What we bring to the society around us is our quality of mind, our quality of heart, our quality of being; so inner spiritual training and social action cannot be separated. They are interrelated and interdependent. The training that we apply to ourselves is as important as anything we do outside, because inner training is the core. The ability we have to help others or affect others depends on our inner clarity, good intentions and the integrity with which we have looked after ourselves. The two are inseparable. Even the practice of keeping precepts – of not harming others, not being dishonest in the way we deal with others – is part of social action because the actions that we do or refrain from doing inevitably have an effect on others.

Sometimes we can get all enthused about social responsibility, social obligations and even social activism

but forget to ask: How do we deal with our families? How do we deal with people we are most close to? How do I pick up the phone and answer it? What do I put into the universe when somebody phones and I'm not really prepared to talk to them, or I get irritated with them? We should remember that these interactions are also social action! So even everyday action and speech - dealing with the circle of people around us, the people

we live with and have responsibilities for - this is part of social action. It is not separate. When we talk about the 'interdependent nature of things,' we are not merely referring to a lovely philosophical theory, but to something of living importance in our day-to-day lives. As it expands, this day-to-day interaction becomes social action in the usual sense. This broader type of social action is something I have also been much involved in.



An important principle underlying social action, is that in solving social problems, you can't afford to exclude anyone or anything. This is a principle that I have applied over and over again in projects with which I have been involved in Thailand, particularly in protecting the forests. Forest preservation is something that I was drawn into; it wasn't something I deliberately set out to do. I was the abbot at Wat Nanachat, the International Monastery in Northeast Thailand. The monastery had many resident monks, novices, lay men and laywomen practising and training there, with a large

lay community living around it. I thought it would be good as a balance to this to have a more remote branch monastery. So I found a remote area called Poo Jom Gom and went ahead and started to set it up. Shortly after we set it up, the Thai Government designated the monastery and the area around it as a National Park. This might make you think 'Wow, wonderful. A National Park!' but it was just a designation on a map, and it didn't come without considerable problems. It was one of the last forests remaining in Northeast Thailand. It was right along the Mekong River. On the other side of the Mekong, you could look into Laos and see these incredible hills and forests; but on the Thai side, there were all these stumps. So, this National Park had been thoroughly logged; it was a serious problem.

In trying to solve the problem, I had to find a way to include people in the solution. How could I get people to cooperate when they were the people doing the logging? I couldn't simply stop them cutting, even though we were in a National Park and even though the law prohibited it. I had to

find a way to include them. But how do you do this? How do you include the merchants who are paying them? How do you include the civil servants who are taking the bribes to allow it? You can't just say 'These are awful nasty people. If they weren't on the planet it would be a much better place!' They are there; they are people just like us; they are trying to look after families and children just like us; they are trying to get ahead in the world.

The Buddhist perspective is that problems arise from people not understanding how they create suffering for themselves and suffering for others. Problems and suffering come from desire and attachment; you can't just wish problems away. You have to consider people's suffering and try to help them, for instance by bringing them health and education. You need to ask, 'Why are they felling trees? Why are they destroying the forests? What do they want out of it?' Of course they want to live comfortably; they want to look after their families. So you have to find ways to provide for this. If you don't, it is like trying to build a wall against a huge tide.



You might think you could put a wall up to stop it. Well, good luck. The sea will find a way in. You must think clearly and find ways that address people's needs. You need to include them. You need to help provide solutions for them.

As the basis of individual practice, the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths: there is suffering, there is a cause of suffering, there is a cessation to suffering and a path leading to the cessation of suffering. Well, the same principle applies to social problems. You've got suffering; you've got a problem. Then you ask: What is the cause of the problem? Where is the cessation? And

what is the path leading to its cessation? You have to realise that you can't simply wish the problem away. You must contemplate it quite clearly: What are the different causes? What sort of goal are we looking for? Where is the end of the problem? If we haven't understood the problem, we won't be able to see the causes. If we are not clear what end we are moving towards, we won't know what path to develop.

So the structure of the Four Noble Truths can be applied to social action as well as to our own practice, and the more practised we are in applying principles of Dhamma to ourselves, the more likely we are to be able to apply them to the social situations involving our friends, family, work, or whatever. That is the heart of social action: applying principles of Dhamma to problems within our communities, and asking ourselves, 'How can we work together to solve this?'

So, with this branch monastery at Poo Jom Gom, there was a big problem of the forest being illegally felled. I had to find a way to draw people into this project who might be interested to help. The monastery, like all monasteries, was a web of interaction. People would come to offer help and support; they would come to listen to talks on the Observance Days; they would come for advice; they would come when they were in major transitions in life - marriage, birth, death; they would come to ask questions; they would come for consultation. So a web of interaction was established. So, when we had this problem in the community, the

problem with the forest, I already realised who might be interested to help. I began inviting people into the project one by one: that is how I started. At first there were only volunteers, but as the workload increased we had to hire people. Then we started drawing in the police.

Police in Thailand are not...it's not a particularly respectable position, but it *is* lucrative. Also, in that area, the police had a lot of power, especially when it came to controlling the removal of logs. Rather than getting into a confrontation with them, I had to find a way to work with them. How could we draw them in? As it turned out, solving this was easy, because one of the supporters of the monastery and one of the first volunteers to help was the police Deputy Superintendent. He was regarded as rather unusual because about five or six years beforehand he had transformed his life. He had stopped drinking, and started keeping the eight precepts, eating only one meal a day. He was very successful in drawing in other honest police officers, encouraging them to involve further police officers and getting them also on our side.

When working on such a project, it takes time to gain the trust of people, for them to see that you have included everybody's best interests. It takes time, it takes patience and it takes clarity. If you operate in a confrontational way, it makes it difficult to succeed. You need to recognise that everybody has their own suffering. They fear that helping you will prevent them improving their lives; therefore you need to consider their best interests. With that in mind, you need to find a way to draw them in so that they are able to help. As the project grew, we managed to draw in the military.

In Thailand the military is very, very powerful, and as an institution it is generally highly respected. However, in 1992/93, there was an uprising against the military dictatorship in power at the time, and a lot of lives were lost. The military was disgraced within the society. Because of their resources, one of the things that they saw that they could do to make amends was help protect



the forests. In this way we were able to draw in the military. Normally you couldn't do that, but circumstances at the time were such that it was possible. I found it important to recognize unusual opportunities, to find and use what was available. I discovered that sometimes you get allied with people in circumstances that you would never dream could happen.

It is very helpful in social action to have a strong focus on personal practice and integrity. I have found that if we have pure-hearted intentions, we start to connect in a mysterious way with other people. It is like a magnet. Good intentions seem to draw other good

people towards us. So for social action, it is important to sustain pure heartedness and clear integrity because firstly it is for our own benefit - we feel so much better - and secondly it draws other good people to us. The more good people we draw, the more we can do, so good intentions gather their own momentum.

During one of the last elections in Thailand I saw a handwritten sign on a building that said: 'The forces of corruption

are more powerful still, when good people retreat.' Sometimes we might say 'I just don't want to deal with society. I'm fed up with it. The system is hopeless.' But the system has more momentum when good people retreat. This is important to remember. However, the more that good people don't retreat, then the more that goodness will gather momentum. This might sound like foolish nonsense, but it's true. From my own experience I've seen it happen. I've seen people springing up to help, almost out of nowhere.

Another forest I've been involved in preserving lies in the west of Thailand along the Thai-Burmese border - an area called Dtao Dum. The problems there were much more difficult because of the degree of official collusion and the amount of money involved. The forest is pristine. There are still elephants, tigers and rhinoceros. These animals are considered almost extinct in Thailand, but in this forest, they still exist. It's the last spot in this huge area that hasn't been touched. For many animals and species of birds, this is the last island. So I've put a

lot of effort into trying to protect it, and am still involved with it. We've got another monastery there.

That part of Thailand is very different from Northeast Thailand. In Northeast Thailand there's a fundamental faith and respect for Buddhism, for monasteries and for monastics. On the western side of the country, the people are wilder, rougher, coarser. There's not so much ingrained respect, and the level of violence is much higher.

My first visit to this forest was about twenty years ago. I went there to spend five months on solitary retreat. At that time, the area was untouched from the main highway all the way to the Burmese border, a distance of about seventy kilometres. When I went back eight or nine years later, it was disheartening to see the extent of destruction. How quickly the forest had disappeared!

In that eight or nine years of my absence there hadn't been any other monk there. On this second visit, I had come with a group of monks to do a retreat. The forest was a tin mining area. There

used to be several tin mines, but on my second visit there was only one left. The villagers were very happy to see us. Because there hadn't been any monks around, no proper funeral rites had been performed for their deceased relatives. So one of the first things they wanted was a collective ceremony for all the people who had died in the previous eight or nine years. We disinterred some of the remains as part of a cremation ceremony. There had been only two causes of death - one was malaria and the other was gun shots. That was all. As I said, the area was rough.

So how do you work with a situation like that? I needed to draw people in, recognizing that there were good people who would be interested to help. I needed to look and ask, 'Who would be interested to help with this? Who would see the value of this?' and then get those people involved.

The forest was - and still is - a national park. Unfortunately, one of the main people involved in the destruction at that time was the director of the national park himself. But there were others also deeply involved.



The people who controlled access into the region were the border patrol police; the head of the border patrol police was involved. The people with legal jurisdiction in the area were the military; the head of the military was involved. So every channel of help seemed blocked. If I was to succeed, I needed to go above those people on the local level, and reach people in the Department of Forestry, checking out who were the honest officials and draw them into the project. And then, as I said, fortuitous things sometimes happen.

There is a woman who used to visit regularly and practice meditation at our main monastery, Wat

Nanachat. It turned out that her younger brother was the Deputy Head of the border patrol police for the whole country. This gave me my opportunity. He transferred one person out and sent in someone honest. It seemed like a miracle, but it really happened.

The next person we managed to get involved was a member of the Royal Family, one of the princesses. She was already interested and active in forest

preservation. As it turned out, one of the monks at our monastery had an aunt who worked for this princess. So I got a letter to the princess and she agreed to help. When she realised how big it was, she said she could do only so much, but told us maybe we should get the Queen involved. So, suddenly we had all these people involved, all starting from the simple intention to do something good.

So, for social action you have to be patient, you have to be discerning, you have to be equanimous and you have to be willing to fail. You have to be willing to recognize that sometimes things will work and sometimes they won't. Sometimes they will work, but in a way that you could never have imagined. The foundation for success however, lies in one's own practice: keeping of precepts, and developing clarity, tranquillity, reflective investigation and wisdom. These are the foundations we build for ourselves that affect the choices we make and the direction in which we apply our energy. Anyway, these are a few reflections for now. I'll end the talk here. ❖

A Dhamma Collage - Part One

Highlights of talks given by Ajahn Jayasaro to the community of monks at Wat Pah Nanachat

The Pot of Oil Simile

The Buddha explained the practice of mindfulness using the 'Pot of Oil' simile. A man was made to carry a big pot of oil along a difficult path through a crowd of spectators who were watching a beautiful dancer. The man had to avoid spilling any of the oil because behind him was a man with a sword who would cut off his head if he spilt even a drop. Now if you imagined yourself in that position, carrying that big pot of oil, where would your attention be? You couldn't afford to look at the dancer or be distracted by the crowd. Probably your attention would be mainly on the pot, but at the same time you couldn't ignore the state of the road; you'd have to avoid the potholes. You'd have to glance ahead occasionally to look for obstacles, then come back to your main object of attention, the pot of oil. So you'd be with the pot of oil most of the time, but some of the time you'd be glancing ahead, checking the path. This is the simile for practising *sati*, mindfulness.

Sampajañña, clear

comprehension, is the withdrawing from the object of *sati* for a moment and seeing the whole context of what you are doing: What else is happening? Are there any obstacles or hindrances arising in the mind? Are there any problems coming up?

Samatha and Irritability

On the path of *samatha* practice, it is common to reach a certain level where you get very judgemental, and irritable with other people, angry if people upset your meditation. You get very protective and paranoid about your *samādhi*. Of course there are good scriptural authorities to support this proprietorial attitude. The Buddha said 'Take care of your meditation object at all times. Don't let your *samādhi* be dissipated.' He encouraged us to avoid unnecessarily disturbing situations. But we can take this attitude too far. We can become self-righteously peeved about people, things, situations, responsibilities that might have a detrimental effect on the peace - my peace! - that we're trying to develop. This is one of the defilements of *samatha* practice.

Looking after your meditation object can be difficult

and frustrating, yes; but try not to blame the difficulty on others. It's better to look at it as a challenge. Another helpful way of coping with the tension, and preventing it taking over your mind is *metta* practice.

Skilful Attention and Inner Imagery

It is important to see how skilfully or unskilfully we attend to what is pleasant or unpleasant. The first hindrance, sensual desire, is born because we attend in an unskilful way to what is pleasant. When we are confronted with a pleasant object, the untrained mind tends to narrow its attention, focussing exclusively on the pleasant aspects of the object. The aspects of the object which are unpleasant, unbeautiful or simply neutral, the untrained mind censors or screens out. When we think of a pleasant object or person or event, we remember just one particular part of it, not the whole thing.

The pleasant aspect of something is called its *subha nimitta*. *Nimitta* means 'image' or 'aspect;' the *nimitta* is only an aspect of an object, not an accurate representative of it in all of its

complexity. In the case of something pleasant, we tend to focus on its *subha nimitta*, its beautiful aspect. We tend to nurture *subha nimittas*: *subha nimittas* relating to sexual matters, to food, or to places we have been. There is a cluster of these *subha nimittas* in our minds and the mind takes up *subha nimittas* and starts to fondle them, exaggerate them, trying to squeeze out every last bit of pleasure from them. That kind of fondling of *subha nimittas* makes them stronger and draws the mind to them like a magnet. This is how sensual desire completely overwhelms the mind. With such fondling of the images, the skilful *dhammas* of dispassion and letting go are weakened. Unskilful *dhammas* of attachment and fascination intensify.

With the second hindrance, hatred, we have *asubha nimittas*: images of people, events and experiences that we don't like. We tend to take such images as accurate, shorthand, representatives of reality, when in fact they are dependent on screening or censoring out important information which would radically change the perception of the object. The *asubha nimitta* might relate to something external - a person or a place - or it might relate to something internal, one of our own character



traits that we don't like. By attending to asubha nimittas in the wrong way, unwholesome dhammas are strengthened and wholesome dhammas - a sense of perspective, forgiveness, metta, and so on - are weakened; we lose our sense of proportion.

Patient Endurance

In the forest monasteries, particularly in my generation, the teaching on patient endurance was drummed into us almost every day. Patient endurance became something we aspired to. Sometimes this went a bit too far: when young men are inspired by the idea of patient endurance, you sometimes get competition and people start showing-off a bit, trying to prove how tough they are. But it is unfair to criticise a teaching simply because certain people, now and then, grasp it wrongly.

The other common response to this encouragement was, 'Well, why put up with something that you don't like? What a waste of time. Why not go and look for something that you like? Enjoy yourself! Life is short.' But the Buddha said that the ability to patiently abide with the unpleasant is a wonderful jewel of the mind. If you don't have patient endurance, in the initial onslaught of unpleasant *vedana*, unpleasant

sensation, then you are liable to get overwhelmed before the cavalry - which is mindfulness - can gallop to the rescue. You've already lost it. What you need is an ability to resist the initial push of defilements, an ability to stand firm. Unless you have got well-developed *sati*, when you are caught off guard, when suddenly there's physical pain, or someone suddenly abuses you, at that moment *sati* is probably nowhere to be found. But when you have patient endurance, you are nonetheless able to bear with these things. The more you see the benefit of patient endurance, the more faith you have in it, then the more willing you will be to cultivate it.

We couldn't have a better teacher of this than Ajahn Chah. I have often told you about Ajahn Chah's battles with sexual desire when he was a young monk. His practice at that time was indeed a battle. There is no other way to talk about it, except through martial imagery. On one occasion strong, obscene, erotic visions or hallucinations obsessed his mind for seven days and nights before eventually subsiding. Ajahn Pasanno once

asked him what skilful means he used to deal with such incredible attacks of lust and sexual desire. Ajahn Chah said 'Nothing special: I just endured.'

Teachings on Samsara

I find the Buddha's teachings on *samsara* very helpful. If you believe that you have been born many, many lifetimes already, then ten or twenty years of meditation practice, or even thirty years, forty years, is the blink of an eye. Some people take the agnostic view on this, saying 'Don't worry about past or future lives; you know, just concentrate on the present life.' But if you are only prepared to consider this one life then ordaining for five or ten years is a really big deal. If the Buddha didn't think it useful for us to consider *samsara*, then why did he talk about it so frequently?

Being Somebody

I remember in America once hearing someone telling her child 'Look, you may be poor but you can be somebody; you can be anybody if you really want.' This is life's goal for many people, isn't it? To be somebody; yet what a sad way to live one's life. The desire to be somebody gets expressed as the desire to be loved, to be appreciated, to be wanted, to be needed; needing to be needed.

Unfortunately this desire always has its shadow. It is always dogged by the fear of not being somebody, of being nobody, the fear of not being needed, the fear of disappearing without trace in the sands of time.

Some years ago, a political figure was assassinated in the States, I think in the Deep South. When they caught the assassin he shouted out in exultation, 'Now I'm a thousandth part of history!' as if his main motive had been to get his name in the papers, afraid he was going to die without anybody knowing his name. This is a kind of *bhava tanha*, desire to be, which has become so prominent over the past 100 or 200 years. It was quite a rare thing before the industrial revolution.

The great cathedrals were probably the greatest artistic creation of the Middle Ages, yet nobody ever thought about recording the names of the architects and craftsmen. With the great art of the East, nobody ever thought to write their name in the corner of the paintings. With the great Buddha images in Thailand, if you look round the back, you won't find engraved there



the name of the man who designed or cast it. People weren't interested in all that. I don't know exactly when it started.

Looking for Sweet Chillies

There's a world of difference between accepting the idea of impermanence on the intellectual level and really penetrating it with wisdom. Probably nobody in the world, in any culture, professing any religion, would deny that things change. Inuits and pygmies, cowboys and coolies: all would agree that things change. But beyond the superficial intellectual understanding of change, there is a certain point when the perception of change changes you. This only comes about through practice, in recognising the extent to which we have been looking for happiness in things that don't last. This is the basic mistake that we all make, because we don't remind ourselves, we don't want to see. There remains a slight hope.

There's a famous story of Mulla Nazruddin, who with tears running down his face was eating his way through a sack of chillies. When asked about it, he explained that one day he hoped he would find a chilli that was sweet. We're like that too. Perhaps sooner or later - we tell ourselves - we'll find a chilli that's sweet, we'll find a condition that isn't impermanent like all the other conditions we've experienced. The rational side of the mind says 'No, it's not possible', but still there is this emotional longing.

Young couples canoodling in the moonlight say: 'If only we could make this moment, this evening last forever;' but they only wish for it to last forever because they know it won't. Actually, it would be pretty miserable if it did, wouldn't it? People think that happiness lies in pleasure lasting forever; but happiness doesn't work like that, does it? Even if canoodling lasted forever, you couldn't enjoy it, because the body gets tired; excitement is tiring. In fact you can't enjoy anything for long, can you? How long can you enjoy anything before it gets boring?

The person without wisdom is like a drowning man clutching at straws, clutching at anything to give some lasting happiness. But nothing lasts. Nothing can do it for you. Nothing is going to give you a permanent high. Even heaven realms are impermanent. In the heavens you can be the life and soul of the party with five hundred young maidens frolicking around with you, gathering daisies and making them into chains, having a

great time for aeons and aeons. Then suddenly the flowers start to fade. Your time is up.

The Buddha related his own early reflections on this. He said, 'Before my enlightenment, though being myself subject to birth, ageing and death, I looked for happiness in things that were also subject to birth, ageing and death.' He reflected that such a search was not suitable or appropriate for a person of intelligence. This led him to embark on what he called the noble search. It wasn't the search for material pleasures; it was the search for liberation.

Self-perceptions and Misunderstandings

What happens when you are falsely accused of something? What happens, particularly if you have done something in a very good way, a very selfless way, and then you are accused of doing it in a very selfish way? How does that feel? How does it feel when people misunderstand you like this? This sense of self, the person you think you are, the sense of being someone, anyone, is an expression of ignorance. The moment you've any sense of being someone, you're setting yourself up as an Aunt Sally in a fairground, inviting people to throw balls at you. You'll find yourself suffering immediately. Even if other people's perceptions of you are not bad, it's unsettling if they don't coincide with your own.

Sometimes you meet someone who is absolutely convinced that they know you better than you know yourself. I used to find it intolerable when my mother would say to me, 'I can read you like a book'. I would reply, 'No you can't!' I'd insist that she didn't know me at all. Sometimes you find that someone's perceptions of you don't fit your own perceptions of yourself. There was an interesting example of this, this morning. A couple of young women visiting the monastery were overheard in the kitchen saying that they thought the abbot's eyes - my eyes - were chilling, like those of an executioner. So I suppose they won't be coming back here again.

I remember a rather confused layman once asked Ajahn Chah about the goal of practice. He had read so many books: books on Zen, books on Mahayana, books on Taoism, books on Don Juan. He asked Ajahn Chah: 'Should we practice to become a Bodhisattva or to become an Arahant?' Ajahn Chah said 'Don't become anything at all. Don't become an Arahant. Don't become a Bodhisattva. The moment that you become anything at all, you'll be suffering already.'



Vanity

As a young man, King Asoka's teacher was a perfume seller. The most beautiful courtesan in the city fell in love with him and did her best to entice him to her bed. But he wouldn't have anything to do with her. Of course, being already completely infatuated with him, the fact that he was the only man for hundreds of miles who wouldn't jump at the chance for an evening with her made him even more alluring. She made him many invitations to visit her, and his continual reply was, 'It's not yet time.'

One evening while she was entertaining a certain guest, she was told that someone incredibly wealthy had just arrived. The only way she could get rid of the present guest was to have him murdered, which she arranged. She got caught for this and sentenced to a horrible punishment, which involved having her hands, feet, nose and ears cut off. Having been punished in this awful way, she was then taken to the cremation ground to die. Still dressed in her finest silks, she lay there with hands, feet, nose and ears scattered around her. Her faithful maidservant sat there comforting her as gradually her life drained away. Suddenly, the maidservant saw someone coming and realised it was the young man that her mistress had been lusting after for so many years. Having so often said, 'It's not yet time,' now of all times he had come. When she informed her mistress about this, her mistress's first reaction was 'Oh, that he should see me like this! Quickly gather the hands, feet, nose and ears and cover them with a cloth.' Such was the intensity of her vanity, even in the final moments of her life! It would be better somehow, she thought, if the young man did not see her severed limbs. Meanwhile the man approached and gave her a wonderful Dhamma teaching. Before she died she became a *sotapanna*, a stream enterer. In terms of Dhamma then, it is a story with a happy ending.

Gratitude to Parents

As a teenager before becoming a monk I once travelled through Iran. I was pretty much down-and-out at the time, living in an alleyway, relying on alms. One day someone had given me a few coins. I knew of a soup shop across Teheran where for very little money they'd give you a big bowl of soup and all the bread that you

could eat. So on this day, I was walking in the early morning towards the soup shop across the city. I passed a woman who had obviously just come out of her house and was on her way to work. She looked at me in a very disgusted way, which was, I admit, reasonable enough, as I was pretty disgusting. She walked over to me looking very stern and pointed at me indicating that I should follow her. We went to the block of flats where she lived and into the lift. She didn't say a word to me the whole time, so I didn't know what was going to happen. She took me into her flat and gruffly showed me to the kitchen, sat me down, and put a huge pile of food out for me and watched me eat till I was full. Then she barked out something in Persian and her son came in with a clean shirt and a pair of trousers. She let me know that my present outfit deserved to be incinerated and



pointed me to the bathroom, to shower and change, which I did. When I emerged, she pointed to the door. We walked out, into the lift, onto the road and then she just walked off without another word. I was very impressed.

My fortunes changes. I returned to India to live a more meditative life. One day I recalled that woman in Teheran, how inspiring I found her. I was sure that I would never forget what she did for me. Suddenly it dawned on me that whereas I felt so much gratitude for someone who had given me just one meal and a shower, I had lived with my parents for almost eighteen years; they had given me three meals a day, all the clothes I needed, and if I ever got sick, they were more worried about it than I was, and I realised that I'd taken it all for granted. I felt more gratitude towards that Iranian woman than I did to my own parents. I realised how shallow my thinking was, how much I had received as a boy without giving it a second thought.

It seems to me that unresolved issues with parents are a major obstacle to spiritual progress: the unwillingness to forgive them for not being perfect, for not being who we want them to be, for having greed, hatred and delusion, for being puthujjanas. This is something we monks need to look at. It's a kind of wound that needs to be allowed to heal.

The Practice of Metta

A lot of us have problems with the practical details of

metta meditation. We wonder how exactly to go about it. What methods should we use? One approach I have found helpful in my own practice is to spark off a feeling of metta and then expand it. I have found that the quickest way to spark off a feeling of metta is to think of my mother and of her love. This is something most of us will be well acquainted with. We all know what this is like. When I think of my own mother, I get this very warm feeling in my heart, in the chest area. I take this as a meditation object, and develop metta meditation from it. Thinking about one's mother's love is not simply a sentimental excursion. It is immensely precious; it has practical value.

Gratitude and Humility

In this tradition we put a lot of effort into striving to be our own refuge and to take responsibility for ourselves and our conduct. In such an individualistic style of practice, it is through reflecting on what we've been given that we prevent ourselves falling a prey to pride. We are saved from the perils of spiritual pride by remembering our connections with others - remembering what we have been given. Reflecting like this is very supportive of humility, of genuine humility, one of the most beautiful spiritual qualities. It is not merely the outer trappings of humility, not merely an ideal that we try to correspond to, but a humility that comes from not grasping at self and from recognising that all that we have has been given to us.



Appreciative Joy

Not many people develop mudita, appreciative joy, as a meditation. This is a pity, because it's a wonderful thing to do. I always say that it is the lazy person's path to enlightenment, because you don't have to actually do anything, you just appreciate what other people are doing. You just sit back, watch and enjoy other people's goodness, and feel your mind becoming purer.

As you cultivate mudita, you'll find your mind develops a natural sensitivity to goodness. It is as if you study plant life or herbs and then walk into a forest: you automatically know which tree is which, which plant is which, which plants can be used for medicine and so forth. In a forest your mind turns to these considerations quite naturally. Similarly, when you develop mudita, you become increasingly sensitive to goodness and to the good intentions of other people.

This appreciative attitude begins to replace the negative and cynical reactions that are ingrained in many of us. Mudita is a way of recognising, of opening our eyes to the goodness around us. In a monastic community of course, it's not difficult to see goodness in every part of the day. It's very unusual to see anything else really.

You can see small acts of kindness even on the streets. I remember one day on almsround seeing somebody dropping something, and somebody else called out to them, 'You've dropped something,' and then picked up the article and gave it back to them. The other person received it with a smile and a 'Thank you'. What a lovely thing that was to see. It made my day. There's no reason why people should bother to do such things, but they do; it's a lovely thing to see. There's no kind of reward for it either; it is just the obvious thing to do. It's the naturalness of such actions that is so uplifting, the intimation of what the human heart is capable of.

Counting Blessings

I'm often reminded of the words of wisdom that I received from my parents when I was small. For instance, I remember my father frequently telling me, 'Sit up straight!' I realise now how wise and profound that advice was, though I didn't used to appreciate it when I was a teenager.

Another phrase from my childhood that springs into my mind occasionally is 'Count your blessings!' Probably most English people have heard this. I think in this monastic environment it is particularly worth bearing in mind, because we can easily take what we have for granted: that we are fed every day, that we have kutis to live in, that we have good friends to live with. If we constantly reflect on our blessings, not simply the material blessings but also the small spiritual victories that we achieve and the goodness that we create, then discontent regarding our progress, or lack of it, shrinks. Counting our blessings provides a cushion, a sense of wellbeing which enables us to bear with the ups and downs of practice, the difficult times, the disappointments and disillusionments that inevitably come, and when one realises that this is a lot bigger job than we initially thought. This isn't just a ten day retreat, it's a practice of ten years, twenty years, thirty years, if one is lucky. If you count your blessings you end up feeling, 'Well, there is nothing else I'd rather do anyway'. There is a sense that we are doing what needs to be done. This is a wonderful refuge. ❖



AN APPRECIATION

Venerable Paññavaddho 1925 – 2004

Venerable Paññavaddho was born in India in 1925; his father was a mining engineer from South Wales. He trained and worked as an electrical engineer. He received samanera ordination from Venerable Kapilavaddho in the London Buddhist Vihara in 1955 and received bhikkhu ordination in Wat Paknam, Bangkok in 1956. He spent five years with the English Sangha Trust in London, before returning to Thailand. Ajahn Maha Boowa invited him to Wat Pah Baan Taad in 1963 where he remained till his death on 18 August 2004.

Ajahn Maha Boowa wrote of him: 'Not only did he develop himself to the fullest, his life was also one that greatly benefited people from all over the world. He was responsible for instructing and training all the foreigners at Wat Pah Baan Taad. Tahn Pañña told me he had one regret: that so few Westerners make an effort to benefit from the Buddha's teachings.'

'Tahn Pañña possessed a subtle and refined nature. He was beyond reproach. The whole time I knew him, I never had any reason to reprimand him – never. He was always composed, circumspect and displayed wisdom in everything he did. His presence has touched the lives of many people over the years. His death is a loss to faithful Buddhists everywhere.'

AMARAVATI NOTICES

Siladharā Pabbajā

Anagārikās Susan Pritchard and Jeanette Williams will request Going Forth into the Order of Siladharā on Sunday 17 October at 2.00 pm. All welcome.

Kathina celebration will be November 7. To offer help, contact Anne Jameson 01234 714148 or a.jameson@btinternet.com.

Winter retreat January – March.

As in previous years we are hoping to have a small lay support team staying in the monastery to help with the kitchen, maintenance, etc. We invite laymen who have stayed before, with a minimum commitment of one month. Please write to the secretary before mid-November. There are no more places available for laywomen.

Amaravati Lay Events: Days of Practice

Nov 13; Dec 4; Jan 15; Feb 12; Mar 13; All are welcome. 9.45am till 5pm. No need to book. Bring food to share. For more information contact Roger Little 01923 253650 or see www.buddhacommunity.org

Amaravati Lay Events: Weekend Retreat

October 8 – 10: All group meetings are optional. You can participate in silence if you prefer. Advance booking essential. Registration from 5.30pm. Retreats end at

4.30pm on the last day. For information write to AUA c/o Amaravati, or phone Nick Carroll 020 8740 9748 or Chris Ward 01442 890034. Booking forms can be downloaded from www.Buddhacommunity.org.

Young Persons' Retreat:

22 Oct. to 24 Oct: contact Ray Glover. Tel: 01242 604129 Mob:07976 756948; raymond.glover@tesco.net

The Bodhinyana Group meets in the Bodhinyana Hall on Wednesdays in school term times at 7.30pm for chanting, meditation and discussion. For details see www.buddhacommunity.org or contact c.ward@btinternet.com.

Introduction to Meditation:

Every Saturday 2 – 4 p.m. in the Bodhinyana Hall. Everyone welcome. No booking necessary.

CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

Kathina celebration will be Nov 14th. Contact person: Mrs. Buddhi Vinitharatne. Tel: 01903 600292

Winter Retreat 2005

Laymen who are experienced with meditation practice and the monastic lifestyle, who are willing to offer support to the Sangha during January – March 2004. Please write to the Guest Monk. Two weeks minimum; month or more preferred.

Forest Days:

Oct. 10 (not 17), Nov. 28, Dec. 12. These afternoons will be spent helping the Sangha in ongoing work in Hammer Wood. Meet at the monastery at 1.00pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation write to the guest monk/nun.

Garden Day: Dec. 4. Meet at the monastery at 1.30pm. If you'd like overnight accommodation write to the guest monk/nun.

Lay Forums:

October 31:
December 5: Forum on Basic Meditation
Contact: Anna 01903 782732

RATANAGIRI NOTICES

Kathina will be held on the 31st October 2004. It is being offered this year by Dr Mo Thuzarand family from Glasgow and will start at 10am. For further details please contact the sponsor on 0141 339 1168 or email moethuzar2004@yahoo.com

Retreat House Building Project: We would appreciate offers of short- or long-term help. Please contact Tom Pickering on 0191 419 4463 or Ratanagiri on 01661 881 612. We particularly need help with carpentry and plastering, as well as with general building.

Other help needed: We would appreciate help in the monastery kitchen and in the

garden. We have modest accommodation for men or women who can stay 1–4 weeks. Please phone Ratanagiri or email community@ratanagiri.org.uk (FAO Guestmaster).

HARTRIDGE NOTICES

Trees and tea: November 28: Everyone is welcome to join our working party, clearing and planting in our new woodland, refreshed by cups of tea in our new kitchen! We start at 9am and again at 1pm. Let us know if you'll come.

Saturday Afternoon Meditation

Workshops: 1:30 – 4:30pm: Oct 23, Nov 27, Dec 25.

Sunday Evenings: Puja and talk every Sunday at 7pm. All welcome.

GENERAL NOTICES

Bangladesh Flood Disaster: To offer help to the victims of the Bangladesh Flood Disaster please contact Mr. Goutam Barua, 16 Waingrove, Nottingham, NG11 7ED. Tel: 0115 969 6344. Email: goutam@barua.fsnet.co.uk

Buddhist Christian Retreats at Turvey Abbey:

Apr 22-24 Inner Silence & Awakening (I)
Sep 16-18 Inner Silence & Awakening (II)
Oct 7-9 Meditation & Mindfulness
For details see www.turveyabbey.org.uk

Dhamma books from our Sangha:

- www.amaravati.org/abm/english/tch.html
- www.abhayagiri.org/dhamma/index.htm#recent
- www.ratanagiri.org.uk/books.htm
- www.buddhamind.info/leftside/under/pubs.htm

NEWSLETTER

This issue's contributors:

Ajahn Pasanno is co-abbot of Abhayagiri. Ajahn Jayasaro lives in Thailand; he was the senior monk at Wat Pah Nanachat for most years between 1990 – 2002.

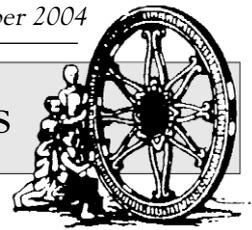
This issue's photographs are from around Amaravati and Ratanagiri.

Forest Sangha Newsletter Online: The current and many previous issues of the Forest Sangha Newsletter are now available to view or download from the internet at <http://www.fsnewsletter.net> or by following the link from <http://www.amaravati.org>

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Subscription and address changes for printed and electronic copies of the newsletter can be made online at the same addresses.

European and Overseas Subscribers: If you wish to continue receiving the Newsletter, please return the enclosed postcard.



Teaching and Practice Venues

| MEDITATION GROUPS | |
|---|--|
| These are visited regularly by Sangha members. | |
| BATH – Thursday/Weekly | Bill and Carol Huxley, (01225) 314-500 |
| EDINBURGH – Thursday/Weekly | Neil Howell, (0131)226-5044 |
| GLASGOW – 1 st Friday/Monthly | James Scott, (0141) 637-9731 |
| LEEDS AREA – Friday/Weekly | Daniela Lueb, (0113) 2791-375 Anne Grimshaw, (01274) 691-447 |
| HAMPSTEAD – 1 st & 3 rd Wednesday/monthly | 1 Hillside (Room 6), London NW5 Caroline Randall, (020) 8348-0537 Entrance in Highgate Road. Ann Booth (020) 7485-0505 |
| LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY | (020) 7834-5858 58 Eccleston Square, London SW1(Victoria) Meditation Sundays: led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday classes – 6.00pm |
| SOUTHAMPTON – 1st & 3rd Thursday/Monthly | Ivor Minard (023) 8089-4890 |
| MEDITATION GROUPS | |
| These meet regularly & receive occasional visits from Sangha. | |
| BEDFORD | David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892 |
| BELFAST – Sunday/Weekly | Paddy Boyle, (02890) 427-720 |
| BERKSHIRE – 2 nd & 4 th Wed/Monthly | Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646 |
| BRIGHTON – Wednesday/Weekly | Nimmalā, (01273) 723-378 |
| CAMBRIDGE – Sunday/Fortnightly | Dan Jones, (01223) 246-257 |
| CANTERBURY | Charles Watters, (01227) 463-342 |
| CO. CLARE, IRELAND – Wednesday/Weekly | Stan de Freitas, (00 353) 61 367-073 |
| DUBLIN | Rupert Westrup, (01) 280-2832, (Dial: 00441 – from the UK) |
| HARLOW – Monday/Weekly | Pamutto, (01279) 724-330 |
| HEMEL HEMPSTEAD | Bodhinyāna Group – Wednesday/Weekly in school term times Chris Ward (01442) 890-034 |
| KENDAL – Sunday/Monthly | Fellside Centre, Low Fellside, Jayasīli, (01539) 740-996 |
| LIVERPOOL – Wednesday/Every two weeks | Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427-6668 |
| LONDON/NOTTING HILL – Tuesday/Weekly | Jeffery Craig, (0207) 221-9330 |
| LEIGH-ON-SEA | Rob Howell (01702) 482-134 |
| MACHYNLLETH/MID. WALES – Monday/Weekly | Angela Llewellyn, (01650) 511-350 |
| MIDHURST – 2 nd /4 th Wed/Monthly | Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479 |
| NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE – Wed/Weekly | Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726 |
| NEWENT, GLOUCS – Friday/Every 3 weeks | John Teire, (01531) 821-902, email: john.teire@virgin.net |
| NORWICH – 2 nd Thursday/Monthly | Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717 |
| PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES – Weekly meeting and other events | Peter and Barbara (Subhadrā) Jackson, (01239) 820-790 |
| PERTH – Saturday/Every 2 weeks | Neil Abbot, (07765) 667-499 |
| PORTSMOUTH – 1 st Mon/Monthly | Dave Beal, (02392) 732-280 |
| REDRUTH – Mon & Wed/Weekly | Daniel Davide, (01736) 753-175 |
| SHEFFIELD | Greg Bradshaw, (0114) 262-1559 email: greg.bradshaw@btclick.com |
| SOUTH DORSET – Thursday/Weekly | Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati), (01305) 786-821 |
| STEYNING / SUSSEX | Jayanti (01903) 812-130 |
| STROUD | John Groves, (07967) 777-742 |
| SURREY/WOKING – Wed/Weekly | Rocana, (01483) 761-398 |
| TEESIDE THERAVADA BUDDHIST GROUP – Weekly/Wed or Thurs | David Williams, (01642) 603-481 and John Doyle, (01642) 587-274 |
| TOTNES – Wednesday/Weekly | Jerry, (01803) 840-199 |

Amaravati Retreats

2004 – Remaining Retreats:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Oct. 15 – 17 (Weekend) | Ajahn Vimalo [#] |
| Oct. 29 – Nov. 2 (5 day) | Ajahn Natthiko [#] |
| Nov. 19 – 21 (Weekend) | Ajahn Visuddhi [#] |
| Nov. 26 – 30 (5 day) | Ajahn Vimalo [*] |
| Dec. 10 – 12 (Weekend) | Sister Mettā |
| Dec. 17 – 19 (Weekend) | Ajahn Visuddhi |
| Dec. 27 – Jan. 1 2005 (6 day) | Ajahn Khantiko [#] |

* Male places left only

[#]Waiting List for places on these retreats

Retreat Centre work weekend 2004

Friday 1st – Sunday 3rd October.

Part-time attendance welcome. Please write or e-mail for an application form.

2005 – Retreats

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| April 8 – 10 (Weekend) | |
| April 22 – 24 (Weekend) | Ajahn Candasiri |
| May 6 – 15 (10 day) | Ajahn Sumedho ^{**} |
| May 27 – June 5 (10 day) | Ajahn Vajiro |
| June 17 – 19 (Weekend) | |
| July 3 – 16 (14 day) | Ajahn Vimalo |
| Aug. 5 – 7 (Thai Weekend) | Ajahn Kongrit ^{##} |
| Aug. 12 – 16 (5 day) | |
| Sept. 2 – 4 (Weekend) | Sister Mettā |
| Sept. 16 – 25 (10 day) | Ajahn Sumedho |
| Oct. 7 – 16 (10 day) | Ajahn Candasiri |
| Oct. 28 – 30 (Weekend) | |
| Nov. 11 – 13 (W/end) | Sr. Metta & Sr. Santacitta |
| Nov. 25 – 29 (5 day) | |
| Dec. 9 – 11 (Weekend) | Christian/Buddhist |
| Dec. 27 – Jan. 1 2006 (6 day) | |

^{**}For those who have already sat a 10 day retreat.

^{##}For Thai speakers only.

Retreats are run on a donation basis only.

Due to demand, there will be a limit of 3 retreats per person per year. For over-subscribed retreats, places will be allocated by lottery after December 1st 2004.

- Unless specified otherwise, registration is from 4 p.m. – 7 p.m. on the first day. Orientation talk is at 7.15 p.m. Weekend retreats **end at 4 p.m.** Other retreats **end at lunchtime.**
- All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat.
- Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form. **Note** that bookings **cannot** be made by telephone or by e-mail ‘messages.’
- Applicants requiring **confirmation** – either that they have been given a place on the retreat or that they are on the waiting list – are requested to supply either a **stamped addressed envelope** or an **e-mail address.**

Telephone: 01442 843239 E-mail: retreats@amaravati.org

Website: <http://www.amaravati.org>

VIHARAS

BRITAIN

◆ Amaravati Monastery,
St Margarets,
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire. HP1 3BZ
Tel: (01442) 842-455 (Office)
84-3239 (Retreat Info.)
Fax: (01442) 843-721
Web site: www.amaravati.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Amaravati.

◆ Aruna Ratanagiri,
Harnham Buddhist
Monastery,
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland.
NE20 0HF
Tel: (01661) 881-612
Fax: (01661) 881-019
Web site: www.ratanagiri.org.uk
E-mail: community@ratanagiri.org.uk
Stewards: Magga Bhavaka Trust.

◆ Cittaviveka: Chithurst
Buddhist Monastery,
Chithurst, Petersfield,
Hampshire. GU31 5EU
Tel: (01730) 814-986
Fax: (01730) 817-334
Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Cittaviveka.

◆ Hartridge Buddhist
Monastery,
Upottery, Honiton,
Devon. EX14 9QE
Tel: (01404) 891-251
Fax: (01404) 890-023
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust.

THAILAND
◆ Wat Pah Nanachat,
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubon Rajathani. 34310
Mailing for Thailand:
To be placed on newsletter
mailing list please write to
Amaravati.

NEW ZEALAND
◆ Bodhinyanarama,
17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Wellington. 6008
Tel: (+64) 45 637-193
Fax: (+64) 45 635-125
e-mail: sangha@actrix.gen.nz
Stewards: Wellington Theravada
Buddhist Association.

◆ Auckland Buddhist Vihara,
29 Harris Road,
Mount Wellington,
Auckland.
Tel: (+ + 64) 957 955-443

ITALY
◆ Santacittarama,
Località Brulla,
02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti).
Tel: (+39) 0 765 872-186
Fax: (+39) 06 233 238-629
Website: www.santacittarama.org
Stewards: Santacittarama Association.

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

NORTH AMERICA
◆ Abhayagiri Monastery,
16201 Tomki Road,
Redwood Valley.
CA 95470
Tel: (707) 485-1630
Fax: (707) 485-7948
(Sangha literature and all
USA newsletters are
distributed from here.)
Web site: www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: Sanghapala Foundation.

◆ Boston Area:
Buddhapharisa, Boston,
Mass. Tel: (781) 8 616-837

AUSTRALIA
◆ Bodhinyana Monastery,
Lot 1, Kingsbury Drive,
Serpentine. 6125 WA
Tel: (08) 95 252-420
Fax: (08) 95 253-420

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

◆ Dhammaloka Buddhist
Centre (Perth),
18-20 Nanson Way,
Nollamara. 6061 WA
Tel: (08) 93 451-711
Fax: (08) 93 444-220
Web site: www.bswa.org.au
Stewards: Buddhist Society of
Western Australia.



OBSERVANCE DAYS

On these days some monasteries are given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome to participate in the evening meditation vigils. At Amaravati on the Full and New moons, there is an opportunity to determine the Eight Precepts for the night.

| Moon Phase | ☾ HALF | ● NEW | ☽ HALF | ○ FULL |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| OCTOBER | 6 th (Wed) | 13 th (Wed) | 21 st (Thurs) | 28 th (Thu) |
| NOVEMBER | 5 th (Fri) | 11 th (Thurs) | 19 th (Fri) | 26 th (Fri) |
| DECEMBER | 4 th (Sat) | 11 th (Sat) | 19 th (Sat) | 26 th (Sun) |
| JANUARY | 3 rd (Mon) | 9 th (Sun) | 17 th (Mon) | 24 th (Mon) |
| ☺ Pavāraṇā Day (Vassa ends) | | | | |

If undelivered, please return to: AMARAVATI MONASTERY
 Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead
 Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ, England

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