

FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter

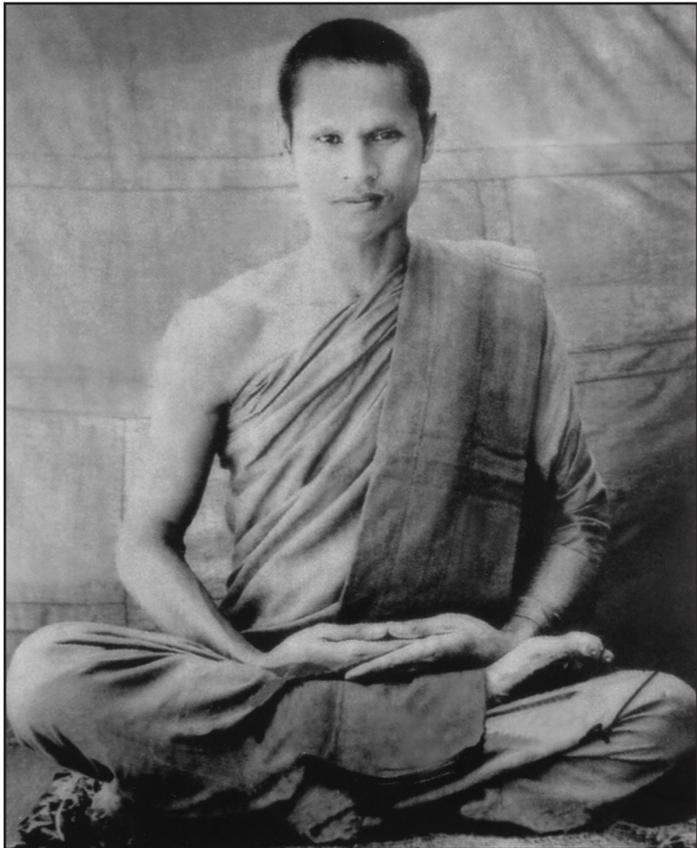
THE TRUE NATURE OF THE BODY

*A Dhamma talk given by Luang Por Plien at Abhayagiri.
Translation by Ajahn Pasanno.*

We all have to understand the nature of the body. And it should play a central feature in our investigation and contemplation of the teachings. The Buddha taught the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, the discourse on not-self. This discourse was given to the five ascetics that had attended on the Buddha. On listening to this particular discourse, they were liberated. All of us here are similar to the five ascetics in that we all want to be free, to not have to experience the difficulties that are attendant on having a body and a mind and with being in the world. The body is a helpful foundation for investigation because it is something that is with us, we live in it. We inhabit these bodies, and when we do understand their nature, then they give us an insight into the nature of the world around us.

We're like a person who has a house, and it's a bit old, a bit dilapidated, needs repair, and we need to worry about and attend to it. Similarly, we all have bodies that we have to look after and care for, we have to worry if they get sick, cold, tired, and there's a burden there. The nature of having existence, of being born in the world, for everybody, is that we're born with bodies and minds. This is what constitutes birth, what constitutes having a life. It's something that everybody in the world has, and it's having a body and not understanding it that leads to suffering and confusion.

However, we have to rely on these bodies, we can't do without them, we can't *not* have them, so it's incumbent on us to try to understand them, so they don't create problems for us. One of the aspects of having a body and mind, but particularly a body, is that there's a strong focus on the body because it's tangible. The body being physical and tangible, it's easier to reflect on and investigate. But it's a source of our sense of self, the creation of a self, the creation of attachment around an image of who we think we are. Then we compare ourselves



Luang Por Plien, circa 1964

to others, look at other people's bodies, and take them to be selves, take them to be entities that we compare ourselves to and compare them according to the whole realm of 'I'; it's actually quite burdensome and confusing. So today I'd like to give some reflections around these aspects of the teaching according to my own ability and my own understanding.

It's necessary for all of us to study carefully the nature of the body and to be able to reflect on that nature. It goes across

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From the Monastery

The year is passing into the realm of memories as the present consumes the future at an alarming rate. Fall leaves blaze with color prior to their brief flight from twig's end to forest floor. Be it the arising and passing of a single breath, a colorful crowd amassing and dispersing on a festival day or the waxing and waning of our monastic timekeeper, the moon, it's all taking place in the ever evolving present moment—it's all teaching us.

In attempting to summarize these past several months, it is this aspect of things arising and passing through the monastery that seems most relevant. Being that the community has agreed to have the year to recuperate from the rather intense development schedule of the past couple of years it's been very spacious and quiet in the forest. However, that is not to say that nothing has been happening . . .

TEACHINGS AND EVENTS

Ajahn Amaro, together with Joe Bobrow Roshi, led a daylong retreat on "Non-Duality" at the Sati Center in Redwood City in late June. Ajahn then headed to Oregon to lead a six day retreat at Great Vow Zen Monastery.

This year's *Rains Retreat* began at the end of July, with the observance of Āsāḷha Pūjā. This ceremony commemorates the anniversary of the Buddha's "setting rolling the wheel of Dhamma" with his teaching of the Four Noble Truths in the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*. The community paid homage by chanting the Sutta and doing a circumambulation holding candles, flowers and incense.

The next day the resident community formally entered the vassa, determining to stay within the boundaries of this monastery for three months. The vassa began with a two week period of group practice. The monastery schedule then functioned as normal, except every two weeks, by rotation, four people would enter solitary retreat. Some people fasted, whereas others took their meal in a solitary place and used the rest of the time to focus on meditation practice.

Every vassa the community studies the Vinaya, the code of monastic discipline that governs our lifestyle as alms mendicants. This year's classes were led by Tan Jotipālo, who taught using case studies and real life scenarios that called for everyone's interaction. It's good to reflect on how the rules can actually be lived out as opposed to listening to the Vinaya being simply read aloud (which can be painstakingly dry). "*Vinayo sasanassa ayu'ti*—The Vinaya is the life of the Religion." As a gesture of gratitude, this year's Kathina robe was offered to Tan Jotipālo.

There is a beautiful custom, particularly emphasized by Luang Por Chah, to pay respects to local senior monks at the start of the vassa. Ajahn Mahā Prasert, abbot of Wat Buddhansorn in Fremont, CA, has been a long time friend and patron of Abhayagiri and in August most of the Abhayagiri monks visited

as a group to bow to him and make offerings.

Venerable Khemaratana, a bhikkhu who ordained at Bhāvana Society in West Virginia, joined us for the vassa this year, and it's worth noting that there were ten bhikkhus, two sāmaṇeras, two anagārikas, and two laywomen in long term residence—the numbers attest to the slowly growing community.

Ajahn Amaro, accompanied by Tan Ahimsako, journeyed to Spirit Rock to help lead the annual Family Retreat in August. (See page 13 for details.)

Reverend Master Seikai of Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple (a branch of Shasta Abbey) joined us on August third for a two week stay. This was a unique opportunity to learn more about the ways of practice of the Shasta Abbey monks, as well as spend time with a wise Dhamma companion.

The annual Spirit Rock Teen Weekend took place at the end of August. Fifteen teens and six adults camped out, took part in the monastic routine, listened to teachings and practiced meditation in the deep forest solitude. It is inspiring to see teens motivated to cultivate ethical conduct, meditation and wisdom in daily life.

The Sangha was fortunate to receive Ajahn Ṭhanissaro (more commonly known as Ajahn Geoff), the abbot of Mettā Forest Monastery in San Diego County, for a six day visit. Ajahn Geoff is one of the most prolific translators of Pali texts into English, and has offered translations of large sections of the Pali Nikāyas over the years. He is one of the leading authorities on the practice of the monastic rules as they are lived, and a skilled meditation teacher. The residents and visitors at Abhayagiri engaged in question and answer sessions and listened to Dhamma teachings and stories.

A contingent of Thai lay supporters, headed by Khun Ting, gathered at the monastery for a *Sanghadāna* in mid-September. The group offered monks' requisites, tools, and office supplies. The community of Abhayagiri would like to extend our gratitude for this generous support.

The sixth annual Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage took place at the end of September. Riders, who peddled 140 miles from Spirit Rock to Abhayagiri, expressed appreciation at the cool weather this year. The event organizers reported that this year had the most riders yet—about 90. And, a new stop was added: Sae Taw Wynn Dhamma Center in Petaluma, where Dr. Thynn Thynn teaches.

Our good friend and senior Siladhāra Ajahn Sundara paid us a visit one evening. She was only here for a couple of hours, yet that was enough to check in and reconnect. Ajahn Sundara was on her way to Cloud Mountain Meditation Center in Washington, where she has been spending the vassa.

A special guest, Ruth Denison, had a brief stay here on October fourth and fifth. Ruth, an early Dhamma pioneer in the U.S., has been a supporter and friend of Abhayagiri for many years. She gave a Dhamma talk to the community on the weekly



Debbie and Ruth, practicing the Dhammacakka mudra

lunar observance night, and when informed that there would be an all night meditation vigil to follow, the 85 year old Ruth gleefully said “Really? That’s great! I’ve come on the right day!” The following morning Ruth, the ajahns, and several of the community members went into the forest to inter the ashes of Ruth’s husband, Henry, in a majestic old oak tree. Ruth continued to share Dhamma reflections for all to enjoy. In fact, if one paid attention, one saw that *all* Ruth speaks about is Dhamma. Ruth ended her visit with a tour of the land at Casa Serena, the women’s residence, and to see the newly finished day use meditation platform for women that she herself had sponsored. Following a short ceremony, she named the platform “Truth.”

Six of the monastics attended a four day “welding retreat,” hosted by Richard Yaskey, in mid-October. On the first evening, Ajahn Amaro gave teachings to the Casper sitting group. Apart from morning meditation, breakfast, and the mid-day meal, the group practiced the welder’s art throughout the day. They learned the basics of safety, cutting, bending, brazing, arc-welding and plasma arc-cutting. Ann and Michael Brown let the monastics use their zendo as a resting place during this time. Special thanks to Richard for his expert welding instruction, and to all who provided food and support to the monastics.

It is also with great appreciation that we mark the completion of the tenth vassa of our longest lay resident and Sangha protector, Debbie Stamp. It would take several newsletters to recount the litany of tasks that Debbie deals with every day for our benefit, and she still manages to connect with residents and guests alike in a warm, kind and humorous way.

For the winter season, Ajahn Sudanto will be living at Birken Forest Monastery in British Columbia, and Tan Jotipālo will be at Arrow River Hermitage in Thunder Bay, Canada, for an extended period.

VASSA IN OREGON

Ajahn Sudanto and Tan Karunadhammo, at the invitation of Portland Friends of the Dhamma, departed to settle for the vassa

on a piece of land in Mosier, Oregon, close to the Columbia River Gorge. The bhikkhus spent the summer season living in tents on this remote land, and gave periodic teachings at the Friends of the Dhamma Center in Portland.

Special thanks to the people who stepped forward as stewards to look after the bhikkhus for this vassa. However, it’s worth noting that the stewards didn’t need to work very hard; every day different supporters brought offerings of prepared food, and one steward had to schedule it in just to be able to offer a meal himself. This is no small act of generosity from the people of Oregon—Mosier is just over an hour drive from Portland. Truly, *Anumodanā*.

Ajahn Pasanno, with Tan ̄hitābho, paid a visit to Mosier in late September. There was a gathering at the retreat site and the ajahn gave his encouragement and support.

This season also marks the completion of the tenth vassa for Tan Karunadhammo, who will continue on now as “Ajahn” Karunadhammo (the first completely home-grown Abhayagiri monk to reach ten vassas).

LUANG POR PLIEN VISITS ABHAYAGIRI

On June 25th we were truly blessed to receive Phra Ajahn Plien Paññāpadīpo, a highly revered Thai Forest ajahn, for a two week stay. During his visit, Luang Por laid out a feast of Dhamma teachings for all to savor. In the evenings, the teaching lasted into the late hours of the night and sometimes the wee hours of the morning. Ajahn Pasanno carried the burden of translator, which required awesome focus and endurance.

Luang Por was accompanied by Tan Moshe, a Thai monk from Wat Pah Nanachat, who served as Luang Por’s attendant during his travels in America. Tan Moshe, with his refined attention to detail, was able to offer our community a good example of *ācariyavatta*, the how-to of looking after senior monks. Another monk who visited during this time was Ajahn Piyasīlo, a soft-spoken Thai monk from Chiang Rai. Ajahn Piyasīlo has spent time at Chithurst Monastery in England and has become a good friend of our community. Mae Chee Mon, an eight precept nun who was ordained with Ajahn Soṇa at Birken Monastery in British Columbia also visited over the same period.

One of the first places that Luang Por was interested in visiting was the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The Venerable Abbot Heng Lyu asked Luang Por if he would give a talk that evening, to which he readily agreed. The Ten Thousand Buddha Hall was completely packed, and the Dhamma teaching was translated from Thai to English to Chinese. Dharma Master Heng Lyu expressed that he felt he had some affinities with Luang Por Plien. Even though the two had never met, they related and spoke to each other like old friends.

On Sunday, July first, Luang Por then went on a brief teaching tour in the San Francisco Bay Area, accompanied by several monks and lay people. Teachings were given at Wat

Buddhanusorn in Fremont, and Luang Por was able to connect with Ajahn Mahā Prasert. Next they stopped at Wat “SanFran” Dhammaram, the city temple of Luang Por Toon Khippapañño. Fortunately Luang Por Toon was there himself, having made one of his rare visits to San Francisco. It is always a delight to see two very senior Thai Forest ajahns visiting and chatting with one another. Jack Kornfield and the staff at Spirit Rock Meditation Center generously offered accommodations to the group, and Luang Por gave the weekly Monday night talk there. Following the formal talk, Luang Por invited anyone with Dhamma questions to join him in the Council House. A good sized group did just that, staying on well past midnight.

Following a whirlwind tour of the Bay Area (literally a whirlwind—a helicopter tour over the Bay and *under* the Golden Gate Bridge) the group went to Berkeley Buddhist Monastery for the monthly “first Tuesday” gathering. Ajahn Amaro arrived in the Bay Area after leading the retreat in Oregon, just in time to join the gathering. Following the evening Dhamma Talk, Luang Por offered a special treat to all present: traditional blessing verses and sharing of lovingkindness, in English.

After a day back at Abhayagiri, Luang Por, Ajahn Pasanno and a crew from the monastery set off for Shasta Abbey. The group stopped along the way to have the daily meal in the redwood groves of Humboldt County. At Shasta, Luang Por met with the resident monastics and gave a well-received Dhamma talk before returning to Abhayagiri. On July tenth Luang Por Plien, Ajahn Piyasilo and Tan Moshe departed leaving behind in the stillness of the woods a peaceful abundance of Dhamma teachings for us to contemplate.

MISSISSIPPI PILGRIMAGE PART TWO

On July ninth Tan Jotipālo headed to Minnesota to meet up with Father William Skudlarek, a Benedictine monk from St. John’s Abbey. The two monks undertook an interfaith walking pilgrimage up the Mississippi River in northern Minnesota, covering about 85 miles in eight days along the Paul Bunyan Bike Trail. The walk was a success. A short journal can be read at: <http://monasticdialog.com/news.php>.

ORDINATIONS

Sāmaṇera Kassapo received the full acceptance (upasampada) into the bhikkhu Sangha on the evening of July fourteenth. It was the first ever night-time ordination held at Abhayagiri.



Sāmaṇera Kaccāna requests the pabbajjā, or “going forth”

The ceremony was well attended by Venerable Kassapo’s friends from Southern California.

Michael Bodman left the home life on July sixteenth, thus becoming an anagārika. Michael had served on the support team for the last winter retreat. He brings an attentive and helpful style to the resident community.

Anagārika Whit took pabbajjā, the “going forth” of a sāmaṇera on October sixth. His new name is Kaccāna, after Mahā-Kaccāna, the Buddha’s disciple foremost in expounding the detailed meaning of brief utterances. His parents, brother, sister, extended family and friends observed the ceremony.

DEVELOPMENT

This year we have mostly stuck to our “no new construction” determination at the monastery. OK, we have put up a small water softening shed to filter our spring-fed water supply to the main buildings. And, after many years of planning, we have erected a shrine house to provide shade to the golden Buddha statue that presides over the cloister compound. The new pavilion, a design collaboration of Ajahn Pasanno and Tan Ñāṇiko, provides a pleasant space in which to sit in meditation and pay respects to the Buddha.

So there may not be a lot to report on here in terms of external development. The work of greatest benefit, the true work that this monastery was established to support, is that of one’s inner development; the cultivation of peace born of seclusion, built on wholesome foundations in the spirit of lovingkindness. That work continues constantly in the ordinary flow of the present moment. Our spacious forest workshop is always open. 🙏

- *The Sangha*



The new Buddha shrine house

Tales from Varapañño

BODY OF COMPLETE ENJOYMENT

By Paul Breiter

“Compassion automatically invites you to relate with people, because you no longer regard people as a drain on your resources. They recharge your energy, because in the process of relating with them you acknowledge your wealth, your richness.... There is no feeling of poverty at all in this approach to life.”

-Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Ajahn Chah often said that it was after he became a teacher and abbot and had to deal with all sorts of people that his wisdom really increased, though in the eyes of some he was caught up in talking and socializing. Those who met him later in his life were inevitably struck by his radiant happiness and naturally drawn to him. I think most people felt that they had never seen anyone who seemed so comfortable with himself and who enjoyed life so thoroughly. Though he lived an extremely simple existence guided by a complex code of vows that included poverty and chastity and avoidance of almost all forms of entertainment and gratification, there was no sense of privation or tedium about him.

Mahayāna teachings speak of the “Three *Kāyas*,” the aspects of enlightened mind. The *Sambhogakāya*, usually represented by deities with any number of arms and faces, often in extremely wrathful, unearthly forms, is usually translated as the “Body of Complete Enjoyment.” It can be interpreted in many ways and on many levels, sometimes not relating at all to ordinary experience, but the term often comes to mind when thinking about Luang Por Chah and his complete enjoyment of life.

My very first impression of him, when a few of us from Wat Boworn¹ went to see him on one of his rare visits to Bangkok in 1970, was that he looked like a big, happy frog sitting on his lily pad. Newly ordained, I was struggling merely to hold on to my robes in those days, but upon meeting Ajahn Chah I immediately thought, if all you have to do to be like that is sit in the forest for 30 years, it would be worth it.

I made my first visit to his monastery, Wat Pah Pong, shortly after that. When I got there, they said that he was in southern Thailand, unable to return because of heavy rains. Based on my first impression of him from that brief meeting in Bangkok, I had a vivid image of Ajahn Chah sitting in an open jeep, stuck in the mud with rain falling heavily, and enjoying himself immensely.

After he returned, the small group of *farang*² who were at Wat Pah Pong (Sumedho, Suvijjano, Dhammagutto, and I) went to see him one evening. As Dhammagutto and I were newly ordained and had come from city monasteries, he spoke of the benefits of practicing in a forest monastery. “When you live in



Ajahn Chah, sweeping the grounds at Wat Pah Pong

the forest, half the job is already done,” he said. “Living in a city monastery is like trying to meditate in the marketplace.” That immediately brought to mind my frustrations at Wat Boworn: in particular I recalled the ice-cream vendor walking through the monastery and shouting to advertise his goods, and I started laughing. That was an image that stayed with me for a long time, in large part because of the lightness of spirit with which Luang Por had said it. It wasn’t said in a tone of condemnation or criticism, but one of amusement: this is just the way things are, and it’s actually funny (which might be a good summation of Ajahn Chah’s view of life).

Day in and day out, at all hours, he took on all comers, monastic or lay, Thai or foreign, doctor or rice farmer, young or old, in a way that is almost unparalleled among spiritual teachers. He had no personal life, nor did he seek disciples or fame. He also didn’t turn people away or try to hide from difficulty. He didn’t strain to be enthusiastic about things or try to find the bright side and think positively. Joy flowed naturally, as did his teaching.

He never really planned things out, though once he made his mind up to do something, he would focus relentlessly on it—yet was always ready to abandon anything on the spot and change course. The world came to find him, and nothing

1. Wat Boworn - A major monastery in Bangkok.

2. Farang - A Thai word referring to foreigners, particularly Westerners.

seemed to throw him. His inner wealth, his lack of worry or panic, communicated itself strongly. I think he enjoyed having *farang* disciples and felt some sort of freshness in talking with people who had different cultural habits. We also presented fresh challenges, but he took it all in stride. Which is not to say that he was all fun and gentleness. He could be stern, terrifying even, as well as imperious, overbearing, and cantankerous, and a terrible tease.

Classic descriptions of the bodhisattva talk about manifesting in whatever forms are needed, including as a bridge, medicine, food and shelter, a companion and a guide. On a more immediate level, Luang Por in the course of a day, a month, or a year might show many different personae and act in many different roles (and as abbot and teacher he also did provide the material support necessary for life). The vital point is that he was always giving—he wasn't trying to please himself. Nor did he have *things* to enjoy; it was just his mode of being. Certainly he was able to enjoy things such as good food, but he could drink horribly bitter *borapet*³ just like anything else.

“I realized that with my begging bowl and one set of robes I was the richest person in the universe and all beings were my children” is one of the statements the Buddha made about his enlightenment.

In Seattle, staying at the home of Ajahn Pabhākarō's parents, he asked if I could find some cigars for him. When we were downtown one day I came across a tobacco shop and bought a package to offer him. Then one afternoon I went for a walk in the neighborhood, and as I returned, from several houses away I smelled the distinctive aroma of a cigar. When I got to the Kappels' house, Luang Por was sitting in the driveway, puffing away and seemingly having a grand time.

He was endlessly amused, though not in the way that needs to belittle others (when he did belittle us, we usually knew he was teaching something, attacking pride or other habits and not people). He seemed to pull things out of thin air, puns that no one else would ever conceive of. After the meal, obviously very relaxed as he joked with the senior monks (while the juniors were anything but relaxed, weighed down with a day's food and wanting to get up and go), he often had the air of a storyteller in a bar. One day he said, “A little novice was taking the *Nak Tam* exams (a sort of scholastic certification), and he came to the question, ‘What does *dbamakarok* mean?’ (It's a fancy term for the water strainer that every monk is supposed to have, with one *m* instead of two, as in *dbamma*), and the novice wrote down ‘His Holiness the Sangharaja (the head of the monastic order in Thailand):’ [I'm not sure how well this reads but it was

funny at the time, and when I repeated it to a Thai monk years later he thought it was hilarious - PB].

He also liked to tell stories, and retell them endlessly, enjoying them more each time. In my first year at Wat Pah Pong, as I struggled to adjust and survive, I was involved in several incidents that became part of his canon of tales. Sometimes I went to tell him what had happened, other times the grapevine would report on me.

As he had me remain in *sāmaṇera* status for a long time, I was down at the end of the row in the eating hall. One hot season a local doctor sent his two young sons to stay at Wat Pah Pong. They took *anagārika* vows, wore white, and sat next to me. They were of course curious about this *farang*, a rare sight in Ubon in those years, and always wanted to talk with me. Dad would bring them things to supplement the lean dry season fare, and they offered me a bag of peanuts once. I kept them in my *yahm*⁴ and added a handful to my food each morning.

Then the inevitable occurred: one morning I awoke to find my *yahm* had been chewed through, and the peanuts spread all over the *kuti*. A mouse had discovered them. I threw the peanuts into the forest and in consternation went to show the *yahm* to Luang Por. He immediately asked if I had put any food in it, so I told him I about the peanuts. He thought that funny (of course) and had someone sew the *yahm* for me, since I hadn't yet learned to use a sewing machine.

But the next morning, there was another hole in my *yahm*. So I went back to see Luang Por again. He thought this was really hilarious. “It still has the smell of the nuts,” he said. So he had it sewn again, and I washed it well. Over the years that followed, I can't count how many times Luang Por would say things like, “Varapanyo really suffered when he first came to Wat Pah Pong. A mouse chewed his *yahm*!” or “Poor Varapanyo, he was hungry when he was a novice so he stored some peanuts in his *yahm*. Then one day he came to me and said, ‘Luang Por, a mouse chewed my *yahm*!’”

During hot season the *kutis*, with their tin rooves exposed to the sun, often became unbearable in daytime. Mine had a bathroom underneath with toilet and enough space to bathe in (though it was generally referred to as *hawng suam*, “toilet,” rather than *hawng nam*, “bathroom”). As it was made of concrete and was sheltered from the sun, I got the bright idea that it might be more comfortable in the daytime, so I brought a mat down there and would take a rest at midday and sit in meditation in it. Of course someone noticed and reported it to Luang Por, which again was repeated over the years—such a thing just wasn't done by Thai or Isan people. “Oy! Varapanyo suffered so much when he first ordained: he used to sleep in the toilet!” And he

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3. Borapet - A very bitter vine used as a medicinal tonic in Thailand.

4. Yahm - Handbag used by monks and novices.

Māra's Desk

By Mettika

Māra has over the years been an important entity in my life. For whatever reason, and there are many, the “evil one” has whispered in my ear. His voice sounds just like mine or yours if not seen and heard for what it is.

Just the other day I went to the local café and planned to order a delicious and healthy salad. When asked what I wanted, the words “cinnamon bun” slipped out of my mouth. The waitress asked if I would like that heated and I wondered why she would suggest that the salad would be heated. Then, understanding that Māra the tempter had crept in and that I could clarify the situation I still didn't. In one fell swoop and slip of the tongue the Lord of Darkness provided the keys to craving, desire, sloth, fear, doubt, stubbornness, and ignorance. I have discovered that Māra has a difficult time discerning between needs and wants.

The Evil One has a base sense of humor which is to corrupt, demote, disparage, disgrace, and depress others. Meditation and Dhamma are the only antidotes to his whisperings and he really does not like being seen. In fact, he slinks away hissing when caught. Whenever Māra is caught, we can have a good laugh at ourselves in the plight of the human condition. Some things I have learned by catching Māra in the act:

THE APPEARANCE OF MĀRA . . .

- Can allow us to see the impermanence of thoughts, feelings, fears and opinions.
- Can allow us to feel our suffering which in turn can release fear and lead to the arising of empathy for others.
- Can allow us to experience life as it is.
- Can help us to realize the Four Noble Truths.

Last year after being diagnosed with an extremely rare blood disease, I underwent a treatment called monoclonal antibody therapy which is a six hour infusion that takes place every three weeks. Every fifteen minutes, the nursing staff checked my heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen level, and other vital statistics. I thought, with Māra's help, how kind, wonderful, thoughtful and caring the staff was. Of course Māra suggested I not read the handout about the drug I was given until a few weeks later. At the top of the form in bold letters was written “Retuxamab may kill you.” The nursing staff was indeed thoughtful and caring but they were mostly interested if I were still living or had croaked while being infused.

I told this story to Ajahn Amaro, who in turn related a story Ajahn Chah told about a chicken who thought she was loved by her owner. The hen was picked up daily and rocked up and down. From the chicken's point of view she was loved and from the owner's point of view he was seeing when it was time for her to be part of a delicious and special Thai meal. 🙏

would always get a good laugh out of it, no matter how many times he told the story.

Everyone was welcome to join his party at any time. Sometimes, with his monks at Wat Pah Pong, he wouldn't let you leave the party. On the Uposatha days, during evening Dhamma talks, or before or after the meal, for example, he would keep us sitting and sitting while he taught, joked, discussed very minor business, and so on. We would be achy, restless, hungry, angry, wanting to go meditate in our *kutis* or sleep, while he was demonstrating right before our eyes that suffering is not necessary. The problem was of course that we didn't recognize there was a party going on, and while it was unlikely he would be able to force us to recognize that, I think he felt that if he kept on pointing in the right direction sooner or later some of us would get it. But no matter how dense or resistant we could be, there were always occasions when we would be at his kuti or listening to his desana in the sala, and in the immediacy of his joy and radiant presence, everything would drop away, all the great burdens and petty concerns, the mental aches and pains and sometimes the physical ones too.

The last time I saw Ajahn Som, the colorful renegade abbot of Wat Tam Saeng Pet, he was standing outside one afternoon, chewing betel nut and occasionally stepping aside to spit it out.

We had one of those rambling conversations that people who are in a hurry might consider pointless but which often yield up nuggets of gold. One thing I've always remembered is that out of the blue he said, “Most of us humans have a lot of karma to work through. Luang Por Chah is someone with little karma.” He meant negative karma, of course, the positive being *parami*, spiritual perfections. While Luang Por's perfections of morality, endurance, diligence, wisdom, and so forth were obvious, I never thought much in terms of generosity (as it's usually considered “layperson's practice” in Thailand and somehow inferior to keeping monastic precepts and practicing meditation), yet now it strikes me how totally generous he was and what richness, what wealth, he projected. “I realized that with my begging bowl and one set of robes I was the richest person in the universe and all beings were my children” is one of the statements the Buddha made about his enlightenment. That was over 2500 years ago, but in more recent times many of us had the good fortune to meet a living embodiment of that grand pronouncement in Ajahn Chah. 🙏

Lunar Observance Days

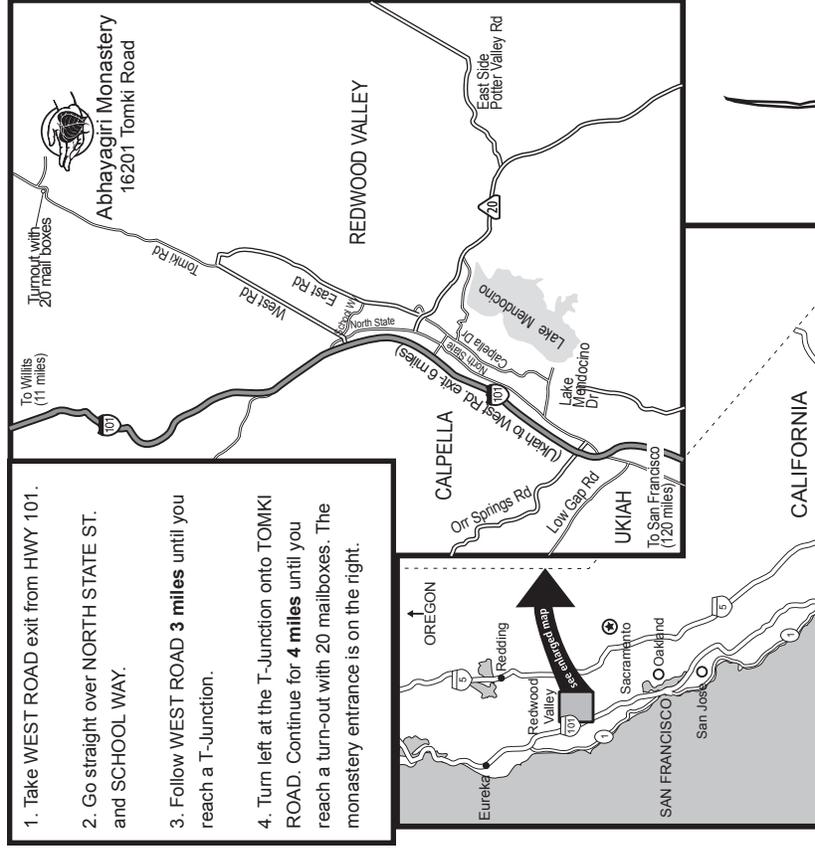
2551	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
	SUN 2	TUE 1					
	SUN 9	MON 7	WED 6	THU 6	SAT 5	SUN 4	TUE 3
	MON 17	TUE 15	THU 14	FRI 14	SUN 13	MON 12	WED 11
	MON 24	TUE 22	THU 21	FRI 21 ¹	SUN 20	MON 19 ²	WED 18
		WED 30	FRI 29	SAT 29	MON 28	TUE 27	THU 26

1. Maghā Pūjā

2. Vesākha Pūjā

Directions to Abhayagiri

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



Dec

- 4 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 8 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
- 9 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- 12 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino.
- 30 Daylong Retreat by Ajahn Amaro at Spirit Rock.

Jan

- 1 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 2 Monastic community enters retreat for three months.
- 16 Luang Por Chah memorial day.

Feb

- Monastic winter retreat.
- 5 Siladharas lead monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

Mar

- Monastic winter retreat.
- 4 Siladharas lead monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 21 Magha Pūjā.

Apr

- 1 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 5 Upasika Renewal Day.
- 6 Ajahn Amaro and Amelia Barili Daylong Retreat at Spirit Rock.
- 7 Ajahn Amaro leads retreats abroad in Europe until May 17th.
- 9 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino.
- 13 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- TBA Ajahn Dun to visit Abhayagiri.

May

- 5 Ajahn Dun to give Monday Night Talk at Spirit Rock.
- 6 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 11 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- 14 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino.
- 19 Vesākha Pūjā.
- TBA Luang Por Sumedho to visit Abhayagiri.

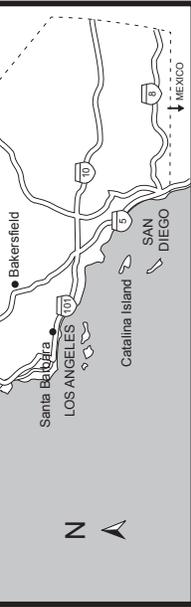
Every Saturday evening at Abhayagiri

Chanting, meditation & Dharma talk, beginning at 7:30 pm.

Every Lunar Quarter at Abhayagiri

Chanting, meditation, Precepts, Dharma talk, and late night vigil, beginning at 7:30 pm.

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



Contact Information

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Berkeley, CA 94703
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Fax. (510) 548 4551
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Berkeley Zen Center

Lay Group
Contact: Julie Schlein
1929 Russel St.
Tel. (415) 460 9918
juliepgs@gmail.com

Portland Friends of the Dhamma

1422 SE Tacoma St., 2nd Floor
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Spirit Rock Meditation Center

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Vimutti Monastery

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Bombay, 2343
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THAILAND

Wat Pah Nanachat

Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubon 34310

Second Sunday of each month (except Jan, Feb, Mar) at Abhayagiri
Community work day, 8:00 am–4:00 pm.

First Tuesday of each month at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery

5:00 pm–6:00 pm: Informal tea gathering.
7:30 pm–9:30 pm: Meditation, Precepts and Dhamma Talk by Theravāda monastic.

Every Tuesday at Berkeley Zen Center (except first Tuesday of the month)

7:30 pm–9:30 pm: Meditation and Dhamma program with lay practitioners.

Second Wednesday of each month at Yoga Mendocino

7:30 pm–9:00 pm: Meditation and Dhamma talk by Theravāda monastic. During the months of Jan, Feb, Mar, the evening will be led by an Upāsika.

Every Tuesday and Friday at Portland Friends of the Dhamma

7:00 pm–9:00 pm: Meditation and Dhamma discussion with lay practitioners.

☸ FEARLESS MOUNTAIN ☸

Fearless Mountain is the periodic newsletter Your input is welcome and of Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, a Buddhist appreciated. If you have comments, community in the Thai Forest tradition of suggestions, or wish to reprint any Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho. It is composed of the material contained in this materials submitted to or written at Abhayagiri and newsletter, please send an email to distributed free of charge to friends of the Abhayagiri abm.newsletter@gmail.com. Please community. Comment within is personal reflection only. keep us informed of your current address.

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16201 Tomki Road, Redwood Valley, CA 95470

Tel. (707) 485-1630 www.abhayagiri.org

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

A NOTE TO ALL OF OUR READERS

In the last issue of the newsletter there was a re-subscription form which you, the reader most likely filled out. There was an option to subscribe to the newsletter for the branch monasteries in England, the *Forest Sangha Newsletter*. Our apologies if you were interested in subscribing, because **Abhayagiri Monastery will no longer be the North American distributor of Forest Sangha Newsletter**. Below are some options if you are still interested in getting that newsletter:

- If you are interested in reading or printing the *Forest Sangha Newsletter*, you may do it online at <http://fsnewsletter.amaravati.org>.
- If you do not have access to a computer and/or printer, you may access this website using a computer at your public library.
- You may sign up for an **email notification** when a new issue is posted on the website at <http://fsnewsletter.amaravati.org/contact.htm>.
- Anyone who wishes to **receive a printed newsletter through the post from England** can enquire about postage costs at the following email address: fsn-mailer@amaravati.org. If you can cover the postage costs, the newsletter can be mailed to you directly from England.

(continued from page 1)

the board in terms of whether we're male or female, whether we're young or old, whether we're monastic or laypeople. One of the things to do is just to take the progression of change in life as a theme in the sense that when somebody is born they're a tiny little being and they grow and start to be able to move around and talk and do things. They become adolescents then adult and continue to change, continue to mature—it manifests in different ways, this change—all the way to old age and finally to death. Normally for most people there's not a lot of reflection on these natural changes in life.

This is where the Buddha taught that what obscures or obstructs seeing the truth of change is something called *santati*, which means continuity—there's a continuity of change and it's progressive, it's not abrupt. This continuity obscures and covers over the reality of impermanence. This makes it necessary to use reflection and investigation because the tendency is not to see it. There's just this continuity, everything's sort of flowing along okay, but in reality change is taking place. If you look, all of a sudden maybe you've got to go to the dentist because you've got cavities in your teeth, or whatever—changes happen. Or we're experiencing some sort of ache or pain or some sort of illness, and it creeps up and changes, and you end up having to deal with it. But there's this continuity that tends to obscure it, we don't take clear notice of it, we don't really pay attention, we don't hone in on it and see: "Ahh . . . this really is impermanent."

This is *anicca*. The Buddha used the word *anicca* to describe this truth of change. In English we can use the word 'impermanence' or 'inconstancy' or 'uncertainty'—those are all words that describe the reality of *anicca*. In the same way that we look at other people and the world around us and reflect on the nature of change, we should be paying attention to ourselves, turning that attention inwards and recognizing that what is changing is not just other people—those people out there—it's us as well. We're in a constant state of change or flux. We need to attend to this so we don't allow that feeling of continuity or that illusion of *santati* to obscure things. So bringing the investigation back to ourselves.

Notice this truth of change. Change starts immediately, even when we're conceived then change is happening and there is this element of suffering.

Turning it back on ourselves and then seeing—is this as the Buddha taught or not? We have to verify that for ourselves—if what the Buddha taught is actually true.

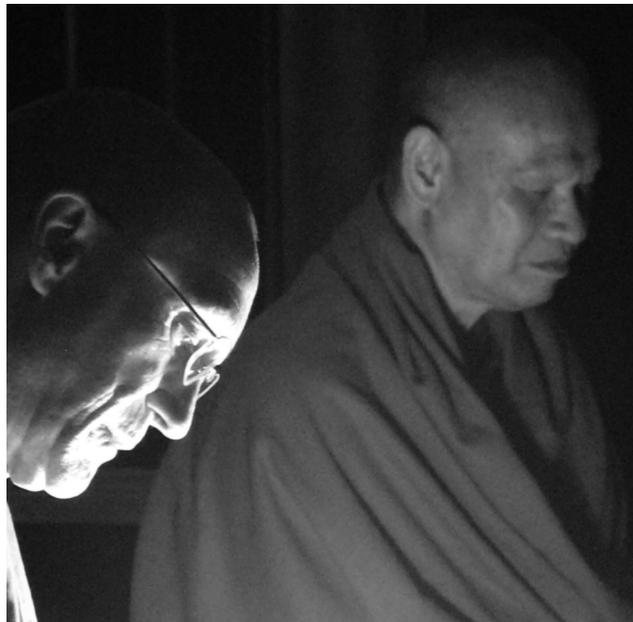
We hear that the body is impermanent and it seems like a fairly direct and easy statement, but the Buddha used it as a basis for teaching and pointing to very basic truths. Like in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, he asked the five ascetics, "Is this body permanent or impermanent?" And of course they have to answer "Well, it's impermanent." He says, "Well, if the body is impermanent, then is it pleasant, happiness, or is it suffering?"

"Well, yes, it's suffering, it's unsatisfactory." It seems straightforward but we really have to notice that whatever is impermanent tends to be unsatisfactory because it always changes and becomes otherwise. This is the nature of suffering or unsatisfactoriness. This word suffering is not just about feeling miserable, but more describing the way that something is not capable of completely and fully satisfying us.

Change is a key element that helps us to see that nature, that tendency [to suffer]. Notice this truth of change. Change starts immediately, even when we're conceived then change is happening and there is this element of suffering. When we're conceived and we're in the mother's womb then we're changing and growing all the time. There's an element of confinement there, being within the mother's womb. We're confined and sort of curled up and if anybody's ever seen in the forests in Thailand in the jungles, during the monsoon when the rains come, the

monkeys are in the trees trying to protect themselves from rain and they're all curled up, like a baby in the womb—it doesn't look very comfortable.

Then of course we were born and the first thing people do when they're born is cry. That's really what every baby is doing, that's its exclamation of truth: "Wow, this is suffering!" This is just the nature of life, even little babies understand this: "Wow, this is suffering!" Observe little babies when they're small, they see their older siblings or adults and they notice them walking and getting up. They're still quite small and not able to do that and they look and try to mimic that, and there's



Ajahn Pasanno translating for Luang Por Plien,
photo taken during this particular talk

this frustration of wanting to move and walk and they can't do it; the body's not working, and then they get frustrated and cry. You can notice that. Or they're hungry and they want their mother's milk and they cry. And they're not crying out of happiness and delight, they're crying out of suffering. Reality is "impinging" on them.

This pattern continues to manifest all through life. There's all the different illnesses that the body is prey to. We can have illnesses basically anywhere in the body. There's the capability of illness to manifest anywhere. We get eye diseases, ear diseases, nose diseases, tongue diseases—all those different senses are a venue for our gaining knowledge and experiencing the world, but they can fall apart on us. There are diseases for all the different organs of the body—heart diseases: heart attacks, enlarged hearts. Kidneys: kidney failure, gall stones. Every organ that we depend on for our life and our existence is subject to different kinds of disease. Cancer can manifest just about anywhere in the body.

To be able to just reflect, recollect that this is really the case, that anywhere in the body there can be disease. It isn't as if there's some country somewhere where there is no disease. Wherever there are human beings, there's illness. And it isn't as if it's limited to some special class of people who get ill—even doctors get ill. So, when one really investigates this, one can't help but ask oneself, "Isn't this suffering?" And one thinks, "Wow, yes, this is suffering." One recognizes that right from birth to growing up to aging to final death then there are difficulties and disease that we experience within the body, and the tendency of human beings is to try to rectify the situation by seeking medical knowledge, or some way to alleviate the condition. And, for as much medical knowledge as we have, there's still illness.

We want to alleviate disease, and there's a tremendous amount of knowledge available about the nature of the body and the illnesses it can have. We've searched for medicines from ancient times, when we'd rely on different plants and natural elements, to now where they're researching in a very refined way, finding the uses of different plants to different types of chemicals and whatnot—extraordinarily extensive.

Bring that up as a perspective of investigation, take on the perspective that, "Oh yes, the body is impermanent, the body is suffering." And if you don't believe the person who's teaching this, then you can just go take a look at hospitals, they are places where there is much illness. America's got to be full of hospitals.

That's the nature of having a physical body. We're going to have to experience illness or "dis-ease" at one point or another. Actually, just having a body is uncomfortable. We experience the discomfort of just having a body. When it's hot, then it's uncomfortable. We sit there sweating and feeling uncomfortable.

We think about getting a fan, getting air conditioning, finding water to bathe in just to cool down so that we can escape the discomfort of heat. Of course it isn't hot all the time, sometimes it's cold, and then it's suffering again. If you live in a place where there's snow and ice as a part of the seasons, then those places have to have stoves and furnaces and you have to find firewood, oil or coal to be able to heat up the buildings that people live in. We have to find proper clothes, sweaters and jackets and there are many industries that create clothing to stave off the cold. Even right now as we're sitting here, at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, and it's cold [giving a talk at the outside meditation platform in 55 degree weather], it's not really comfortable. This is the way of nature.

When we have a body we experience these different aspects of discomfort. In some countries where it's cold then they raise sheep for wool and they take the wool and make sweaters and different articles of clothing to keep warm. But think of those poor sheep! They're pretty cold already so they have this wool and then humans go and cut the wool off, and there's these poor freezing sheep around. We go and take it away from them, and that's not very fair.

Furthermore, we get thirsty and have to find water in different ways either from streams, lakes or wells and we have to filter, strain and soften it and there's all sorts of factories and industries to do this. If we don't have water we can't live for very long at all. We also get hungry. This is a really big problem, having a body that gets hungry and needs to be fed. All of the different crops, and the difficulty of planting and raising all the food that we need in order to eat, and people have to go to university to study agriculture just to deal with the human need to appease hunger. Everybody has to find money, just to go out and buy food. We have to find an occupation. Whether we're laborers or casual workers or we have a profession, we're engineers, whatever occupation we have it's basically to find the money to be able to eat. We need to feed ourselves all the time.

So, we're trying to find a sense of comfort, of ease within the physical experience of having a body. All of our efforts at making a living and saving money and paying it out, it's trying to find a sense of comfort and ease. There's a certain effort

It isn't as if there's some country somewhere
where there is no disease.

that's always being put into working, to try to find that easeful quality. Everybody experiences that. We get tired from

our work. Take taxi drivers. Sometimes they have to put in extraordinarily long hours, and it's tiring—exhausting. Being an airline pilot, whatever the job is, it's tiring. We get exhausted trying to find the means to experience comfort and ease within this body. So it's a rhetorical question: is this suffering or not? We're recognizing that all of the things we purchase, all of the commercial elements of an economy are there for trying to find

some comfort.

It isn't just physical. You get all these things when having to look after the body, water and food and whatnot, but then you've got to build toilets too. And they're just for relieving suffering. Whether it's in a home or a monastery, you've got to provide for these things, you have to take them into account. Isn't this really a problem for everybody?

All of our efforts at making a living and saving money and paying it out, it's trying to find a sense of comfort and ease. There's a certain effort that's always being put into working, to try to find that easeful quality. Everybody experiences that.

This is suffering, but it tends to be obscured in the same way that continuity obscures impermanence. The four postures obscure suffering. We're changing our postures, moving to alleviate suffering, and as a result we don't notice it. If we're walking along and it gets to be a bit difficult, then there is suffering just in walking so we try to find something more comfortable. But if you're walking at Abhayagiri Monastery then if you try to go *anywhere*, that's going to be suffering [because of the steep terrain]. So we have the suffering of walking and then we sit down thinking that's going to make it more comfortable and it's okay for a while but after sitting for a time that starts to get uncomfortable as well and then we decide, "Maybe I'll lay down and have a rest and that will be pleasant." Then it's okay for a while but that's suffering too. It doesn't take all that long, you're laying and resting and then your back starts to hurt—some people even if they're lying down they're restless and they toss and turn, and some people even toss and turn and they fall out of bed, and that's suffering.

It's important to reflect for oneself: "Is it like this or not?" We need to bring it inward as it's said in the characteristics of the Dhamma: *Opanayiko* is turning the qualities of Dhamma inward, seeing within our own experience that, "Being born is like this, having a body is like this." So in order to be practitioners, to be people who are meditators, we need to be able to turn our attention inward, reflect and investigate so that we can see this clearly.

Aging is another aspect of the body that we need to be contemplating. We recognize that as the body ages, things get more difficult. Being an old person—60, 70, 80 years old, even 90 years old, this is difficult. Having to get up and carry the heavy body around starts to be difficult. Walking is difficult. Notice you're not as limber, and it's difficult getting around. Sometimes one is not so steady on one's feet and then one has to start using a cane. Or there are aches and pains in the legs, and then you need to have some support, a walker. You start off with two legs,

and you increase to three legs, then to four legs in order to be able to get around. And then after some time as we continue to get older, we'll need to have people helping us. With people who are older, they'll sometimes have their grandchildren help them just to be able to get up the stairs, to help them to get around and do things, and that's just the nature of the body. But even after a while as we continue to age, it might not be so easy

to get around anymore, we're not so able to be mobile and we're left with merely sitting and lying down. You get up and it's "oyy!" you sit down and it's "oyy!"

It isn't as if it's just affecting the body. The mind and the moods get affected as well. We experience this as a painful mental sensation, a mood

of mental discomfort. Take the time to investigate and recognize that it's just this way, this is just the nature of things, it isn't any way else, whether we like or don't like it, whether we approve or disapprove, it's just this way. That gives a sense of equanimity and strength. This is why it's so necessary to turn attention to reflection and investigation.

Also recognize that it isn't just aging with no end in sight. We also have to experience death, and death is suffering. Similarly it's helpful to prepare oneself or be able to reflect on a continuous basis, because death can turn into something external and way off into the future. And it's not just the body that dies, but throughout life our moods, our thoughts, our thinking is constantly being born and dying, moods are constantly being born and dying, thoughts—whatever they are, whether coarse or refined, they're being born and they're dying. This is a cycle that is pointing to nature, pointing to just how things are. And to recognize: "Ahh, it's just like this, this is the way it is." The Buddha said the body is *anattā*—why would he bother to point this out? In the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* the Buddha asks, "Whatever is subject to impermanence, subject to change, can this be self?" and then the five ascetics of course have to answer, "No, that's not appropriate to hold as self, as me. If it's impermanent and changing why would one cling to it as oneself?" If it were truly ours and belonged to us then it would listen to us and that's not the case. We can't really order it to follow our commands.

When we're very young and we like to play, we really want to stay like that. But then change happens, we get older and we're separated from that quality of youngness. And we're maybe adolescent and we're growing up and feeling this is a really good time of life, "I really want it to be like this," but then it changes again. We can't force ourselves to stay within that condition. Or perhaps when we're older, 40-ish and we feel the peak of maturity and power and strength of well-being and we want it always to be like this, but we can't make it stay that way. We don't want the body to age, but it goes ahead and does it

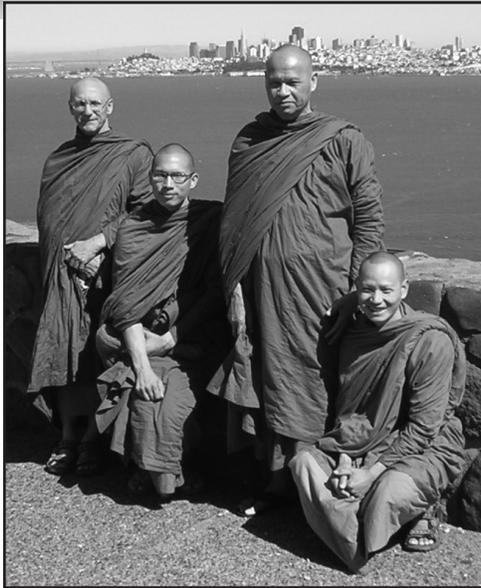
anyway. We don't want the body to be sick but it just goes ahead and does it anyway, and again this isn't just something that happens here. Wherever there's a human being, it's going to be like this.

Anyone who wishes to control the body and make it be according to their wishes is going to find that it's impossible. Even doctors, they get sick and their body changes. In the end it's really that we don't want to die. That mystery and fear of death is very primal. Parents always want to be with their children, they don't want to be separated from their children, they don't want them to die, they want to be with their children all the time. Husband and wife want to be together, they don't want to be separated but inevitably somebody has to go before the other, and that's the nature of reality. We're all the same in this universal condition, which the Buddha described as being *anattā*—this is all not-self, at no point is the body something that we can say, "This is who I truly am, this is me and its going to be like this, always."

The teaching of the Buddha points to universal truths for all beings, even animals. They're all subject to aging, sickness and death. All are subject to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, not-self. When we reflect on these universal characteristics it'll finally dawn on us, "Oh. . . It's just like this! It has to be this way." And when we gain that insight, "Oh, this is the true nature of things," we recognize that we need to look after ourselves, not just trying to make the body comfortable, but looking after ourselves with understanding and wisdom. The most efficacious way of looking after ourselves is seeing that, "Ah, this is not-self. This is *anattā*." Whether it's our perception of our body in the past or future, near or far, coarse or refined, that too has to be *anattā*. Wisdom is just seeing that this is natural and ordinary.

When we see clearly, quite naturally we begin to let go, to relinquish. We will be able to step back from the passion and desire of wanting to *be* according to our preferences. Seeing, "This is the way it is" and just letting go is freedom. When we let go, we're not letting go in a way that there's nothing to do, but when we let go that's when we can truly focus on using our bodies, using our life for that which is good. We can pay attention more completely to that which is wholesome.

What is it that leads to peace? We've got the clarity and the space to really turn attention to the development of that which is truly good. It's like having a house—you need to keep it clean and in good repair. You need to paint it and fix it up so that it's pleasant to live in. In the same way, attending to the wholesome will help us to not get distracted or deflected by misunderstanding the true nature of things. We really need to see the



Group in San Francisco
From left: Ajahn Pasanno, Tan Moshe,
Luang Por Plien, Tan Kassapo

nature of the body clearly to be able to look after it properly. We should use the body skillfully for seeking wisdom and freedom from suffering.

We're actually quite like those five ascetics that the Buddha was teaching. The five ascetics wanted to experience freedom from suffering, to be liberated, basically to be happy. If we pay attention and see the same truths that the Buddha taught those five ascetics, then we also can be free. Those truths are just the ordinary truths of the nature of the body. And when we see that, we can let go of desire and attachment to the body.

In actuality, it's not just the body, it's all of what are called the five *khandas*, the aggregates of being which, in addition to the body, include the elements of the mind—feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. Tonight I'm just focusing on the body. If I taught all five *khandas* tonight it would be really extensive and take up a lot of time. Actually, it's not really necessary because if we see the nature of the body we'll also see the nature of the mind. So please reflect and investigate in order to understand this, really turn attention inward and question yourself, "Is this the way it is or not?" Because when we *do* see in this way, it truly alleviates the attachment and clinging that tends to obstruct the mind. When we really see clearly it's not just desire that is attenuated or falls away, but also anger and aversion, we'll really be able to live without having to be caught in the conflicts that come from ill will and aversion. We'll be able to really let go of *abamkara* and *mamamkara*, which are the 'I'-making and 'mine'-making tendencies. It's this fabricating of me and mine, of I, that creates a sense of self and other, which in turn leads to all the feelings of separation—which is constructed. We're fabricating it! Let go of the attachment to all things and see that non-self nature.

The teachings of the Lord Buddha are always available to us because the truths that the Buddha points to are everywhere, they simply point to the nature of things. Whether a Buddha arises in the world or a Buddha doesn't arise in the world, the nature of things is that there is this *anicca*—impermanence, there is *dukkha*—this unsatisfactoriness, there is this *anattā*—this non-self nature. Reality is just like this. Having offered these teachings for reflection I give my blessings with my wish that you all are able to take them and use them for your own development. 🙏

Spirit Rock Family Retreat

Reflections by Tan Abimsako

Early August and it's that time of the summer when the Spirit Rock Family Retreat takes place. Once again Ajahn Amaro, in keeping with tradition, was invited to participate as one of the four teachers leading the retreat, joining Heather Sundberg, Betsy Rose, and Julie Wester—the Family Retreat *dream team*—for this five-day event. For me, it was the third time that I have been blessed with the opportunity to accompany Abhayagiri elders who have taught there (Ajahn Pasanno has also participated in past years).

These retreats have been running now for ten years and have been developed and enriched through the experience of many people over that time. This year, approximately thirty-five families and twenty teachers, counselors, and support-people, gathered together for this annual retreat. Some of the activities included family meditation and Dhamma teachings, Dhamma songs, pilgrimages on the Spirit Rock land, an art tent, sport activities (for those with *loads* of energy), a traditional Native American sweat lodge, parent discussion groups, and a 'water world' consisting of pools and sprinklers. One afternoon also saw the opportunity to go on a field trip off the Spirit Rock land. Ajahn Amaro and I went with the group on a walk across the Golden Gate Bridge—Ajahn for the first time and thirty-five years since I'd ridden my apple-red Schwinn Sting-Ray bicycle across it.

Each year the retreat has a theme, and this year's was generosity. Each full day of the retreat saw a different aspect of generosity as the focus of the day's intent. The retreat began on Wednesday evening, and at the following morning's communal gathering we were all encouraged by Ajahn Amaro to investigate "the gift of fearlessness." For me this was something that, although I'd heard it spoken about before, I'd never deeply considered. Somehow being part of this retreat, and in this

particular environment that was striving to create an atmosphere of safety/no-fear, this theme really struck home with me. There is so much going on in people's lives and the fact that these families were able to gather together for these precious days was in itself a rare blessing. But how much the richer if they could be in a place where they were fearless? So I kept (and keep) asking myself, "How can my verbal and bodily actions help create fearlessness?" (My name literally means "harmless one.")

Friday saw Ajahn Amaro expound on the theme of "the generosity of the joy of giving," and Saturday's theme was "the generosity of time and presence" (or "attention"). Not only were we hearing these morning reflections, but many of each day's activities were structured to highlight further the theme-of-the-day, giving the retreatants the opportunity to remind themselves and investigate generosity through direct action/experience and its results. For example, all of a sudden a young person would rush up with something to offer you, and you'd see the joy in their face—direct experience of the joy of giving. And then they'd witness the experience of the joy of receiving by seeing your reaction.

During the retreat Ajahn Amaro was able use his then very-recently-acquired knowledge of the latest Harry Potter book, which he skillfully used by weaving its characters (with very decent vocal renditions!), and stories into his own reflections on the Dhamma.

Saturday night, the last night of the retreat, saw the traditional campfire with singing, music, story-telling, jokes, and refreshments. Around the glow of the fire could be seen the joyous faces of this temporary Sangha-tribe, as different people offered their contributions to the evening's bill.

On the last morning at Spirit Rock, while reflecting on the theme of fearlessness, I strongly felt that those five days had been spent in a time and place where no fear had entered my mind. My only wish is that I was not alone. 🙏





*“If you can let go,
Your mind will calm down through meditation.*

*If you can calm down,
You will be happy.*

Do you agree with me?”

- Luang Por Plien

MONASTIC RESIDENTS

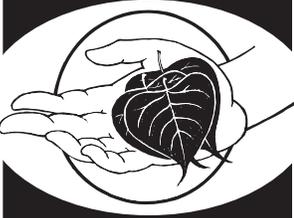
	vassa		vassa		vassa
Pasanno Bhikkhu	34	Cāgānando Bhikkhu	3	Sāmaṇera Cunda	1
Amaro Bhikkhu	29	Sampajāno Bhikkhu	2	Sāmaṇera Kaccāna	1
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	10	Ṭhitābho Bhikkhu	1	Anagārika Nic Grueff	1
Ñāṇiko Bhikkhu*	5	Kassapo Bhikkhu	1	Anagārika Michael Bodman	1
Ahiṃsako Bhikkhu	4				

* Away in India until January

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

**ABHAYAGIRI
BUDDHIST
MONASTERY**

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Redwood Valley CA 95470



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SĪLADHĀRAS COMING TO AMERICA

The nuns of Amaravati and Chithurst are exploring the idea of establishing a community in the United States – most likely on the west coast. This is exciting news for the Saranaloka Foundation, a nonprofit that was set up to support them coming here to practice and teach. Several things are being planned to see if the time is right to take the first steps towards a permanent community.

Ajahns Ānandabodhi and Santacitta will be coming for the winter months, January 10–March 6, and living somewhere in the Bay Area. We are looking for a house for them and Anagārikā Santussika to create a temporary “pocket monastery” that is fairly central. This is a wonderful opportunity to help support the quickly expanding vision of a more permanent monastery here. They will be the guest teachers for the two first Tuesday sittings in Berkeley in February and March, during the time when Abhayagiri is on retreat, as well as visiting sanghas around the Bay Area and traveling to Oklahoma and the Northwest.

Ajahns Mettā, Ṭhānasanti, Upekkhā, and Ṭhāniyā will all be visiting America within the next year. Meetings to discuss the potential community here will be set up. News on the future monastery, meetings, the nuns’ teaching schedules and information on Saranaloka can be found at www.saranaloka.org. If you do not have access to the web, feel free to call me at (408) 379-6835.

- Jill Boone, Saranaloka Foundation

