Breaking the Circle of Samsara

(This article is adapted from a talk given on June 26 on the occasion of the installation of the new Buddha image at Abhayagiri.)

We’ve gathered together tonight in this place of solitude and nature to establish an understanding in the Buddha’s teachings. These teachings are based on the natural order of things. While we sit here in this natural place, we may not find it completely convenient or comfortable. We may find some things coarse and some things refined, some things agreeable, others disagreeable. By studying our reactions to nature, we can understand how to live in a way that leads to happiness and freedom.

In order to establish a sense of peace and independence, we first look at the body. We step back and acknowledge that the body is a part of nature. In seeing the body like this, we are able to disentangle ourselves from the feeling of this is me, this is who I am, this is myself, and this is others. When we’re able to step back like this, we see in accordance with Truth and in accordance with the characteristics common to nature: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. We see how all things arise in the beginning, are established in the middle, and dissolve in the end. We see the Dhamma of the dhammas, or the natural way of things. Seeing in this way helps us to step back from the moods, impressions and feelings that lead to that which is unskillful and unwholesome and that which creates a sense of suffering in the heart.

While material things are the coarser qualities of life, the mental qualities are the more refined aspects of our being. The mental qualities don’t have any characteristics like white or black, dark or light; they’re immaterial. But even though they

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T he last few months have been characterized by many noble people coming together—a number of older ajahn visited, bhikkhus returned from travels, and the lay community congregated for work and religious events.

Tan Sudanto and Tan Karunadhammo returned from their travels in late April. Tan Sudanto spent the winter at Birken Monastery in British Columbia. He deeply appreciated the silence of the snowy atmosphere, the practical setup of the main house area, and the solitude that a new and remote monastery offers.

Tan Karunadhammo spent ten days with Ajahn Amaro at a retreat at the Insight Meditation Society before returning to Abhayagiri. Tan Karunadhammo’s travels included stays at Bodhiyanarama Monastery in New Zealand, Ajahn Kalyano’s new monastery in Melbourne, Australia, and Bhavana Society in West Virginia.

The community said goodbye to Tan Dhammado, who is in residence at Birken Monastery until November.

Four Spirit Rock teachers came to spend May 18–19 at the monastery as a part of Jack Kornfield’s teacher training program. Leigh Brasington, Noah Levine, Diana Winston and Trudy Goodman studied more about the schedule and the styles of monastic practice. Trudy, who had never been to the monastery, was surprised and impressed with the kutis deep in the forest, which provide physical seclusion and paths for walking meditation.

Ajahn Sundara visited us briefly in May and, unfortunately, soon after, she had a minor heart attack and had to cancel several teaching events. The Abhayagiri community and the lay community abroad sent many good wishes to her, and she was well cared for by friend Ronnab Katabanick. Ajahn Sundara is now back in England taking it easy and recovering.

Near the end of May the level of activity stepped up a few notches. The new Buddha image arrived at the monastery, and simultaneously work began on a substantial expansion to the water system. On the positive side, these projects helped to develop camaraderie and giving.

Ajahn Jumnian, after giving teachings at Spirit Rock (see below), came to Abhayagiri for a few days and helped the community with some very bright energy and talk on Dhamma. Something unusual about Ajahn Jumnian is that he wears a huge amount of weight on him in order to contem- plate unpleasant feeling (66 pounds at present, reduced from the 150 pounds he wore until the age of 60). To accomplish this, he wears three monk’s upper garments, each covered with pockets stuffed full of amulets, tools and other heavy items.

Luang Por Liam, Ajahn Jundee, Ajahn Nanadhammo and Ajahn Utain arrived from Thailand on June 22 to spend time at Abhayagiri and to help lead the ceremonies surrounding the new Buddha image on the weekend of June 26–27. Ajahn Punnadhammo also arrived a couple of days later, and Tan Chao Khanh Maha Prasert came from Wat Buddhanusorn in nearby Fremont to participate in the ceremony. Luang Por Liam has been ordained for 43 years and is the abbot of Wat Nong Pah Pong. Luang Por is the spiritual head of over 200 Ajahn Chah branch monasteries in Thailand. Ajahn Jundee runs a monastery outside of Bangkok and has been ordained for 28 years. Ajahn Nanadhammo is the abbot of Wat Nanachat, the international forest monastery in Thailand, and has been ordained for 24 years.

About 200 people arrived on June 26 to participate in the commemoration of the new Buddha image. The ceremonies began at 7:30 p.m. with chanting and meditation on the eight-sided ordination platform up in the forest. Later in the evening Luang Por Liam gave a teaching on the naturalness of the Dhamma (see article on page 1), with Ajahn Pasanno translating into English. Everyone then had the chance to sit until midnight in the chilly mountain wind, and visitors camped all over the monastery.

The next morning everyone gathered again at the platform for the installation of relics into the back of the Buddha. For those who don’t know, relics are crystallized remains of the cremated body of either the Buddha or fully enlightened disciples who came afterwards. The coming together of many relics into one Buddha image is very auspicious. Everyone then gathered for the meal offering, and the final ceremonies included a formal offering of robe cloth to Luang Por Liam. The Abhayagiri monastic community would like to express tremendous gratitude to everyone who attended the ceremonies and helped out!

On July 2, the visiting elders and a group from the monastery left for a road trip and headed up towards Canada, with many stops along the way (see article on page 12).
In early July, Ajahn Pasanno left for ten days to attend the ceremonies surrounding the 25th anniversary of Cittaviveka Monastery in Chithurst, England. Ajahn met up with many familiar faces from the Sangha abroad, including Ajahn Sucitto, who just returned from a successful pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash in Tibet.

Darren Noy arrived on July 19 and has taken anagarika vows for 10 months. Darren is a doctoral student at the U.C. Berkeley department of sociology, and has decided to take one year off to practice at the monastery.

Adam Kane has left the anagarika training in order to go back into the world and explore some other avenues of practice. Adam has selflessly served the community for a year and a half and will be dearly missed.

Ajahn Amaro’s pilgrimage in India is well underway. He is spending the Vassa near Jetavana Grove, where the Buddha lived and taught for over 20 rains retreats. The only word we’ve heard from Ajahn Amaro is a small, dusty postcard wishing everyone well.

**DEVELOPMENT**

The new Buddha image arrived from Thailand on May 25, along with 9,000 pounds of books and gifts. The large semi-truck was unable to make it up the last hill before the Dhamma Hall clearing, but fortunately another truck was able to help pull the semi-truck up the hill. The rest of the day was spent unloading the truck and getting the Buddha image into place. The Buddha image was lifted onto the shrine housing using a forklift with a retractable arm.

As the summer has progressed, bhikkhus and laypeople have had a chance to practice a rare kind of giving—that of building the monastery and helping to establish a beautiful and practical place for the Sangha to dwell. In late May, work began on a water system expansion project. In brief, the new water system included installing a solar-powered pump into a well on the ridge-top; installing fire hydrants in two locations; and installing a water tank above some high-elevation kutis. Local people were hired to do trenching and labor. Tan Naniko managed the project and helped with the plumbing.

There are plans to build four small meditation platforms on the Casa Serena land, but due to time constraints and a lack of human resources, it is unsure whether they will come to completion this year.

The building committee is in the process of doing studies and plans for the future cloister building. Once the cloister building and the new duplex are built, phase one of the building process will be complete. It is unsure whether the cloister building will be built next year.

**TEACHINGS**

After the meal Luang Por gave a talk in Thai while Ajahn Nanadhammo gave a talk and answered questions for the English-speaking crowd. There was a lovely atmosphere of community, gratitude and goodwill permeating the space. It was truly heartening to meet so many sincere Dhamma practitioners, all of whom were so gracious and welcoming. That evening there was a special blessing and Dhamma talk at Ladawan’s home with a small group of friends. Although Luang Por’s talk went untranslated, a message of peace and tranquility was clearly conveyed.

The following morning, loaded up with piles of food offered by a number of generous Thai supporters, we drove up to Anacontes through rain showers and boarded the ferry to Vancouver Island. The ferry ride was spectacular—the rain clouds lifted, leaving bright blue sky, sparkling water, intriguing inlets and wooded islands. Luang Por had a big smile on his face as he strolled around on the deck, clicking off another roll of film. After a sumptuous picnic in a park we drove to Butchart Gardens and took in the magnificent sights of thousands of blooming flowers and exquisitely designed gardens. The only drawback was that it was very crowded, making it difficult for the monks to avoid being jostled around.

Another ferry ride took us to the mainland and a short drive to the home of Lili Kitaphanich in Vancouver. Again, it was lovely to observe how all were welcomed and invited in by Lili, a smile on her face and hands in anjali. As with all the places we visited, we were greeted with kindness, generosity and gracious hospitality.

The next day, after a beautiful meal offering by Lili and others, we were taken out for some sightseeing. First stop was Stanley Park and the Aquarium. Here we saw many fabulous creatures, with the Beluga whales and their ghostly, eerie smiles being the highlight. The next stop was the Capilano Suspension Bridge, which is several hundred feet long and just as many feet above a coastal stream. We also had a chance to walk along the nearby hiking trail.

The next morning we all met at Friends of the Dhamma Center for the meal. The monks chanted a blessing chant for the center, and, after a few more photos, we headed off for a little sightseeing in the Columbia Gorge. We walked up a path to a lovely waterfall and took another excursion to Larch Mountain, where one can see five volcanoes and a sweeping view of the Columbia Gorge. It was a perfect afternoon, and, judging by the number of photos taken, inspirational to all.

Leaving our Portland friends behind we travelled north to Seattle, arriving at Ladawan and Hiran Kong-karat’s home in time for tea and a well-deserved rest. It was lovely to see Ladawan come out of the house, smile on her face and hands in anjali, to welcome all and invite us into her home. Another mental note was made. The next morning we drove over to Wat Atamayataram for the meal. The community of several monks and many laypeople had done a beautiful job setting up an outdoor eating platform for the monks. At least 50 people showed up, bringing loads of food, flowers, film and devotion. With each new situation we found endless opportunities to simply observe and follow and were even beginning to ease into that sense of uncertainty.
It is a great pleasure and honor to visit Abhayagiri Monastery after having lived with Ajahn Pasanno as a very young monk in Thailand many years ago. He kindly invited me to take part in this Buddharaupasana dedication ceremony. When we were chanting a moment ago, I noticed that the fan with the logo of Abhayagiri shows the Buddha’s hand holding bodhi leaves. This image comes from the “Handful of Leaves Sutta” that the Buddha gave when he was living in a forest. He picked up a handful of leaves and then gave a discourse, saying to the bhikkhus, “What are greater, the leaves in this forest or the leaves in my hand?” The monks replied, “The leaves in the forest are great and numerous. The leaves in your hand, venerable sir, are few.” The Buddha said that like the leaves in the forest, those things he had realized and understood on the night of his enlightenment were invaluable and innumerable. Yet what he taught beings in the world was limited—like the leaves in the hand—to that which can obtain release from suffering. He taught the Four Noble Truths: unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering, and pain; their cause; the result of this release from suffering, nibbana; and the path to the ending of suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path. That handful of leaves, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, is the symbol of Abhayagiri. And the Buddha image we are installing this weekend at Abhayagiri represents the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, in which the Buddha actually first taught those Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Many people ask me how the form of this image came about and the meaning of the hand mudra. It’s a complex mudra posture. The Buddha has the thumb and forefinger of one hand formed in a circle, with the middle and small fingers pointed out. He holds the other hand with his thumb and forefinger in another circle. I don’t know if this is the meaning the artist intended, but here is how I’ve interpreted it: the circle of the left hand symbolizes the Buddha’s teaching of the Four Noble Truths. The First Truth is suffering and it has a cause: craving. When there’s suffering produced by craving, that reinforces suffering, which creates birth, old age, sickness and death. That forms a circle, doesn’t it, a circle of samsara? There is only one way to release from that circle of craving, that circle of suffering, that circle of life and death. That is nibbana, or enlightenment. Enlightenment is sustained and maintained by another circle, the Dhammacakra, the Wheel of Dhamma, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path. This is represented by the right hand. When we maintain the Eightfold Path in a continuous circle, it will lead to nibbana and break the circle of old age, sickness and death—the circle of samsara.

When we see a Buddha image, it’s something for all of us to reflect on and consider. This image is based on an ancient image found in Sarnath, India. Its old Indian style from the Gupta Period doesn’t belong to any of today’s ethnic traditions; it brings us back to our

Compared to our more Westernized manner of attending to monastics, the Thai style seemed so formal, awkward and slightly intimidating. But out of gratitude for the lovely teachings and the inspiring example of the kruba ajahns, we felt blessed to be along and wanted to attend as respectfully and appropriately as possible, albeit a bit clumsy next to the grace of the Thais.

In a country where one is born and raised with the notion of dana and of offering food to monks, dining in a restaurant is a very uncommon experience for the monks; while traveling in Thailand the monks simply take their bowls and walk alms round and will inevitably receive some offering. “What should we order? How much should we get? We must order quickly so that they have sufficient time to eat.” Then we had to be certain that each dish was properly offered—all done with some semblance of calm!

When the monks were finished, they shared their food with us and calmly waited until we were finished. Throughout the trip there was an acute awareness that we were also being looked after, in a very subtle way. And so, despite our somewhat fumbling manners, we managed to get the meal offered and eaten before the noon hour.

We drove by lovely sections of the Trinity River, dotted here and there with colorful rafts and kayaks. We passed by a few snowy peaks of the Trinity Alps, which was the first view of snow for Ajahn Utan. Along the way the question arose as to whether we should stop to offer something cold to drink. We knew that the kruba ajahns would leave something like that up to us. It was a long drive and we still had a couple of hours of driving left, so we made the decision to stop. Hmmmm. Juice or sodas? Fortunately, the little store was limited, so option paralysis couldn’t stir too many doubts up for us.

Late in the afternoon we arrived at Shasta Abbey, our destination for the first night. After settling in we took a tour of the grounds and had a cup of tea with the abbot, Rev. Master Eko, and a few other monks. Luang Por was invited to give a talk, which he readily agreed to. The whole community, including lay guests, was invited. The talk took place in the beautiful Ceremony Hall, and, as Luang Por climbed up into the tall and imposing Dhamma seat, he said that it was obviously made for Westerners, which drew a laugh and put everyone at ease. Ajahn Nanadhammo skillfully translated Luang Por’s talk, in which he drew connections between the different traditions, acknowledging the sincerity of the community and the common aspiration they shared. It was clear that all were gratefully moved by Luang Por’s sincerity, simplicity and humility.

In the morning we participated in the morning service, which was a first for all of the forest monks. Over a cup of tea, the monks from both traditions shared their common experiences of and ideas for sustaining a sense of community among branch monasteries scattered worldwide. After a round of group photos, we headed north on Interstate 5. On a tip from somebody staying at Shasta Abbey, we stopped in Grants Pass (the most logical place for the meal), looking for a restaurant that had “the best cinnamon buns in the world.” Alas, the sign never appeared, and we found ourselves instead at a truckstop–style diner. No cinnamon buns here!

With no time to waste in order to finish the meal by noon, we ordered seven veggie omelettes, two orders of pancakes and two orders of french toast. “I don’t even have a grill! I only have two hotplates,” the cook exclaimed, with a worried look on her face. We offered to go elsewhere, but as the monks were already seated, she consented. “It’ll be slow; one or two omelettes at a time.” With food from the shelves of the little “store,” a variety of items Ploen had brought along, and a little trip to a neighboring gas station “store,” we managed to complete the meal before noon.

While we fretted a bit about getting a somewhat balanced meal together for the monastics and the haphazardness of the offering, the monastics were at ease. They were grateful. What had initially seemed like a blunder on our part resulted in a great sense of joy in making do with what the situation offered and the reminder that there never was a problem in the first place, beyond what we created in ourselves. In the end the cook, the woman behind the cash register, and all of us were laughing and saying our good-byes.

In a country where one is born and raised with the notion in which the Buddha actually first taught those dana and of offering food to monks, dining in a restaurant is a very uncommon experience for the monks; while eating in Thailand the monks simply take their bowls and walk alms round and will inevitably receive some offering. “What should we order? How much should we get? We must order quickly so that they have sufficient time to eat.” Then we had to be certain that each dish was properly offered—all done with some semblance of calm!
On a Monastic Road Trip

by Debbie Stamp and Robert Hohn
with Catherine Direen

With the Thai forest tradition of Buddhism still new in the West, each chance we have to host visiting Thai monks and observe how they behave and interact with each other, with Western monks and nuns, and with lay supporters is a chance to learn more about the deep roots from which this tradition grew and now is sustained. Even the most seasoned among us—and in the West, that doesn’t amount to many years in this tradition at all—can feel a bit unsure and awkward, especially given the mutual language challenges. The following story of a recent roadtrip of Thai and Western monks and lay supporters shows just how unpredictable, and yet ultimately precious, such interactions can be.

The lay supporters found that, just like Abhayagiri, a good dose of willingness, mixed with respect and humility, can help us all surmount even the most daunting conditions.

—Catherine Direen

The Dhamma is a part of the world for us to know. And it is only through practice that it will be known. Wherever we practice, there we can realize Dhamma.

An image depicting the Buddha teaching the Four Noble Truths is an important symbol in a country where Buddhism is very new, like America. In the West we are looking for a teaching that can be put to the test, something that isn’t just taken on faith but which can actually be applied to our minds and known: Is this true? Does this work for me? Is this a reality that I can know?

One of the most profound things that struck me in my early days as a Buddhist was that I often heard other spiritual teachers talking about ultimate reality, ultimate truth, but never systematically describing how to get there. They were asking their students to take a leap into some surreal world or some state which is to be realized, but they didn’t give a step-by-step process of how to apply their teachings and test for oneself to see whether they were true. Whereas in the Buddha’s teachings I found a precise explanation of the steps and stages for release. One can apply these teachings in one’s life and experience and ask: Does this work for me?

In this very monastery, it’s the citas—the minds and hearts of each individual sitting in this hall—that have the potential to realize the goal of the teachings. It’s the minds and hearts of the people here who experience suffering and realize it is not a state that is desirable for evermore. That there must be something higher than this, that there must be some release from this. It’s the earnest desire to find release from our painful experience—the suffering, the disappointments and ups and downs of life—that sends us on the quest for something to bring about peace, freedom and release. The Buddha’s teachings are like the handful of leaves in their simplicity, clarity, precision and directness.

One moment ago you all took the precepts. This is part of the experiment. Ask yourself, Does this end up simplifying my life, giving clarity to my life? Is this path of the precepts a virtue, something that gives me security and psychological well-being? Does it lead to freedom from suffering, the disappointments and pain, and does it release others from pain? In one of the very beautiful suttas the Buddha said, “Keeping the Five Precepts is an act of compassion because one gives oneself and all other beings freedom from fear that one will cause suffering to oneself or others.” So by taking on the precepts, we are not only developing stability of mind by changing the darkness of the world, we can change ourselves.

Instead of changing the darkness of the world, we can change ourselves. We can apply these teachings and see how they affect our lives. For example, with the teachings of virtue, samadhi and wisdom, we see that each is an aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path. Samadhi is that tranquility and calm when there’s a sense of inner trust and inner security, when the mind becomes one with a meditation object. When we sustain our attention on an object there is a sense of inner peace, inner well-being and interest to know only that object and to draw the attention away from the sense impressions of the outside world. We find that a sense of tranquility starts to arise, a sense of lightness of body, a sense of ease. Then an inner joy arises.

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Early in the morning of July 2, two vans—loaded with seven monks, five laypeople, bowls and sleeping bags—headed north from Abhayagiri. Five of the monks were from Thailand: Luang Por Liam (abbot of Wat Pah Pong), Ajahn Jundee (abbot of Wat Pah Ampawan), Ajahn Nanadhammo (the Australian abbot of Wat Nanachat), Ajahn Utain (Luang Por Liam’s secretary), and Ajahn Prateep (who is currently staying at Abhayagiri). The Thai monks had come to Abhayagiri for the installation ceremony of the new Dhammaputta, and it seemed like a good chance to show them some of the West Coast and visit Birken, an affiliated monastery in British Columbia. Tan Hasapantio and Tan Nanilo filled out the monastic contingent. Ploen Petkue, Debbie Stamp, Tina Tunyong, Jan Orborn (Tan Nyaniko’s father) and Robert Hohn made up the lay contingent.

We sat for a light breakfast and a few last details after packing the vans before our planned 7 a.m. departure. The three monks from Abhayagiri and several of the five laypeople paid their respects to Ajahn Pasanno at 20 minutes before the hour, but as we exited the Dhamma Hall, it was clear that the “kruha ajahn” (teaching monks) were already ready to leave. “Isn’t it early?” one of us queried. “Apparently not” was the gist of Ajahn Pasanno’s reply, a grin on his face. The meaning of the phrase “pencilled in” was becoming clear.

While it was up to lay people as the drivers to keep track of directions, schedules and location and timing for the meal, there was also the necessity to stay attuned to the appropriate respect for the kruha ajahn. We would have to sort that out, situation by situation; attentiveness mixed with a sprinkling of learning through trial and error.

Our first stop was the Avenue of the Giants, where we paid respects to our other elders, the ancient redwood trees. It was here that the first of many group photos was taken, necessitating mini-training sessions on the intricacies of half a dozen cameras.

Lovely weather and clear blue skies over Eureka soon found us searching for someplace to eat. We needed to provide the meal for the monastics before 12 noon. Tina and Ploen discovered a Chinese restaurant that was just opening. At a brief meeting with Ajahn Pasanno the night before, we’d asked Ajahn Nanadhammo if he’d pick things off the menu for the Thai monks. His reply was that we should decide for all of them as we were offering the meal. “But I’m a Libra!” Debbie exclaimed, somewhat dismayed. “At least we know it’ll be a balanced meal” was the response.
breaking the circle of samsara (continued from page 5)

These are qualities based on wholesome meditation objects that the Buddha encouraged. The thought of lovingkindness sustained for a long period of time brings tranquility, inner happiness and inner joy. That’s a wholesome happiness because it’s not based on the five strands of sense pleasure. It’s a happiness that will take the mind to samadhi, to a deep state of peace and stillness, of unity and inner security. Purity of mind is found in samadhi, and when the mind draws into that state it becomes rested, peaceful and very, very happy.

When we go into states of peace and calm, we start to see the nature of change. We see that change is unsatisfactory and is a cause for suffering. We see that change cannot be controlled; there’s no owner, there’s no controller. This is a very important insight. The teaching of nonself is understood by seeing that we’re not in control—it’s not me, it’s not mine, I can’t control anything, I can’t hold on to it. That’s a very important meditation, because if you’re trying to control and force the mind to do exactly what you want, you’ll get tense and stressed. When you see that there is no controller there, you can let go and stay in that clear awareness of knowing. That leads to great understanding and the arising of the wisdom faculty. The wisdom faculty is nothing more than letting go of suffering, putting things down. In Buddhist wisdom means knowing suffering and abandoning it. Ajahn Chah would say frequently to us, “If you let go a little, you’ll have a little peace; if you let go a lot, you’ll have a lot of peace; if you let go completely, you’ll have complete peace.”

Ajahn Chah also taught that suffering has two qualities. It has its unpleasant aspect, and it has its wisdom aspect. Without suffering we wouldn’t seek a way out of suffering; we wouldn’t seek those feelings of liberation and peace. I remember that as a young man I hitchhiked through this area in search of something. I was on my way up the West Coast of the U.S. toward Canada. My goal was to find a log cabin up in the Yukon. I thought that if I lived secluded in a cabin through the winter, I would find some inner peace, the secret to life. I knew that peace had to be found somewhere in nature and that being in solitude was a way of being able to see myself more clearly. I never found it on that trip, but through that desire to search for a path to release from suffering, I eventually came across the Buddha’s teachings and recognized them as the truth.

On this path, we realize that we are looking for something. We are looking for the ending of suffering. We come to see that the ending of suffering is not to be found outside, not in a log cabin up in the Yukon. It’s to be found in the mind, and this monastery is a place that facilitates this exploration. It’s an exploration into the mind: into virtue, into peace and into wisdom. It’s when the mind turns inward that liberation can be found. It’s when we look after ourselves that we look after others as well. Be peaceful and calm and wise and skillful, and those qualities will reflect out into the world and radiate out into others. That’s the best way of spreading the Buddha’s teachings.

Ajahn Nnanadhammo is the abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat in Ubolrachatani. Originally from Australia, he ordained as a monk under Ajahn Chah in 1979.

We need to see the non-self aspect in praise and blame so that we can establish an unshakable quality of stability. Establishing ourselves in mindfulness and clear comprehension is the basic foundation of Right View—seeing in accordance with Truth, or the way things really are. As we establish ourselves in this quality of Right View, then there is a freeing of being the one who desires, and thus is established in the quality of happiness and brightness. The quality of wrong view is a way of seeing that hinders the feeling of independence and freedom.

How do views come into being? When the senses come in contact with objects, we may have the feeling of “me” and “myself” being impinged upon by something external. When we view things in this way, we tend to have agitation in the mind. We have a feeling of not wanting to be in contact with certain things. The feeling of being in contact with that view diminishes our experience of freedom. It is an obstruction to a sense of well-being, and we experience suffering. There are many gradations of suffering: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. These feelings arise from desire, or taṇhā, a thirst that inevitably leads to suffering. So we need to establish awareness as the mind moves towards desire or the craving mind. We need to question these feelings, really bring up a question in the mind, and ask: Who is this? Whose body or mind? Who is seeing this? Does this feeling belong to me? Who do these feelings belong to? Who is this that is feeling these things? Why is it moving in this direction?” The Buddha asks us to question the assumptions behind our desires and to be attentive to the body.

Normally we assume we are the body. But we need to question how valid that assumption is. Am I the hair of the head? Is the skin me? The teeth, is that me? These are classic meditation objects. When we investigate, we start to realize that there isn’t anything we can call “ourselves.” There are just various conditions that come together and dissolve. We see that the assumptions we make aren’t so valid. When we step back from the assumption of selfhood and see things in their true nature, there’s a feeling of dispersion or dissentangling, and this is a cause for a sense of real happiness and lightness in the heart.

The foundation of Right View is to pay attention to suffering, the conditions of suffering, the experience of suffering, so that we can understand clearly its causes. It is something that is coming to teach us, and it is incumbent on us to be willing to learn from suffering. We come to see that our suffering is just something that we are experiencing, something that arises and passes away without any solidity to it. It’s something that is always changing in the same way the world around us changes from daytime into nighttime. Daytime is light, and nighttime is dark. That’s just how nature functions.

We pay attention to suffering so that we’re not under the power of suffering. When we’re not under the power of suffering, we can establish ourselves in awareness and clarity. When we see things clearly, we recognize that nothing has the sense of selfhood within it. When we step back from the different aspects of desire, we have a sense of peace or contentment. Desire has the function to not feel full or complete in the same way that a fire has the duty to consume whatever fuel it is using. The one who desires is like a fire and to see our own views, then it’s going to continue to produce suffering. When we see desire clearly, then it ceases to have any power over us. It’s just a phenomenon of nature. This is why it is so important to be established in clear mindfulness and clear knowing. We need to recognize that the different kinds of desire pull us into liking and disliking, wanting and not wanting. The Buddha elucidated the different types of desire: desire for being (bhava-taṇhā) and desire for non-being (vibhava-taṇhā)—that pulling upward pulling of the heart that is agitating and destructive. As we see clearly, then we are not held in its sway. The heart establishes itself in dispersion or disenchantedness and turns to Truth, turns to the true nature of things, what the Buddha called dhamma, the Truth of the dhamma.

One who sees clearly does not see any enemies. One does not see anybody who is a danger to us. When we live in truth, we live with feelings of compassion and friendliness towards the world, and this is a basis for our well-being and happiness. We live in the world without fear or suspicion. This is a complete, fulfilled way of living. The Buddha encouraged us to cultivate this way of living, the dhamma of liberation, the dhamma of freedom, mokkha-dhamma. When we establish ourselves in these qualities, then we are one who is content, peaceful and happy wherever we go, whether we’re on our own or living within society.

As we establish ourselves in these qualities, then we are able to view the world as something which is not a problem for us. We look at the world and see other people as our friends and relatives. We’re not separated from people through feeling any sense of adversity. So this is a happiness that arises from seeing clearly, seeing correctly. This quality of being a complete and fulfilled human being arises from practice and training in the ways that the Buddha laid down for us. We look at the world—and our life—as an opportunity to cultivate these qualities of peace, well-being, completeness and maturity. The Buddha encourages us to learn from our attachments and use every occasion as an opportunity to create a sense of safety, refuge and comfort.

Ajahn Liam was born in Northeast Thailand in 1941 and ordained at age 20. He began training under Ajahn Chah in 1969. When Ajahn Chah became ill in 1982, Ajahn Liam was asked to look after Wat Pah Pong and has since become abbot.
don't have a material base, mental qualities are still powerful because they can create that which is painful and disadvanta-
geous to us. On the other hand, they also have the power to create happiness. We need to look after and care for the mind.
We need to establish a sense of awareness and attentiveness to the wholesome and unwholesome qualities of the mind.

The disadvantageous feelings in the mind are the lower dharmas. Those are the dharmas of the ordinary, run-of- the-mill suffering being. We think the world is improving on us, but this is just a feeling in the mind. We get caught in the moods of liking; we get caught in the moods of disliking. The moods of liking can have a painful result; the moods of disliking can also have a painful result. When we're entangled in these moods of liking and disliking, then we create and become a slave to suffering.

We have to recognize that a mind overwhelmed with suf-
f ering, agitation or a sense of incompleteness is a mind not yet fully developed. When we recognize a feeling of incompleteness, then we need to meet it with the desire to train ourselves in the prac-
tice of the Buddha's teaching. We need to bring up the quality of mindfulness, or sati. Sati is something that gives tremendous ben-
efit and support for the wholesome conditions in the mind. When we establish mind-
fulness we can have a clear awareness of the moods of the mind as well as a clear aware-
ness of the world around us. With mindfulness as the foundation, we can see the movements of the mind. When we see the mind moving towards liking, it doesn't have a painful result. When we have awareness and mindfulness, we can see the mood or feeling of disliking arising in the mind. It can be seen as only a mood, and it doesn't grow into some-
thing that is painful or problematic. We recognize that a pleas-
ant feeling is just a visitor to the mind. Unpleasant feelings are just also guests. When we have mindfulness and see that a friendly guest is arriving, then we can deal with it at ease a bit. But when we recognize that a guest to our home is an enemy, then we have to be very, very cautious and attentive.

In relating to the moods of the mind with awareness, we begin to see their true nature and in particular the nature of their dissolving and ending. When something is consciously dissolving and ending, we can't really call that “me” or “mine” or “myself.” We don't create a sense of self in those moods. We see them as an aspect of nature that arises and ceases. Mindfulness undermines attachment and clinging. We step back from our feelings of gladness, of sadness, of delight or depression. This gives us a place of firmness and stability, a place of independence.

When we see clearly like this then the attachment or the influence of the worldly dharmas dissipates in the same way that shining a light into a darkened room immediately dis-
solves the darkness. When we are established in this awareness and clarity, in the quality of what we call “Buddha,” then we are unmoved, negative aspects of the worldly dharmas dis-
solve. Relying on mindfulness and clear comprehension, we can be one who is “awakened,” one who has a sense of happi-
ness and clarity.

Mindfulness and right understanding—sati and samma-
ditthi—are intertwined with each other. We establish mind-
fulness at the arising of things at the sense doors. The sense doors, of course, are where our whole world comes into being: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. These internal sense
doors come into contact with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental objects. When, as an example, the eye sees a desirable form, there can arise feelings of desire, attraction or lust. We do not allow the feelings of liking and disliking to overwhelm the mind. Instead, we recognize and maintain recognition of the things that we contact through the senses. We see that these are things that are impermanent, changing, unstable and therefore not self. And we also recognize that when we forget and get drawn into the assumption and illusion of self, then it brings up a quality, a feeling of suffering, or dissatisfaction.

The feeling of liking or disliking something tends to color the true nature of things. That leaves us in a place of depen-
dence or feeling a lack of freedom. We hem ourselves in with attachment and clinging. One very strong form of clinging is the feeling of “me” arises. Whether it’s me being happy or me being unhappy, it’s always a feeling of me and my ownership of things. This is burdensome. When we assume ownership over anything, it’s pleasant or unpleasant, we don’t recognize that this is just a feeling that arises, establishes itself and pass-
es away.

In the worldly dharmas, one of the things we experience as confusing or a threat to self is praise and blame. But for one who is established in knowing, watching, awareness and wis-
dom, a different feeling arises—a sense of evenness. One who has wisdom recognizes that the person who is criticizing us is just following the duty or responsibility of one who has the duty to criticize, the inclination to criticize. We don’t have to make a big fuss over it. It’s just a worldly dhamma being dis-
played for us to see. We can recognize that somebody who feels it is necessary to criticize and blame comes from a place of suffering. When we look on somebody who is suffering, we can see them as not well. Just as a nurse or doctor would look at a sick person with compassion, we can see the suffering of this person who has lost their freedom and independence. A doctor or nurse would not feel obliged to react to the moods of the patient. There would be a feeling of evenness. So too in responding to praise or blame, there needs to be this evenness.

We think the world is impinging on us, but this is just a feeling in the mind.

Feared Mountain (continued from page 1)

Creating a Refuge (continued from page 1)

A 9 a.m. the temperature is a cool 70 degrees. Since it’s the day after the all-night observance of the new moon day, there is no morning work period. So I wander down to the beginning of the loop trail, which skirts in and around, up and down the monastery’s 300 acres of forest-
ed land. Once before I had endeavors to hike on parts of the trail when it was still unfinished, and I had gotten stuck in several places. Since the trail was completed, I have avoided going on it again, finding many excuses: it’s too hard, it’s too steep, it’s too dangerous, it’s too hot, it’s too cold, it’s too rainy, it’s too early, it’s too late. I’m too stuffy, I’m too hungry, I’m too out-

of-shape, I’d rather go and visit friends in Ukiah.

But today I skip past all my excuses and begin the hike. Soon after, I am confronted by Mara, the Buddhist tempter figure. In Buddhist cosmology, history and mythology, this character is often called the “Evil One.” He is the opponent of liberation. He appears in the texts as a deity and as a personification of evil and the passions of worldly existence. Mara also is the metaphor for death. According to tradition, when the Buddha sat under the bodhi tree, Mara slipped into our own minds with great ease when our feelings of gladness, of sadness, of delight or depression is a mind not yet fully developed. When we recognize a feeling of incompleteness, then we need to meet it with the desire to train ourselves in the practice of the Buddha’s teaching. We need to bring up the quality of mindfulness, or sati. Sati is something that gives tremendous benefit and support for the wholesome conditions in the mind. When we establish mindfulness we can have a clear awareness of the moods of the mind as well as a clear awareness of the world around us. With mindfulness as the foundation, we can see the movements of the mind. When we see the mind moving towards liking, it doesn’t have a painful result. When we have awareness and mindfulness, we can see the mood or feeling of disliking arising in the mind. It can be seen as only a mood, and it doesn’t grow into something that is painful or problematic. We recognize that a pleasant feeling is just a visitor to the mind. Unpleasant feelings are just also guests. When we have mindfulness and see that a friendly guest is arriving, then we can deal with it at ease a bit. But when we recognize that a guest to our home is an enemy, then we have to be very, very cautious and attentive.

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When we see clearly like this then the attachment or the influence of the worldly dharmas dissipates in the same way

Mara: Hey, look down that cliff. See how far down it is to the bottom? This is where Ajsinn Sumedho slipped. What if you fall down this cliff? No one at the monastery would ever think to look for you on the loop trail.

Mettika: Just put one foot in front of the other and... breathe. Don’t look down there.

Mara: You’re in trouble now. The path is really narrow and slippery, and you have yet in all these years to figure out your body’s center of gravity.

Mettika: There’s a sturdy stick I can use; I’ll be more sure-footed with it. Just breathe and put one foot in front of the other. Arghh... just land-ed on my butt.

Mara: Not too agile, are you?

Mettika: I didn’t really fall—just a little slip. Breathe and step. Oh s%&*, the trail is getting really narrow. Don’t freeze. It’s okay. Oh look, there’s a little wooden bridge that was built to get over a tricky area. Thank you to whoever built this support. My gratitude to all the efforts involved to make the loop trail safe. Just keep walking. Breathe... put one foot in front of the other.

Mara: The trail is still steep and is getting wider. What’s that? It’s a very long cigar-shaped scat in the middle of the path. Oh my god: it’s not bear, it’s not fox, it’s not raccoon. I wonder if it’s mountain lion. At least it’s not today’s poop... but it could have been yesterday.

Mara: That’s right, it is mountain lion scat. Suppose you see a mountain lion and the worst happens?

Mettika: Then I see a mountain lion and the worst happens. Just keep walking, one step and then another. Breathe. Dammit—more slippery areas up ahead, more nasty places.

Fall 2004

Me and Mara on the Loop Trail by Mettika

Mara: Look, Mettika. There’s the waterfall. Do you remember a few years ago when you got stuck on the teeny-tiny narrow little path over the falls and you had to hug the boulder. You were frozen, unable to go forward or backward. Ha-ha. I loved it when you were so scared, holding on for dear life.

Mettika: Well, whaddya know? That is the waterfall. It now has a sturdy foot bridge across the scary place and a dangly stretched-out rope for a railing. Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you to the monks who dragged and schlepped timbers to make the trail safe.
Lunar Observance Days

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Directions to Abhayagiri

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

Also visit our online calendar at www.abhayagiri.org for the most up-to-date information

27-10/1 Ajahn Pasanno and others attend the Western Buddhist Monastic Conference, Land of Medicine Buddha, Soquel, CA.

2-3 Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage from Spirit Rock to Abhayagiri. Contact: www.dharmawheels.org, buddhistbike@yahoo.com, or (510) 559-9624.

5 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Berkeley, CA (see below).
9 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri.
10 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
13 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Ukiah, CA (see below).
31 Kathina (Alms giving) Ceremony at Abhayagiri.

2 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Berkeley, CA (see below).
10 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Ukiah, CA (see below).
14 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri.
19-28 Thanksgiving Retreat with Ajahn Pasanno and Tara Niyana in Santa Rosa, CA. Contact: www.abhayagiri.org or Paul Friedlander at retreat04@juno.com.

4 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
7 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Berkeley, CA (see below).
8 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Ukiah, CA (see below).
12 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri.

2 Monastic retreat period begins, continuing through March 31.*
4 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley, CA (see below).
12 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Ukiah, CA (see below).

1 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley, CA (see below).
9 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Ukiah, CA (see below).

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31 Monastic retreat period ends.

5 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Berkeley, CA (see below).
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8 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Ukiah, CA (see below).

* During the Monastic Retreat period (Jan. 1 to Mar. 31), visitors are welcome to join the community for its silent daily practice. Overnight and multiple-day visits are not possible during this time.

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

Every Lunar Quarter at Abhayagiri
Chanting, meditation, Precepts, Dhamma talk & late night vigil, 7:30 pm.

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

Every Tuesday in Berkeley, CA (except first Tuesday)
7:30-9:30 pm at the Berkeley Zen Center, 1929 Russell Street. Meditation and Dhamma program with lay practitioners. Arthur Levy, (510) 530-1757, adl@lrolaw.com

Second Wednesday of the month in Ukiah, CA
7:30-9 pm, Meditation, Precepts & Dhamma talk by monastic at Yoga Mendocino, 206 Mason St., (707) 462-2580, www.yogamendocino.org

Every Tuesday in Portland, OR
7:00-9:00 am at the Friends of the Dhamma Resource Center, 1701 NW Thurman, Ste. 202. Meditation and Dhamma discussion with lay practitioners. Mary (Sakula) Reinand, sakula@notjustus.com.
that shining a light into a darkened room immediately dis-solves the darkness. When we are established in this awareness and clarity, in the quality of what we call “Buddha,” then the unwholesome, negative aspects of the worldly dhammas dis-solve. Relying on mindfulness and clear comprehension, we can be one who is “awakened,” one who has a sense of happi-ness and right understanding—sati and samma-ditthis—are intertwined with each other. We establish mind-fulness at the arising of things at the sense doors. The sense doors, of course, are where our whole world comes into being: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. These internal sense doors come into contact with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental objects. When, as an example, the eye sees a desirable form, there can arise feelings of desire, attraction or lust. We do not allow the feelings of liking and disliking to overwhelm the mind. Instead, we recognize and maintain recognition of the things that we contact through the senses. We see that these are things that are impermanent, changing, unstable and therefore not self. And we also recognize that when we forget and get drawn into the assumption and illusion of self, then it brings up a quality, a feeling of suffering, or dissatisfaction.

The feeling of liking or disliking something tempts us over the true nature of things. That leaves us in a place of depen-dence or feeling a lack of freedom. We hem ourselves in with attachment and clinging. One very strong form of clinging is the feeling of “me” arises. Whether it’s me being happy or me being unhappy, it’s always a feeling of me and my ownership of things. This is burdensome. When we assume ownership over anything, be it pleasant or unpleasant, we don’t recognize that this is just a feeling that arises, establishes itself and pass-es away.

In the worldly dhammas, one of the things we experience as confusing or a threat to self is praise and blame. But for one who is established in knowing, watching, awareness and wisdom, a different feeling—sati arises in the mind. One who has wisdom recognizes that the person who is criticizing us is just following the duty or responsibility of one who has the duty to criticize, the inclination to criticize. We don’t have to make a big fuss over it. It’s just a worldly dhamma being dis-played for us to see. We can recognize that somebody who feels it is necessary to criticize and blame comes from a place of suffering. When we look on somebody who is suffering, we can see them as not well. Just as a nurse or doctor would look at a sick person with compassion, we can see the suffering of this person who has lost their freedom and independence. A doctor or nurse would not feel obliged to react to the moods of the patient. There would be a feeling of evenness. So too in responding to praise or blame, there needs to be this evenness.

We think the world is impinging on us, but this is just a feeling in the mind. 

Mara: Hey, look down that cliff. See how far down it is to the bottom? This is where Arijah Sumedho slipped. What if you fall down this cliff? No one at the monastery would ever think to look for you on the loop trail.

Mettika: Just put one foot in front of the other and... breathe. Don’t look down there.

Mara: You’re in trouble now. The path is really narrow and slippery, and you have yet in all these years to figure out your body’s center of gravity.

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Mara: Look, Mettika. There’s the waterfall. Do you remember a few years ago when you got stuck on the teeny-tiny narrow little path over the falls and you had to hug the boulder. You were frozen, unable to go forward or backward. Ha-ha. I loved it when you were so scared, holding on for dear life.

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(continued on page 15)

Fall 2004

We’re all in this together.

Fearless Mountain
Breaking the Circle of Samsara (continued from page 5)

These are qualities based on wholesome meditation objects that the Buddha encouraged. The thought of lovingkindness sustained for a long period of time brings tranquility, inner happiness and inner joy. That’s a wholesome happiness because it’s not based on the five strivings of sense pleasure. It’s a happiness that will take the mind to samadhi, to a deep state of peace and stillness, of unity and inner security. Purity of mind is found in samadhi, and when the mind draws into that state it becomes rested, peaceful and very, very happy.

Then, when one withdraws from this state of samadhi, one begins to see the world in a different way. It’s by seeing the mundane things of life in contrast to a state of composure, of peace, of samadhi that one can truly understand and see them clearly. When the mind is clarified and purified, then it sees things in a different way. One will see the nature of change, the busyness of antahkara and all conditioned phenomena, which are constantly in a state of flux. Before, one didn’t notice because one was immersed in it. It’s like someone who lives in the hustle and bustle of downtown San Francisco. They get used to it, conditioned to it; it’s familiar to them, and they take it as a normal existence. But if they spend a month meditating at Abhayagiri and then go back into that hustle and bustle, they’ll see its intensity more clearly because now they know the contrast.

When we go into states of peace and calm, we start to see the nature of change. We see that change is unsatisfactory and is a cause for suffering. We see that change cannot be controlled; there’s no owner, there’s no controller. This is a very important insight. The teaching of nonself is understood by seeing that we’re not in control—it’s not me, it’s not mine, I can’t control, I can’t hold on to it. That’s a very important meditation, because if you’re trying to control and force the mind to do exactly what you want, you’ll get tense and stressed. When you see that there is no controller there, you can let go and stay in that clear awareness of knowing. That leads to great understanding and the arising of the wisdom faculty. The wisdom faculty is nothing more than letting go of suffering, putting things down. In Buddhism wisdom means knowing suffering and abandoning it. Ajahn Chah would say frequently to us, “If you let go a little, you’ll have a little peace; if you let go a lot, you’ll have a lot of peace; if you let go completely, you’ll have complete peace.”

Ajahn Chah also taught that suffering has two qualities. It has its unpleasant aspect, and it has its wisdom aspect. Without suffering we wouldn’t seek a way out of suffering; we wouldn’t seek peace. Before we seek liberation and peace, I remember that as a young man I hitch-hiked through this area in search of something, I was on my way up the West Coast of the U.S. toward Canada. My goal was to find a log cabin in the Yukon. I thought that if I lived secluded in a cabin through the winter, I would find some inner peace, the secret to life. I knew that peace had to be found somewhere in nature and that being in solitude was a way of being able to see myself more clearly. I never found it on that trip, but through that desire to search for a path to release from suffering, I eventually came across the Buddha’s teachings and recognized them as the truth.

On this path, we realize that we are looking for something. We are looking for the ending of suffering. We come to see that the ending of suffering is not to be found outside, not in a log cabin up in the Yukon. It’s to be found in the mind, and this monastery is a place that facilitates this exploration. It’s an exploration into the mind: into virtue, into peace and into wisdom. It’s when the mind turns inward that liberation can be found. It’s when we look after ourselves that we look after others as well. Be peaceful and calm and wise and skillful, and those qualities will reflect out into the world and radiate out into others. That’s the best way of spreading the Buddha’s teachings. ◆

Ajahn Nanadhammo is the abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat in Ubolratani. Originally from Australia, he ordained as a monk under Ajahn Chah in 1979.

We need to see the non-self aspect in praise and blame so that we can establish an unshakable quality of stability.

Establishing ourselves in mindfulness and clear comprehension is the basic foundation of Right View—seeing in accordance with Truth, or the way things really are. As we establish ourselves in this quality of Right View, then there is a ceasing of being the one who desires, and thus is established in the quality of happiness and brightness. The quality of wrong view is a way of seeing that hinders the feeling of independence and freedom.

How do views come into being? When the senses come in contact with objects, we may have the feeling of “me” and “myself” being impinged upon by something external. When we view things in this way, we tend to have agitation in the mind. We have a feeling of not wanting to be in contact with certain things. The feeling of being in contact with that view diminishes our experience of freedom. It is an obstruction to a sense of well-being, and we experience suffering. There are many gradations of suffering: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. These feelings arise from desire, or taṇhā, a thirst that inevitably leads to suffering. When we see desire clearly, then it ceases to have any power over us. It’s just a phenomenon of nature.

This is why it is so important to be established in clear mindfulness and clear knowing. We need to recognize that the different kinds of desire pull us into liking and disliking, wanting and not wanting. The Buddha elucidated the different types of desire: desire for being (bhava-tanha) and desire for non-being (vibhava-tanha)—that pushing and pulling of the heart that is agitating and destructive. As we see clearly, then we are not held in its sway. The heart establishes itself in dispersion or disenchantment and turns to Truth, turns to the true nature of things, what the Buddha called sacca-dhamma, the Truth of the dhamma.

One who sees clearly does not see any enemies. One does not see anybody who is a danger to us. When we live in truth, we live with feelings of independence towards the world, and this is a basis for our well-being and happiness. We live in the world without fear or suspicion. This is a complete, fulfilled way of living. The Buddha encouraged us to cultivate this way of dwelling in the dhamma of liberation, the dhamma of freedom, mokkha-dhamma. When we establish ourselves in these qualities, then we are one who is content, peaceful and happy wherever we go, whether we’re on our own or living within society. As we establish ourselves in these qualities, then we are able to view the world as something which is not a problem for us. We look at the world and see other people as our friends and relatives. We’re not separated from people through feeling any sense of adversity. So this is a happiness that arises from seeing clearly, seeing correctly. This quality of being a complete and fulfilled human being arises from practice and training in the ways that the Buddha laid down for us. We look on the world—and our life—as an opportunity to cultivate these qualities of peace, well-being, completeness and maturity. The Buddha encourages us to learn from our attachments and use every occasion as an opportunity to create a sense of safety, refuge and comfort.

Ajahn Liam was born in Northeast Thailand in 1941 and ordained at age 20. He began training under Ajahn Chah in 1969. When Ajahn Chah became ill in 1982, Ajahn Liam was asked to look after Wat Bih Pong and has since become abbot.
roots, the source of Buddhism in India. We see that Dhamma does not belong to any community, group or tradition. It’s just there. The Dhamma is a part of the world for us to know. And it is only through practice that it will be known. Wherever we practice, there we can realize Dhamma.

An image depicting the Buddha teaching the Four Noble Truths is an important symbol in a country where Buddhism is very new, like America. In the West we are looking for a teaching that can be put to the test, something that isn’t just taken on faith but which can actually be applied to our minds and known: Is this true? Does this work for me? Is this a reality that I can know?

One of the most profound things that struck me in my early days as a Buddhist was that I often heard other spiritual teachers talking about ultimate reality, ultimate truth, but never systematically describing how to get there. They were asking their students to take a leap into some surreal world or some state which is to be realized, but they didn’t give a step-by-step process of how to apply their teachings and test for oneself to see whether they were true. Whereas in the Buddha’s teachings I found a precise explanation of the steps and stages for release. One can apply these teachings in one’s life and experience and ask: Does this work for me?

In this very monastery, it’s the cittas—the minds and hearts of each individual sitting in this hall—that have the potential to realize the goal of the teachings. It’s the minds and hearts of the people here who experience suffering and realize it is not a state that is desirable for everyone. That there must be something higher than this, that there must be some release from this. It’s the earnest desire to find release from our painful experience—the suffering, the disappointments and ups and downs of life—that sends us on the quest for something to bring about peace, freedom and release. The Buddha’s teachings are like the handful of leaves in their simplicity, clarity, precision and directness.

A moment ago you all took the precepts. This is part of the experiment. Ask yourself, Does this end up simplifying my life, giving clarity to my life? Is this path of the precepts a virtue, something that gives me security and psychological well-being? Does it lead to freedom from suffering, from complexities, difficulties and pain, and does it release others from pain? In one of the very beautiful suttas the Buddha said, “Keeping the Five Precepts is an act of compassion because one gives oneself and all other beings freedom from fear that one will cause suffering to oneself or others.” So by taking on the precepts, we are not only developing stability of mind by working against the darkness. We are also developing the traits of the four stages of self-transcendence: from the darkness, to the light, to the light a little, to the light a little more, to the light of nirvana.

One of the sayings I find useful for myself is an old Chinese proverb, probably influenced by Buddhist and Taoism: “Instead of complaining about the darkness of the world, light a candle.” I find this saying powerful because often, as Westerners, we tend to get caught up in judgments, cynicism and finding fault with the world, ourselves and others. Instead of complaining about the darkness, we can do something by lighting a candle. Instead of changing the darkness of the world, we can change ourselves.

We can apply these teachings and see how they affect our lives. For example, with the teachings of virtue, samadhi and wisdom, we see that each is an aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path. Samadhi is that tranquility and calm when there’s a sense of inner trust and inner security, when the mind becomes one with a meditation object. When we sustain our attention on an object, we develop a sense of inner peace, inner well-being and inner interest to know only that object and to draw the attention away from something else.

The Dhamma is a part of the world for us to know. And it is only through practice that it will be known. Wherever we practice, there we can realize Dhamma.
I t is a great pleasure and honor to visit Abhayagiri Monastery after having lived with Ajahn Pasanno as a very young monk in Thailand many years ago. He kindly invited me to take part in this Budharupa dedication ceremony. When we were chanting a moment ago, I noticed that the fan with the logo of Abhayagiri shows the Buddha’s hand holding bodhi leaves. This image comes from the “Handful of Leaves Sutta” that the Buddha gave when he was living in a forest. He picked up a handful of leaves and then gave a discourse, saying to the bhikkhus, “What are greater, the leaves in this forest or the leaves in my hand?” The monks replied, “The leaves in the forest are great and numerous. The leaves in your hand, venerable sir, are few.” The Buddha said that like the leaves in the forest, those things he had realized and understood on the night of his enlightenment were innumerable and innumerable. Yet what he taught beings in the world was limited—like the leaves in the hand—to that which can obtain release from suffering. He taught the Four Noble Truths: unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering, grief and pain; their cause; the result of this release from suffering, nibbana; and the pathway to the ending of suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path. That handful of leaves, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, is the symbol of Abhayagiri. And the Buddha image we are installing this weekend at Abhayagiri represents the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, in which the Buddha actually first taught those Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Many people ask me how the form of this image came about and the meaning of the hand mudra. The Buddha has the thumb and forefinger of one hand formed in a circle, with the middle and small fingers pointed out. He holds the other hand with his thumb and forefinger in another circle. I don’t know if this is the meaning the artist intended, but here is how I’ve interpreted it: the circle of the left hand symbolizes the Buddha’s teaching of the Four Noble Truths. The First Truth is suffering and it has a cause: craving. When there’s suffering produced by craving, that reinforces suffering, which creates birth, old age, sickness and death. That forms a circle, doesn’t it, a circle of samsara! There is only one way to release from that circle of craving, that circle of suffering, that circle of life and death. That is nibbana, or enlightenment. Enlightenment is sustained and maintained by another circle, the Dhammacakka, the Wheel of Dhamma, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path. This is represented by the right hand. When we maintain the Eightfold Path in a continuous circle, it will lead to nibbana and break the circle of old age, sickness and death—the circle of samsara.

When we see a Buddha image, it’s something for all of us to reflect on and consider. This image is based on an ancient image found in Sarnath, India. Its old Indian style from the Gupta Period doesn’t belong to any of today’s ethnic traditions; it brings us back to our

**Fearless Mountain**

by Ajahn Nanadhammo

Adapted from a Dhamma talk given at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery on June 27, 2004.

There is only one way to release from that circle of craving, that circle of suffering, that circle of life and death.

Compared to our more Westernized manner of attending to monastics, the Thai style seemed so formal, awkward and slightly intimidating. But out of gratitude for the lovely teachings and the inspiring example of the kruba ajahns, we felt blessed to be along and wanted to attend as respectfully and appropriately as possible, albeit a bit clumsy next to the grace of the Thais.

In a country where one is born and raised with the notion ofdana and of offering food to monks, dining in a restaurant is a very uncommon experience for the monks; while traveling in Thailand the monks simply take their bowls and walk alms round and will inevitably receive some offering. “What should we order? How much should we get? We must order quickly so that they have sufficient time to eat.” Then we had to be certain that each dish was properly offered—all done with some semblance of calm!

When the monks were finished, they shared their food with us and calmly waited until we were finished. Throughout the trip there was an acute awareness that we were also being looked after, in a very subtle way. And so, despite our somewhat fumbling manners, we managed to get the meal offered and eaten before the noon hour.

We drove by lovely sections of the Trinity River, dotted here and there with colorful rafts and kayaks. We passed by a few snowy peaks of the Trinity Alps, which was the first view of snow for Ajahn Utan. Along the way the question arose as to whether we should stop to offer something cold to drink. We knew that the kruba ajahns would leave something like that up to us. It was a long drive and we still had a couple of hours of driving left, so we made the decision to stop. Hmmm. Juice or sodas? Fortunately, the little store was limited, so option paralysis couldn’t stir too many doubts up for us.

In the morning we participated in the morning service, which was a first for all of the forest monks. Over a cup of tea, the monks from both traditions shared their common experiences among branch monasteries scattered worldwide. After a round of group photos, we headed north on Interstate 5. On a tip from somebody staying at Shasta Abbey, we stopped in Grants Pass (the most logical place for the meal), looking for a restaurant that had “the best cinnamon buns in the world.” Alas, the sign never appeared, and we found ourselves instead at a truckstop–style diner. No cinnamon buns here!

With no time to waste in order to finish the meal by noon, we ordered seven veggie omelettes, two orders of pancakes and two orders of french toast. “I don’t even have a grill! I only have two hotplates,” the cook exclaimed, with a worried look on her face. We offered to go elsewhere, but as the monks were already seated, she consented. “I’ll be slow; one or two omelettes at a time.” With food from the shelves of the little “store,” a variety of items Ploen had brought along, and a little trip to a neighboring gas station “store,” we managed to complete the meal before noon.

While we fretted a bit about getting a somewhat balanced meal together for the monastics and the haphazardness of the offering, the monastics were at ease. They were grateful. What had initially seemed like a blunder on our part resulted in a great sense of joy in making do with what the situation offered and the reminder that there never was a problem in the first place, beyond what we created in ourselves. In the end the cook, the woman behind the cash register, and all of us were laughing and saying our good-byes.

**Breaking the Circle of Samsara**

Adapted from a Dhamma talk given at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery on June 27, 2004.

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After the meal Luang Por gave a talk in Thai while Ajahn Nanadhammo gave a talk and answered questions for the English-speaking crowd. There was a lovely atmosphere of community, gratitude and goodwill permeating the space. It was truly heartening to meet so many sincere Dhamma practitioners, all of whom were so gracious and welcoming. That evening there was a special blessing and Dhamma talk at Ladawan’s home with a small group of friends. Although Luang Por’s talk went untranslated, a message of peace and tranquility was clearly conveyed.

The following morning, loaded up with piles of food offered by a number of generous Thai supporters, we drove up to Anacortes through rain showers and boarded the ferry to Vancouver Island. The ferry ride was spectacular—the rain clouds lifted, leaving bright blue sky, sparkling water, intriguing inlets and wooded islands. Luang Por had a big smile on his face as he strolled around on the deck, clicking off another roll of film. After a sumptuous picnic in a park we drove to Butchart Gardens and took in the magnificent sights of thousands of blooming flowers and exquisitely designed gardens. The only drawback was that it was very crowded, making it difficult for the monks to avoid being jostled around.

Another ferry ride took us to the mainland and a short drive to the home of Lili Kitaphanich in Vancouver. Again, it was lovely to observe how all were welcomed and invited in... and hands in anjali. As with all the places we visited, we were greeted with kindness, generosity and gracious hospitality.

The next day, after a beautiful meal offering by Lili and others, we were taken out for some sightseeing. First stop was Stanley Park and the Aquarium. Here we saw many unfamiliar faces from the Sangha abroad, including Ajahn Sucitto, who just returned from a successful pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash in Tibet.

Darren Noy arrived on July 19 and has taken anagārika vows for 10 months. Darren is a doctoral student at the U.C. Berkeley department of sociology, and has decided to take one year off to practice at the monastery.

Adam Kane has left the anagarika training in order to go back into the world and explore some other avenues of practice. Adam has selflessly served the community for a year and a half and will be dearly missed.

Ajahn Amaro’s pilgrimage in India is well underway. He is spending the Vassa near Jetavana Grove, where the Buddha lived and taught for over 20 rains retreats. The only word we’ve had from Ajahn Amaro is a small, dusty postcard wishing everyone well.

**TEACHINGS**

A
dphano and a group of monks headed to Spirit Rock on June 8 to attend the Ajahn Jumnien retreat. Ajahn Pasanno translated teachings for a few days, along with Joseph Kappel (formerly Ajahn Pahakaro). Ajahn Prateep and Tan Hasapāthito attended the first half of the retreat, while Sumantra Alimsako and Anagarika Adam stayed on for the full nine days.

(continued on page 15)
The last few months have been characterized by many noble people coming together—a number of older Ajahn visited, bhikkhus returned from travels, and the lay community congregated for work and religious events.

Tan Sudanto and Tan Karunadhammo returned from their travels in late April. Tan Sudanto spent the winter at Birken Monastery in British Columbia. He deeply appreciated the silence of the snowy atmosphere, the practical setup of the main house area, and the solitude that a new and remote monastery offers.

Tan Karunadhammo spent ten days with Ajahn Amaro at a retreat at the Insight Meditation Society before returning to Abhayagiri. Tan Karunadhammo’s travels included stays at Bodhinyanarama Monastery in New Zealand, Ajahn Kalyano’s new monastery in Melbourne, Australia, and Bhavana Society in West Virginia.

The community said goodbye to Tan Dhammadaso, who is in residence at Birken Monastery until November. Four Spirit Rock teachers came to spend May 18–19 at the monastery as a part of Jack Kornfield’s teacher training program. Leigh Brasington, Noah Levine, Diana Winston and Trudy Goodman studied more about the schedule and the styles of monastic practice. Trudy, who had never been to the monastery, was surprised and impressed with the kutis deep in the forest, which provide physical seclusion and paths for walking meditation.

Ajahn Sundara visited us briefly in May and, unfortunately, soon after, she had a minor heart attack and had to cancel several teaching events. The Abhayagiri community and the lay community abroad sent many good wishes to her, and she was well cared for by friend Ronna Kabatznick. Ajahn Sundara is now back in England taking it easy and recovering.

Near the end of May the level of activity stepped up a few notches. The new Buddha image arrived at the monastery, and simultaneously work began on a substantial expansion to the water system. On the positive side, these projects helped to develop camaraderie and giving.

Ajahn Jumni, after giving teachings at Spirit Rock (see below), came to Abhayagiri for a few days and helped the community with some very bright energy and talk on Dhamma. Something unusual about Ajahn Jumni is that he wears huge amounts of weight on his body in order to contem- plate unpleasant feeling (66 pounds at present, reduced from the 150 pounds he wore until the age of 60). To accomplish this, he wears three monk’s upper garments, each covered with pockets full of amulets, tools and other heavy items. Luang Por Liam, Ajahn Jumni, Ajahn Nanadhammo and Ajahn Utain arrived from Thailand on June 22 to spend time at Abhayagiri and to help lead the ceremonies surrounding the new Buddha image on the weekend of June 26–27. Ajahn Punnadhammo also arrived a couple of days later, and Tan Chao Khan Maha Prasert came from Wat Buddhanusorn in nearby Fremont to participate in the ceremony. Luang Por Liam has been ordained for 43 years and is the abbot of Wat Nong Pah Pong. Luang Por is the spiritual head of over 200 Ajahn Chah branch monasteries in Thailand. Ajahn Jundee runs a monastery outside of Bangkok and has been ordained for 28 years. Ajahn Nanadhammo is the abbot of Wat Nanachat, the international forest monastery in Thailand, and has been ordained for 24 years.

About 200 people arrived on June 26 to participate in the commemoration of the new Buddha image. The ceremonies began at 7:30 p.m. with chanting and meditation on the eight-sided ordination platform up in the forest. Later in the evening Luang Por Liam gave a teaching on the naturalness of the Dhamma (see article on page 1), with Ajahn Pasanno translating into English. Everyone then had the chance to sit until midnight in the chilly mountain wind, and visitors camped all over the monastery.

The next morning everyone gathered again at the platform for the installation of relics into the back of the Buddha. For those who don’t know, relics are crystallized remains of the cremated body of either the Buddha or fully enlightened disciples who came afterwards. The coming together of many relics into one Buddha image is very auspicious. Everyone then gathered for the meal offering, and the final ceremonies included a formal offering of robe cloth to Luang Por Liam. The Abhayagiri monastic community would like to express tremendous gratitude to everyone who attended the ceremonies and helped out!

On July 2, the visiting elders and a group from the monastery left for a road trip and headed up towards Canada, with many stops along the way (see article on page 12).
We’ve gathered together tonight in this place of solitude and nature to establish an understanding in the Buddha’s teachings. These teachings are based on the natural order of things. While we sit here in this natural place, we may not find it completely convenient or comfortable. We may find some things coarse and some things refined, some things agreeable, others disagreeable. By studying our reactions to nature, we can understand how to live in a way that leads to happiness and freedom.

In order to establish a sense of peace and independence, we first look at the body. We step back and acknowledge that the body is a part of nature. In seeing the body like this, we are able to disentangle ourselves from the feeling of “this is me, this is who I am, this is myself, and this is others.” When we’re able to step back like this, we see in accordance with Truth and in accordance with the characteristics common to nature: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. We see how all things arise in the beginning, are established in the middle, and dissolve in the end. We see the Dhamma of the dharmas, or the natural way of things. Seeing in this way helps us to step back from the moods, impressions and feelings that lead to that which is unskillful and unwholesome and that which creates a sense of suffering in the heart.

While material things are the coarser qualities of life, the mental qualities are the more refined aspects of our being. The mental qualities don’t have any characteristics like white or black, dark or light; they’re immaterial. But even though they... (continued on page 10)