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Tudong in Wales

Excerpts from talks by Sister Anandabodhi and Sister Thitamedha after their two month pilgrimage in Wales.

Sister Anandabodhi: I was born in Wales and grew up in Pembrokeshire, at the foot of the Preseli Hills in West Wales. Our tudong began in those hills. We also visited my mum and the house I had grown up in and a few key people who had helped me onto the spiritual path. In part, then, the tudong was a pilgrimage through my life, an unravelling of my identity.

Sister Thitamedha: *Tudong* is translated as “shaking off”; shaking off old habits, shaking off what is unnecessary. It implies being less burdened; it implies an inner renewal. One of the sisters asked me in what way the tudong had affected me. One of the most powerful things was the sense within me of gently letting go. I felt the situation gently pushing me to be present in every moment, not letting me retreat into the past or dream about the future. There was just one thing to do: be present. There was often no choice; one simply had to let go. If I tried to hold on, or plan ahead, or try to arrange some comfortable situation or other it didn't work out. After a while I realised that it's better to let go willingly. Eventually one learns to be present with things as they are, to let things be: the elements, the wind, the rain, the cold, the blazing heat. If one is hungry or thirsty, let it be as it is.

Sister Anandabodhi: We set off on 25th June from Amaravati with our rucksacks and alms bowls on a tudong that would take us up the west coast of Wales. We took bivi bags not tents, minimal changes of clothing, a little stove and a few teabags. We each had a little Buddharupa and some pictures of Luang Por Sumedho and Luang Por Chah, our little portable shrines.

Sister Thitamedha: When one is on the road in the fresh air one has little control apart from the ability to be present. It's very refreshing to walk like that, just being with body. There's nothing to do but walk. Often we didn't even know where we were walking to. Although we had a map and a rough direction, we didn't plan in advance much because things changed so fast. After a while we realised there was no point planning. It just made things more painful and gave us more things to let go of. So we would simply plan by the

hour, agreeing to try and reach some place or other and see what happened.

Sister Anandabodhi: When planning the tudong, some people had encouraged us to take mobile phones. But no, no mobile phones; we were going on faith; and as the tudong unfolded we had an increasing sense of being guided. Although we had maps and we would make plans, the route we followed was often outside of our control, and in a very beautiful way we would find ourselves as if taken to particular people who had a resonance with Buddhism or meditation.



Sister Thitamedha: We felt ourselves being continually showered by divine blessings. I had noticed a similar effect on shorter tudongs I have done in the past, but on this two month tudong it seemed particularly impressive. We seemed to receive miracles daily. There was no planning involved, but wonderful things seemed to happen spontaneously. At times it was like being in a fantasy movie. We'd meet people, wonderful people, friends of friends, saints, who would care for us. At first it amazed us, but after a while it began to seem normal. It was just miracles; nothing special.

Sister Anandabodhi: In our eight weeks' tudong we were offered food every single day. Also we spent not a single night in the rain. On some nights when it looked like it would be fine we ended up by chance getting a place to shelter; then torrential rain would come down and we would say "Ooh, isn't it lucky that we are not outside in our little bags!" So we were very well cared for. It felt a very blessed time.

Sister Thitamedha: We started our walk on the Preseli Hills, which are dangerous to walk on in winter and also when it rains because of its bogs. Fortunately we had good weather. I found it especially nice to sometimes walk barefoot, to feel the earth beneath my feet.

Sister Anandabodhi: Sister Thitamedha and I have been friends for 10 years so there were not too many difficulties to work out between us. One problem, however, was I would always get a surge of energy at five o'clock and would want to walk another couple of hours, while she at about that time would always want to find a place to rest for the night. So that took some negotiating.

Sister Thitamedha: Sister Anandabodhi had a soft spot for derelict huts, so whenever I saw a derelict hut towards evening time, I knew that's where we would be staying. On our first night, this is what happened. It was a nice, quiet place. Various animals and birds, mice and bats had made good use of it, so we had to clear some space for ourselves, and then did a puja. It was a cloudy but beautiful evening,



and we had a lovely view over the hills.

Sister Anandabodhi: Next morning we walked off the hills and looked for a place to go for alms, our first pindapat. We had to walk about 3 miles to the village. We stood for only five seconds when a man shouted, "Hello. You're Buddhists, aren't you?" He was a carpenter who lived nearby; he invited us in and fed us. He had first come across Buddhism in prison where visiting monks had impressed him with their peace and demeanour. He said that each prisoner gets just one meal at midday, and this meal he had offered to the monks. It was very nice meeting him.

Then we set off to the Gwaun valley, a beautiful valley famous for its fairies. It was a long, tiring walk. By evening Sister Thitamedha was unwell with a bad migraine. We found a beautiful little church, St. Brynach's. It was open, so, having asked someone about it, we went in. The heating was on and it had a nice, thick carpet, so we stayed there for two nights while she recovered. St. Brynach was a pilgrim saint who used to travel around Wales with a portable altar, just as we were now travelling with portable shrines. His presence there was still palpable. Elsewhere we kept finding places dedicated to him; we felt his goodness was still present in that part of the land.

Sister Thitamedha: By the second morning, my headache had gone. We felt as if St Brynach had really looked after us, had taken us under his wing. Then Sister Anandabodhi's mother drove us to the coast, to Saint David's, Ty Ddewi, the cathedral of the patron saint of Wales.

Sister Anandabodhi: Then we went one and a half miles south to St. Non's. St. Non was the mother of St. David. At St. Non's there was a little well or spring that they say appeared on the stormy night that St. David was born.

When we started our tudong we were physically unfit. We were carrying heavy packs and wearing sandals. By the time we reached St. Non's our feet were sore; my feet felt like tenderised steak. But when we bathed our feet in the spring, we found the water was very healing, and found we could walk without pain or foot problems from then on.

Sister Thitamedha: That evening, sitting on a desolate beach with neither money nor food nor anywhere particular to go to, Sister Anandabodhi's mother was understandably reluctant to leave us. However, we encouraged her that we would be fine, and chanted the *Jayanto* for her, the victory chant. It was very touching. Then she drove off.

Sister Anandabodhi : In the following weeks, as we walked up the coast we'd see beautiful mountains and listen to the sound of the sea and appreciate the ancient feel of the land. Although I grew up in a very beautiful part of Wales, I had never realised that the whole country was so beautiful.

Sister Thitamedha: On the walk we didn't do as much formal meditation as we would do on retreat. We meditated in the morning and evening, and sometimes during the day too. But mostly we just walked in silence. In spite of that I found I

could access an inner stillness. What surprised me was that when I returned to the monastery the stillness was still strong and present; I could still easily access it. I found this interesting because although with retreats you also get good samadhi, calmness of the mind, that calm depends on the conditions of the retreat; so, after retreats, my samadhi usually doesn't last long. But after this tudong I noticed the sense of steadiness and inner silence I gained stayed with me, and remained easily accessible.

Sister Anandabodhi : In about the third week, we happened to be walking on an 'A' road. It was narrow and busy, with the cars being driven aggressively. We were on our way for alms at a little village. We found a footpath away from the road which we hoped would take us there. After a while it became overgrown with brambles so we took a turn that went across a hill. Then we got lost and were running out of time to collect alms. As we rounded a hill I suddenly saw a gate. Enthusiastically I rushed towards it, so didn't see a rabbit hole. I fell over and twisted my ankle quite badly. Fortunately Sister Thitamedha is a doctor. She examined it and said it was not too serious. She went to a hedgerow and made a walking stick from a sycamore sapling; this lasted me a few weeks; it was great.

Next day we decided to hitch to the next town. Sister Thitamedha had been keen that we shouldn't take contact addresses of people who might help us; she wanted to survive purely on faith although she agreed to have an address for the middle of our tudong, at Machynlleth. In spite of this, I had taken along one or two other addresses, just in case, and at this point it became clear that this had been a good idea. We were in this town and I had two addresses of Buddhists we could contact, a Zen group and another person.

Sister Thitamedha: So she suddenly produced this little piece of paper saying, "Look, I have two contacts in this town. There are Buddhists here." I replied, "That's wonderful!" I left her sitting on the beach, feeling that it was my duty to go and investigate. So I went to a church and asked some people there: "Can I leave my rucksack?" They said "Yes, yes please." Then I asked: "Could I use your phone?" They were surprised that I didn't even have a phone card (unfortunately we had lost it on our first or second day). They allowed me to make one or two calls, but no more. I phoned the Zen group but they had a retreat on and couldn't take us. I tried phoning the other contact but there was no reply.

I was sitting in this church feeling the peak of despair. I felt so responsible. Anandabodhi was sitting there on the beach and here was I trying to organise the universe, but the universe was not co-operating. It made me weep. I felt that with my medical background I had to do something. I had to organise the situation. Gradually my sense of concern faded away and I realised "Well, I can't do anything. That's it. It's just the way it is." I became very peaceful; I let go of my

demands and expectations and went to a place of total surrender and humility.

I had expected that if somebody was in trouble or had an accident or needed urgent assistance, the universe would rush to help. Then I realised that it's not the case. I suppose that the universe will offer its blessings, but not if you're demanding it.

Having recovered, I went to collect Sister Anandabodhi. We ended up having a lovely pindapat; many people offered us food. It was nice. However, we were still hoping to find our contact who might help us.

Sister Anandabodhi : So we thought, 'Let's just go to the house.' We got a lift to somewhere nearby and then discovered that the address was on a very, very steep hill. You couldn't drive down it, but also I could hardly walk. Anyway, I slowly made my way to the house and we knocked on the door; someone shouted "Go away, I'm busy". So we went away for half an hour, then went back. When we knocked, someone again shouted "*I'm busy!*" So we thought 'This obviously is not somewhere to stay.'

Sister Thitamedha : I felt Sister Anandabodhi needed somewhere indoors because of her ankle. It was seven o'clock by then, so, being nuns on tudong, we would need to leave town fairly soon. Eventually we found a phone, then discovered it wasn't working. Although I was already at peace, for Sister Anandabodhi, this was her peak moment of letting go.

Opposite the phone box a lady playing with her dog had been watching us. I waved to her and said hello. She asked if we wanted to use her phone, and invited us into her house. We went in and she offered us a drink. We made a call and discovered that the person we had been looking for hadn't lived in the town for five years.

Sister Anandabodhi : There was something about that moment: things had crescendoed; we had persisted in trying to control things, thinking, 'This has got to work; it's a bit of



an emergency; we've got to find this person; we've got to find a place to stay.' When we discovered that our contact didn't live in the town, I had this sense of "Ah! So now we can live on faith again...!". It was a relief, actually.

Sister Thitamedha : This lady was so kind to us. After our day of struggle it helped us to meet someone so warm and generous. She said she couldn't put us up for the night. We said it was no problem, but asked if she knew of a field that we could sleep in because it seemed like it would be a good night to stay outdoors. She pointed out somewhere nearby. Her kindness really healed us. It was very, very nice, this simple human kindness. Just a smile, a drink, an invitation into her home and the use of her phone. It made a tremendous difference.

Sister Anandabodhi : We found a beautiful field to sleep in; it didn't rain and we could see the sea and the mountains. It was a lovely spot. Once we had let go of the idea of 'we have got to do something', everything was alright.

Sister Thitamedha : The long pilgrimage helped us more and more to be present with problems and let go of things we didn't actually need. It was helpful for two months to be involved in a situation where there was very little choice, unlike the familiar setting of the monastery where it is easy to find ways to make oneself comfortable.

Sister Anandabodhi : When sleeping outside in our bivi bags, I always felt that we should find the right spot, not just stop anywhere. Therefore we would often try to find a beautiful field with a view of the sea. Unfortunately, the dew would come down at about 8.30 pm (or 9 if we were lucky). This forced us into our bivi bags even though we weren't ready for bed, otherwise everything got wet. Sometimes you could have a little breathing hole open, but if it was very damp you would have to close even that. So, commonly we would be lying there in some exquisite spot and be able to see nothing.... In the morning it would be the same: you couldn't get up because if you did everything got soaked. I tried once

or twice sitting in a raincoat but it didn't work very well. This problem kept recurring.

One day we found a field that seemed perfect. It was near a little road, but you couldn't see us from there. We were sitting behind a rock that had an oak tree growing out of it. There were lots of harebells, which Sister Thitamedha loves because they are common in Russia, where she comes from, but they don't grow very much in this country. It seemed like we had finally found the perfect place. There was no dew, so we could sit as long as we wanted. There was a lovely sunset that turned the hills pink. It was late at night when we finally curled up into our bags. When we woke up there was still no dew, so we could get up immediately. I thought: 'Oh! There *is* a perfect place; there *is* perfection!'

That day there was a downpour and we stood for alms in the rain. Nobody was interested in offering us anything. Eventually some men who worked in a shop that sold beach things took pity on us and bought us a loaf of bread and some cheese. We found a church and had our lunch and a cup of tea. Some women joined us and told us that there was a Buddhist centre in the town and explained where it was. As it was still pouring with rain we thought we might find a place for the night there. So we went to ask. It was an old convent, now owned by a Tibetan Buddhist group. We knocked at the door, soaking wet. A man answered and said "Oh, you are Theravada!" It turned out he had been a Theravadan monk in Thailand many years ago and knew Ajahn Sumedho and had a lot of respect for our Sangha. So he welcomed us in. Everyone resident there was away for the day, so he gave us a room with a bathroom.

While showering I realised that while sleeping in that 'perfect' field, dozens of tiny ticks had attached themselves to me. We were both covered. We spent two hours with tweezers pulling them off. Most of the ticks survived this, and we took them outside. So, the perfect field had not been as perfect as we had thought.

Sister Thitamedha : When we reached the Llyn Peninsula, both of us noticed a sudden change in ambience. It's as if time stops there. People are not in such a hurry. There is a magic about the place.

Sister Anandabodhi : The whole sense of going somewhere, doing something, so evident elsewhere suddenly disappeared.

Sister Thitamedha : We discovered that a pilgrimage route used to pass through there in the Middle Ages. People used to travel through there on their way to Bardsey Island, at the end of the peninsula. So we were participating in an ancient tradition.

Sister Anandabodhi : On Bardsey, it is said, 20,000 saints are buried. In Welsh the island is called Ynys Enlli which means the Island of Difficult Currents. Even though it is close to the mainland, it is difficult to reach. Many pilgrims probably died in attempting the crossing.

Making our way along the Llyn Peninsula we kept coming



across Christian priests, both men and women, who warmly welcomed us, saying that we were “bringing the sacred back to the land” Whether we were Christians or Buddhists didn’t seem to matter. The main point was that we were religious people; whether you called your practice ‘prayer’ or ‘meditation’ was unimportant.

The night before we reached the town of Pwllheli it looked like it might rain again, so we had to find shelter somewhere. Eventually we found a friendly-looking old oak to sleep under. I had a lovely dream that night about Pwllheli, of it being a festive place with young, joyful people wearing the national Welsh dress. When we entered the town the next morning we found the town indeed had a feeling of openness and friendliness with flags flying from the shops. People greeted us, smiling, and asked what we were doing. When we explained, they expressed heart felt appreciation.

Sister Thitamedha : They stopped us on the street and exclaimed, “Oh, the pilgrims are back! The pilgrims are back!” They shook our hands and asked us if we had letters of pilgrimage, because in the past, pilgrims would have a letter signed by the bishop which apparently used to have the silhouette of a shell on it. When they asked about this shell I told them, “Yes, I do have a shell. In my rucksack,” because I did indeed have many shells there.

When we stood for pindapat, people enquired what we were up to. When we explained, within five minutes we were overwhelmed with food. We received so many bags, I warned Anandabodhi that we had better escape. Then a woman running behind us called out, “Oh, please wait! Please wait!” She offered us two bags of buns and bread. We had enough food to keep a monastery going. It was heart-warming.

Somebody on the Llyn Peninsula told us that there were many hermitesses there. When we showed some interest in this, the person explained to us where one of them lived. As usual I said, “We’ll see. If we happen to pass that way, we’ll visit. But if not...” and we took the address. Somehow we happened to travel in that direction. When we saw the chapel we decided to have a look, to take the opportunity to say hello. We found the door and knocked. No one replied, so we thought maybe the hermitess was in deep silence and wasn’t receiving visitors. We waited around a bit when suddenly this woman appeared, greeted us and asked us about ourselves. When I said “Hello” she said, “Oh, you’re from Russia!” I asked her how she knew. She said, “I am a Russian Orthodox nun...” and she invited us to stay. It was a magical place, so we stayed longer than we had expected. We had thought to stay overnight, but it was hard to leave.

Sister Anandabodhi : It was lovely meeting this hermitess. We were excited by each other’s company and we talked about our spiritual paths. Eventually we said “It would be good to sit together.” We sat for about an hour in her front room. There was such a profound depth of silence. It was lovely being with someone with such a deep practice. Again,

the outer form did not seem relevant; only the ability to stay in the present, to enter into the depth of silence. That was very special. We spent two days with her. I thought “Maybe when I am an old lady I can go back and be a hermit on that peninsula.”

Sister Thitamedha : One thing I have found interesting when talking with people is the way in which the ‘self’ arises, the energy of it, not the mental concept of it. I notice with groups of people how everybody wants to speak. When I also want to say something I have noticed a kind of energy arises in my solar plexus, a kind of agitation. This has fascinated me. I realise that this is the arising of ‘I am’. I like to put my attention on the sensation to see what happens next. I notice that the energy stays for a while and then slowly calms down. When it ceases I am left feeling deeply peaceful, blissful even. I think, “How wonderful!” So, whenever I have this sense of wanting to say something and feel the ‘I am’ arising I just hold it gently, let it be. If you do that, you’ll find it takes you to a place of silence. It’s very helpful to practise like this.

Sister Anandabodhi : We reached the cove where the ferry left for Bardsey Island. Somebody had arranged with the ferryman for us to cross. However, there is only one boat a day and we had missed it by an hour. So we waited overnight on the peninsula, a place we found extraordinary; it had an incredible silence; it was very conducive to meditation. Where we slept was just a sheep field but there was something very special about it. We meditated and eventually curled up into our bags for the night. In the morning we discovered that both of us had woken up in the night and had stayed awake for hours in this incredible place. I had never seen the stars so brilliant; the Milky Way was stunning. It was a beautiful, expansive place for meditation. That was our first night waiting for the boat. It was lovely.

The next day the sea currents were so strong that the ferry was cancelled. So we waited another day. The next day we discovered there was no scheduled crossing. So we thought



we'd forget the whole thing and go back up the peninsula and on to Holy Island, another island further north. But this field was such a lovely place to be that we couldn't leave it. So we stayed on, meditating on the hill. That afternoon, clouds started sweeping in from the sea but we remained sitting till the rain began. It became heavier and heavier, but we didn't move. Eventually I told Sister Thitamedha that we had better look for shelter because the rain wasn't going to stop. Though she was reluctant to leave, we realised that if we didn't move we'd be drenched. Half a mile away we found a farm. It had a barn, and we slept there on a small heap of straw. The next day we thought that again the boat wouldn't be going because of the terrible weather, but it did, and we managed to cross.

Bardsey is a tiny island with just six or seven cottages on it. Three couples live there; the other cottages are rented. There is also one little hermitage for Christian hermits; there had been a nun living there for twenty-five years. There was also a little chapel, an oratory, a lovely place for meditation. We were not allowed to use the hermitage but we were allowed to use the little chapel and were given the use of a five-bedroomed retreat centre next door. We meant to stay just one night but the boat didn't go, so we had an extra day. It was a lovely place, this island, very peaceful. At two o'clock the day-visitors would go back so then it was even quieter. There were the ruins of an old abbey nearby and a small graveyard with three Celtic crosses. One of them, a very beautiful, simple cross, had written beneath it: "Respect the 20,000 saints buried near this spot." I found it amazing to be somewhere that so many saints had visited.

Back on the mainland again, someone offered to drive us all the way back along the peninsula and on to Anglesey, a large island in North Wales. She dropped us off on a little lonely road and we spent the night in a field. The next day we walked into town for alms. In Anglesey we felt like we had left Wales, even though it is still Wales, but the land was more cultivated there and money seemed suddenly more important.



Nevertheless, a lot of people approached us and fed us well.

It was a hot day as we left town. We had not walked far when a woman driving in the opposite direction seemed to wave at us, so I waved back. Then I thought 'Maybe she was just adjusting her mirror.' However, she turned the car around, stopped, and when she asked, we told her we were going to Holy Island which, with my limp, would have been a three or four day walk. She said "Get in. I'll drive you," which she did and dropped us off on the mountain there. The first night we stayed in a field. Then we walked a bit further and found a beautiful little cove, a little beach with cliffs around it. We spent time on the beach until people started arriving.

Sister Thitamedha : Then we climbed up onto the cliffs, twenty or thirty metres from the beach, and sat amongst some huge rocks. Beneath us was the bustle of a busy weekend beach scene. But the rocks seemed very quiet, very steady. Both of us found a nice place to sit, Anandabodhi on one rock and me on another. The sense of stillness and silence was so strong, it suffused my whole body. We sat there for hours and hours. We didn't want to move. It is not because I have good samadhi. I think it was the energy of the rocks.

The sun was blazing down. Though I wrapped my scarf over my head, it didn't stop the sun burning its way through; but this didn't disturb me.

Sister Anandabodhi : As we meditated, the beach below us was getting more and more busy. Speedboats were racing around and people were splashing about in the water.

Sister Thitamedha : It felt as if we were looking down on *samsara*; as if we were embracing it but not involved in it, not lost in it.

Sister Anandabodhi : Occasionally we would walk down to the beach with our walking sticks to get drinking water and then walk back up again. We both had sticks by then because Sister Thitamedha's knees were starting to give way. People on the beach would see these robed figures walking down and up, so gradually we became an object of interest for them.

Sister Thitamedha : In the evening we climbed down to the beach because the beach warden had wanted to know where our monastery was. So we gave him our address and invited him to visit. He invited us to return next morning to the beach so he could offer us food. Other people also seemed interested, explaining to us all the types of food they were going to bring. So we said okay, we would return. We would stay the night and come for pindapat in the morning.

Sister Anandabodhi : The next day people offered us dana on the beach and we chanted a blessing. It had been exceptionally busy the day before but people told us, "When you came down, the whole beach became peaceful." We realised that the sight of a *samana* had touched something in them that they were longing for, a peace and simplicity in life, and even on this chaotic and excited beach this could still happen. People kept saying "It is lovely to see you; what a peace there is around you," even though we weren't doing

anything special. We were just walking.

Sister Thitamedha : Many people brought us carrier bags of food, so much that it was impossible to fit into our bowls. The lady who ran the kiosk offered us cups of coffee and chocolate bars. The beach warden had driven especially to meet us even though it was his day off. He brought us many bags of food which we couldn't possibly have eaten, so we asked him to let us accept just a little. Then we chanted a blessing.

Sister Anandabodhi : We stayed for three days on the cliff. The last night it began to rain so we went to stay with two middle-aged women who had met us up there. They were from Cheshire and were staying in their holiday home. They told us about the pressure in modern life to look right, to have the right clothes, the right car, the right everything and how shallow it all was and yet in spite of this, how caught they were in it. It was obviously painful for them. Seeing us with our shaved heads had made them realise the meaninglessness of it all.

In the bedroom they gave us there was a women's fashion magazine. We both read it and felt thoroughly depressed afterwards because its strong message was the need to look right; plastic surgery, whatever it cost, that was what was important. There was no acknowledgement of the reality of ageing and death.

In the middle of this magazine there was an article about Sudan. Somebody had gone to stay in a village there and the article was bringing attention to the poverty and the lack of water and the need for support. What was striking was how joyful those people were. They were very poor and had very basic clothing, but in the photos they were dancing and looked radiant; they looked so joyful. Every other person in the magazine, top models with expensive clothes and hairdos, looked miserable. All of them. It was a strong reflection for us.

Many times on the trip we would say to each other, "We are so grateful not to have to participate in the game of trying to be eternally young and beautiful, but to be at peace with the knowledge that the body ages and it will die and it is not what we are. We had such a sense of: 'Thank you, thank you, that this teaching is still available, that people are still keeping Dhamma alive.'

The whole time we were walking we felt a strong connection with the Sangha here. Every evening we would share blessings with those who had supported the tudong in any way, people in our communities, people who had helped us get prepared, and people we had met along the way, and with all the visible and invisible beings who also had helped us.

So I would like to express my gratitude to everyone here and especially to the sisters, who have been working hard while we've been away. It is very nice to be back. I very much appreciate being part of this Sangha.

The Chapter of Octads

The Atthaka Vagga, the fourth chapter of the Sutta Nipata, is translated here (the first six poems) by Tahn Varado, and dedicated to its previous translators including K.R. Norman, E.M. Hare, Ven.H. Saddhatissa, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, and Paññobhaso Bhikkhu and also to the editors of the Pali Text Society Pali-English Dictionary, T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede.

1: Discourse on Sensual Pleasure

If a person longing for sensual pleasure achieves it,
He's delighted, yes,
The mortal who gets what he wants.
But that person, longing, desiring,
If his pleasures diminish,
He suffers as if pierced with an arrow.

Whoever mindfully avoids sensual pleasures
As he might, with his foot, the head of a snake,
Leaves behind attachments in the world.

A man who is greedy for fields, property, gold,
Cattle, horses, servants, men, women, relatives,
And many sensual pleasures
Is over powered by what is weak
And is crushed by troubles.

Sorrow invades him like water into a leaky boat.
So a person being always mindful should avoid the objects of desire.

Having abandoned them
He will cross over the flood
Like one who, having bailed out a boat,
Would reach the further shore.

2: Discourse on the 'Cave'

A person embedded in the cave (of sensual reminiscence),
Where many things remain deeply hidden,
Shrouded in bewilderment,
Is far from true seclusion.
The pleasures of the world are not easily forsaken.

Those bound by desire,
In bondage to the pleasure of existence,
Are not easily released;
For there's no freedom when involved with another.

Longing for what's over or for what's to come,
Yearning for pleasures in the present
And pleasures of the past,
Those who are greedy for pleasure,
Hunting for it, deranged, selfish,
Are bent on what is morally wrong.
When drawn into difficulty, they lament:
"What will become of us at death?"

So, people should train themselves.
 Whatever one knows to be wrong,
 Do not for its sake engage in misconduct,
 For the wise say that life is short.

I see people floundering,
 Obsessed with existence;
 Despicable characters wailing in the face of death
 With their craving for existence unallayed.
 Look at them,
 Floundering amidst their cherished possessions
 Like fish in a dwindling stream.

Having watched this,
 You should live without feelings of ownership.
 You should free yourself of attachment to life.
 You should subdue desire for earthly or heavenly rebirth.
 You should understand sense contact.

A wise person is free of greed.
 He does nothing for which he would blame himself.
 He is not soiled by what he sees or hears.

Comprehending the nature of perception,
 Not soiled by possessiveness,
 A sage crosses the flood.
 With the arrow of craving removed,
 Living diligently,
 He longs for neither this world or the next.

3: Discourse on Evil

Those corrupted at heart dispute,
 And those whose hearts are set on truth also dispute.
 But a sage does not enter a dispute that's arisen.
 Therefore he is nowhere involved in hostility.

How could someone led by impulse,
 Bent on pleasure,
 Being someone who as he sees things, likewise speaks,
 Overcome the very views which he has himself
 conceived?

Whoever unasked,
 Boasts to others of his virtuous conduct and religious
 practices,
 Speaking of himself of his own accord,
 Is ignoble, say the Good.

But a monk who is calm, completely peaceful,
 Who does not boast of his precepts, "I am like this,"
 Being unconceited about anything in the world,
 Is noble, say the Good.

When someone, seeing a benefit for himself,
 Conceives, formulates and honours religious principles
 that are impure,
 Then his peace relies on something unstable.
 Clinging to views is not easily overcome.

If a man grasps a view from amongst whatever Dhamma
 he investigates,
 He therefore embraces or rejects Dhamma
 From one or other clung-to viewpoint.

One who is pure has no preconceived view about anything
 in the world.
 Having abandoned delusion and pride, he remains aloof.
 Therefore by what view would he go?

One who is attached argues over religious teachings.
 But how, and about what, can you argue with one who is
 aloof?
 There is nothing that he either takes up or throws off.
 He is indeed free of every view in the world.

4: Discourse on the Pure

"I see what is pure, ultimate, freedom from sickness.
 It is by means of seeing that a person becomes pure."
 Perceiving in this way,
 Believing that this view is supreme,
 A 'seer of purity' reverts to knowledge.

If it is by means of seeing that a person becomes pure,
 If he abandons dukkha by having knowledge,
 Then a person with a basis for attachment
 Is purified by adding something further.
 The view of one who asserts purity in this way is thus
 belied.

No Brahman says that purity comes from adding
 something further,
 Either what is seen, heard or cognised,
 Or precepts or practices.
 A Brahman is untainted by good and bad kamma.
 Rejecting what he has taken up, he adds nothing further.

Those following craving,
 Abandoning what they had previously in order to grab
 something else,
 Do not cross over attachment.
 They release and catch hold like a monkey releasing one
 branch in order to seize another.

A person who is bound to ideas,
 In undertaking religious observances goes high and low.

But one of great wisdom,
 One who has penetrated Dhamma,
 Does not go high and low.
 He is peaceful towards everything whether seen, heard or cognised.
 He sees things as they are and conducts himself openly.
 How could anyone have any doubts about him?

Ones like him neither formulate opinions nor hold them in
 reverence.
 They do not proclaim of anything, "This is final purity."
 Having untied the knot of grasping with which they are bound
 They do not hope for anything in the world.

The Brahman has gone beyond conventional boundaries.
 He has grasped nothing either seen or known.
 He is not impassioned by passion;
 He is not impassioned by dispassion.
 He is attached to nothing either in this world or the next.

5: Discourse on the Supreme

If a person maintains that of opinions, his is the best,
 Holding it as the highest in the world,
 And says that all other views are inferior,
 Then he has not gone beyond disputes.

When a person sees an advantage for himself
 In what is seen, heard, or cognised, or in precepts and
 practices,
 He grasps such things, regarding everything else as
 inferior.

The Good call that thing a fetter relying upon which one
 regards others as inferior.
 Therefore a monk should not rely on what is seen, heard,
 or cognised,
 Nor on precepts or practices;

He should not come to an opinion about himself
 Based either upon his knowledge
 Or upon his precepts and practices.
 He should neither present himself as an equal
 Nor suppose that he is either inferior or superior.

Abandoning what he has taken up,
 Free of any basis of attachment,
 He does not rely even upon knowledge.
 Amongst those in dispute he does not take sides.
 He does not revert to any grasping of opinions
 whatsoever.

One who has no aspiration for any form of existence
 Either in this world or the world beyond,
 Having investigated religious teachings, has no attachment
 to them.

Whoever does not conceive the slightest conception
 About what is seen, heard or cognised,
 This Brahman who has grasped no view,
 How could anyone have any doubts about him?
 He does not conjecture,
 Follow others' opinions,
 Or hold on even to Dhamma.
 He is a Brahman, not led astray by precepts and practices.
 Gone to the further shore, he does not return.

6: Discourse on Old Age

Short indeed is this life;
 You die within a hundred years.
 Indeed, if you live longer than that
 You surely die of decrepitude.

People grieve for what they cherish;

But nothing is possessed forever.
 Having seen that separation does indeed happen,
 One should not lead the household life.

At death, that which a person supposes to be "mine" is
 abandoned.
 Realising this, my wise disciples should not be inclined to
 possessiveness.

Just as on awakening, a man does not see what he met in a
 dream,
 Likewise, he does not see loved ones who have passed
 away.

When they were alive,
 People called by this name or that were both seen and
 heard;
 But when dead, only their names live on to be uttered.

Those greedy for loveable things
 Do not put away grief, lamentation and selfishness.
 Looking for safety,
 Sages abandon possessions and lead the homeless life.

For a monk living withdrawn,
 Resorting to a secluded dwelling,
 They say that it is fitting for him to not exhibit himself in
 the world.

The sage is not attached under any circumstances.
 He does not cultivate anything either liked or disliked.
 Lamentation and selfishness do not stain him,
 As water does not stain a lotus leaf.

Just as a waterdrop does not stain a lotus leaf or a red lily,
 So the sage is not stained by what is seen, heard or cognised.
 He does not suppose that he is purified by what is seen,
 heard or cognised.
 He does not expect to be purified by adding
 something further,
 Which, indeed, would neither excite nor repel him.



NOTICEBOARD

AMARAVATI NOTICES

Siladhara Ordination

Anagarika Louise will receive the Going Forth, *pabbajja*, on Tuesday 30 May 2006 at 1.30 pm. Everyone is invited to attend the occasion .

Wesak Celebration at Amaravati

Sunday 14 May. Rice pindapat at 11.15am. Dhamma talk after noon.

Introduction to Meditation

Every Saturday, 2pm till 4pm in the Bodhinyana Hall. All welcome. No booking necessary.

Tape Library: improved facility

Our new tape library is equipped with MP3-players, a computer, and a CD duplicator.

Family Events

- Rainbow weekend: April 28-May 1
- Family Weekend: June 23-25
- Family Summer Camp: August 19-27
- Young Persons Retreat: Nov 24-26
- Family Camp Over 18's Activity Weekend: December 15-17 (help to organise this is needed, please) Information and registration: <http://www.family.amaravati.org>

Amaravati Lay Events

- Days of Practice: May 13; Aug 12; Oct 28; Dec 2. No need to book. Bring food to share.
 - Retreats: July 14-16; Sep15-19; Nov 10-12. Booking essential.
- Events take place in the Amaravati Retreat Centre.
Information: www.buddhacommunity.org or tel 01442 865519

CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

From the Cittaviveka Maintenance Committee:

We are looking for somebody to manage the day-to-day maintenance of the properties, probably two days a week. Either a live-in position with a small stipend, or someone living locally who receives remuneration. For details call Sam Ford on 01730 817191

Wesak Vigil: May 12 starting 7.30pm

Wesak Celebrations: May 14.

Lay Forums: April 23, June 4, July 2 at 2pm in the Reception Room. Contact Anna Barnard on (01903) 782732

Forest Days: April 30, May 28, July 9 at 1.30pm. Meet by the workshop. For overnight accommodation, write to the Guest Monk/Nun.

Garden Days: May 7, June 18 at 1.30pm. For over night accommodation, write to the Guest Monk/Nun.

RATANAGIRI NOTICES

Wesak Celebration: May 14, starting at 10am. All welcome.

Retreat House Building Project:

To help build the Harnham Retreat House, short or long term, please contact the monastery at retreathouse@ratana-giri.org.uk or phone 01661 881612. We are particularly interested in people with carpentry and general building skills.

Summer Retreat: Aug 12-20 at Harnham led by Ajahn Abhinando. Information and booking: www.ratanagiri.org.uk or phone Nick Pearce on 01573 420 701.

HARTRIDGE NOTICES

Saturday Meditation Workshops: April 22 & May 27

GENERAL NOTICES

Amaravati Cassettes: an appreciation

For twenty years Lynne and Barrie at Amaravati Cassettes have supported the Sangha by distributing tapes of Dhamma talks around the world, and for this many people have been very appreciative. However, in response to recent developments in technology this service has now come to an end. Our wish is that all the good energy generated by Amaravati Cassettes will continue to flow and that digitalization will bring even greater benefit to those seeking Dhamma. In the next issue of Forest Sangha Newsletter we aim to present an article that discusses these recent developments and gives more details of what we hope for.

Dhamma Books and Dhamma CDs

River Trading UK Ltd is an on-line trading enterprise based in Scotland that sells a large range of meditation aids. It also distributes, for free, our Dhamma books and Dhamma recordings (MP3 and Audio CD). Profits are stewarded by the trustees of Aruna Ratanagiri. Website: www.dhammathreads.org.

Retreats with the Sangha at Sunyata Centre, Ireland

May 5-7, Sister Thaniya: *Heartfelt Awareness, Wisdom and Compassion*. This monastic-style retreat will observe noble silence and the eight precepts. There will also be opportunities for Q & A and discussion on practice. Cost E160. www.sunyatacentre.com info@sunyatacentre.com

Christian/Buddhist Retreat:

October 6-8: *Meditation and Mindfulness* led by Sister Anandabodhi, Sister Santacitta and Sister Lucy, a Turvey Benedictine nun. Cost £85. For other Christian/Buddhist Retreats at Turvey Abbey please see their website at www.turveyabbey.org.uk/

Sangha Walks with Nick Scott

Laymen with reasonable fitness and having some experience in meditation are invited to accompany two monks on walks in Europe, and to share the costs.

May 9-16: White Mountains of Crete
June 29-July 7: Julian Alps of Slovenia
Contact: nickscott@amaravati.org

Rude Awakenings

Wisdom Publications has just published in America the account by Ajahn Sucitto and Nick Scott of their six-month pilgrimage in 1990 during which they slept out at night, survived on almsfood, and walked one thousand miles in the same parts of India in which the Buddha also lived and travelled. The book, *Rude Awakenings*, will probably be published in the UK later this year.

NEWSLETTER

This issue's contributors:

Sister Anandabodhi was ordained in 1994 and lives at Amaravati. Sister Thitamedha was ordained in 1996 and lives at Cittaviveka. Tahn Varado was ordained in 1988 and lives at Amaravati.

This issue's photographs:

Page 2: The well at St. Non's
Page 3: Pembrokeshire, Wales
Page 4: The chapel, Bardsey Island
Page 5: Pwllheli town centre
Page 6: Pembrokeshire, Wales
Page 12: Bardsey Island

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to everyone who offered photos for this issue, some of which were published: John Hawkins (p4)
Martyn Croydon (p5)
Susan Jackson (pp 2,3,6)
Sister Elizabeth (Williams) (p12)

Lay Groups Web-Addresses

If coordinators of our associated lay groups would like to advertise their web-addresses, they may send them to me. Ed.

Forest Sangha Newsletter Online

The current and many previous issues of the Forest Sangha Newsletter are now available to view or download from www.fsnewsletter.amaravati.org or by following the link from www.amaravati.org. For printing purposes, PDF versions are recommended.

Subscription and Address Changes

Subscription and address changes for hard copies and soft copies of the newsletter can be made online at www.fsnewsletter.amaravati.org.

Contact for newsletter business:
editor @ amaravati.org

ROCANA VIHARA PROJECT



On 22nd June 1979 the monks arrived at Chithurst House, and ‘Cittaviveka Monastery’ was established. Soon thereafter, with the blessing of Luang Por Chah, women joined the monastic community. The nuns’ residence, Aloka Cottage, a ten minute walk from the main house, was purchased in 1980.

Recently, the property beside Aloka Cottage became available. Given its location and the nuns’ need for more accommodation, the English Sangha Trust bought it, naming the purchase the Rocana Vihara Project. Part of this Project is also to build a shrine room for the nuns as their existing shrine room is small and structurally unsound.



Luang Por Sumedho:

“Until now the nuns have been very dependent on the main house; the new cottage will allow them more separation. For example, they will be able to have their own office there. In this way, though living in the same monastery, they will be less dependent on the house — and that is better, both for the nuns and the monks. From my position the new cottage seems a very welcome addition. If you can make

the situation better for the nuns at Cittaviveka, I think ‘Why not?’ It makes sense, if possible, to improve it.



Sister Thaniya:

“The Rocana Vihara got off to an auspicious start. On the 3rd of January lay friends offered dana there to the whole community – quite a feat, as we had gained access just that morning. During that day many folk came to see the place, and many joined our ‘scrubbing party’. As the winter retreat was about to begin we did a ‘good enough’ move; we will sort out some of the logistics in spring. The cottage feels good

to be in: it quickly had the sense of being part of the monastery. Given the pressure on Aloka and the shared resources at the main house the sisters are grateful to have more room and to now have reasonable accommodation to offer our guests. The advent of Rocana Vihara meant more women could benefit from the winter retreat here.

There have been many spontaneous and heart-warming happenings in support: blessings keep pouring in the door. The generosity of heart that has manifested in response to the news of the Project is something for the community here to remember: may it fuel our practice.”

Donations:

Financial donations can be made to ‘The English Sangha Trust’ at either Amaravati or Cittaviveka. For further information, contact Medhina: Tel: (01273) 483006 or email rocanaproject@amaravati.org.

Amaravati Retreats



2006 RETREATS SCHEDULE:

		Waiting list places only	
		men	women
April 14-16	Sister Santacitta	Weekend	WL
April 21-25	Ajahn Thanasanti	5 Days	WL WL
May 5-7	Ajahn Vajiro	Weekend	WL WL
May 18-28	Ajahn Sumedho	10 Days	WL WL
June 3-16	Ajahn Vimalo	14 Days	WL
June 30-July 9	Ajahn Sundara	10 Days	WL
July 21-23	Ajahn Ratanawanno##	Thai Weekend	
August 4-8	Sister Metta	5 Days	WL
September 1-10	Ajahn Sumedho	10 Days	WL WL
September 21-24	Ajahn Upekkha	Weekend	WL
October 6-15	Ajahn Candasiri	10 Days	WL
October 20-22		Work Weekend	
November 3-5	Ajahn Nyanarato	Weekend	
November 17-19	Ajahn Natthiko	Weekend	
December 8-10	Ajahn Thaniya	Weekend	
December 27 – 1.1.07	Ajahn Nyanarato	6 Days	WL WL

##: This retreat is for Thai speakers only.

The waiting lists for Ajahn Sumedho’s retreats are closed.

See website for latest details.

General Guidelines

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is best to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat. Due to demand, people may join only three retreats a year. The Retreat Centre is dependent on donations alone to meet its running costs.

Booking Procedure

Bookings can only be made with a booking form. Bookings cannot be made by email or telephone. If you want to know whether you have secured a place on a retreat or are on the waiting list, please send us either a stamped addressed envelope or your email address.

Start and Finish Times

Registration is from 4pm to 7pm on the first day of the retreat. The orientation talk is at 7.15pm. Weekend retreats end at 4pm. Other retreats end at lunchtime.

Work Weekend

Participants gather on Friday evening. Work begins on Saturday morning. Part-time attendance is also welcomed. Please email or write in for an application form.

Contact Information:

Tel :01442 843 239
 Email: retreats@amaravati.org
 Website: http://www.amaravati.org

EUROPEAN MONASTERIES

BRITAIN

◆ **Amaravati Monastery**
 St Margaret's, Great Gaddesden,
 Hemel Hempstead,
 Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ
 Tel: (01442) 84-2455 (Office)
 84-3239 (Retreat Info.)
 Fax: (01442) 84-3721
[http:// www.amaravati.org](http://www.amaravati.org)
 Stewards: English Sangha Trust, Amaravati

◆ **Cittaviveka**
 Chithurst Buddhist Monastery
 Chithurst, Petersfield,
 Hampshire GU31 5EU
 Tel: (01730) 81-4986
 Fax: (01730) 81-7334
 Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
 Cittaviveka

◆ **Aruna Ratanagiri**
 Harnham Buddhist Monastery
 Harnham, Belsay,
 Northumberland NE20 OHF
 Tel: (01661) 88-1612
 Fax: (01661) 88-1019
<http://www.ratanagiri.org.uk>
 Email: community@ratanagiri.org.uk
 Stewards: Magga Bhavaka Trust

◆ **Hartridge Buddhist Monastery**
 Upottery, Honiton,
 Devon EX14 9QE
 Tel: (01404) 89-1251
 Fax: (01404) 890023
 Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust

ITALY

◆ **Santacittarama**
 Località Brulla,
 02030 Frasso Sabino (Reiti)
 Tel: (+39) 0765 872 186
 Fax: (+39) 06 233 238 629
<http://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
<http://www.dhammapala.org>
 Stewards: Dhammapala 31921-201-5



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	☉ FULL	☽ HALF	● NEW
APRIL	6 (Thu)	13(Thu)	21 (Fri)	27(Thu)
MAY	5(Fri)	12(Fri)☺	20 (Sat)	27 (Sat)
JUNE	4 (Sun)	11 (Sun)	19(Mon)	25 (Sun)
JULY	3(Mon)	10 (Mon)☼	18 (Tue)	25 (Tue)

☺ Vesak
 ☼ Asalha (Vassa begins 11th July)

Teaching , Study & Practice Venues

Bath	Bill & Carol Huxley	(01225) 314 500
Bedford	David Stubbs	(01234) 720 892
Berkshire	Anthea West	(0118) 979 8101
Brighton	Nimmala	(01273) 723 378
Cambridge	Dan Jones	(01223) 246 257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	(01227) 463 342
Carlisle	Jean Nelson	(01228) 543491
Co. Clare-Ireland	Sunyata Centre	(00353) 61 367 073
Cork, Ireland	Paddy Boyle	(00353) 21 4622 964
Dublin	Rupert Westrup	(01) 280 2832
	(Dial:0041 from the UK)	
Edinburgh	Neil Howell	(0131) 226 5044
Harlow	Pamutto	(01279) 724330
Hemel Hempstead	Bodhinyana Group	Chris Ward
Glasgow	James Scott	(0141) 637 9731
Kendal Fellside Centre, Low Fellside	Sumedha	(01539) 729 793
Leeds Area	Daniela Loeb	(0113) 279 1375
	Anne Grimshaw	(01274) 691 447
	Ursula Haekel	(0151) 4276668
Liverpool	London NW5	Caroline Randall
London Hampstead 1 Hillside(Room 6)	Entrance in Highgate Road	Ann Booth
London Buddhist Society 58 Eccleston Square	London SW1(Victoria)	(020) 7834 5858
London-Notting Hill	Jeffery Craig	(0207) 221 9330
Leigh-on-sea	Rob Howell	(01702) 482 134
Machynlleth-Mid Wales	Angela Llewellyn	(01650) 511350
Midhurst	Barry Durrant	(01730) 821 479
	Viv Bell	(01730) 812 362
Newcastle-on-Tyne	Andy Hunt	(0191) 478 2726
Newent-Gloucs	Email: john.teire@virgin.net	John Teire
Norwich	Ian Thompson	(01603) 629129
Pembrokeshire - S Wales	Peter & Barbara (Subhdra)	Jackson
Penzance	Lee	(01736) 762 135
Portsmouth	Medhavi	(02392)732 280
Redruth	Vanessa	(01209) 214 031
Sheffield	Email: greg.bradshaw@btclick.com	Greg Bradshaw
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati)	(01305) 786 821
Southampton	Ivor Minard	(023) 8089 4890
Steyning-Sussex	Jayanti	(01903) 812 130
Stroud	John Groves	(07967) 777 742
Surrey-Woking	Rocana	(01483) 761 398
Teeside	John Doyle	(01642)587 274
Totnes	Jerry	(01803) 840 199

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