

# FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

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In all Theravada countries chanting is a large part of the religious observance, both for the laity and in the monastic life. Morning and evening chanting is pretty well universal in the monasteries in Asia. What's usually chanted are passages either taken directly from the *suttas* or worked over a bit for phonic and mnemonic reasons to create a chant that has some musical quality to it.

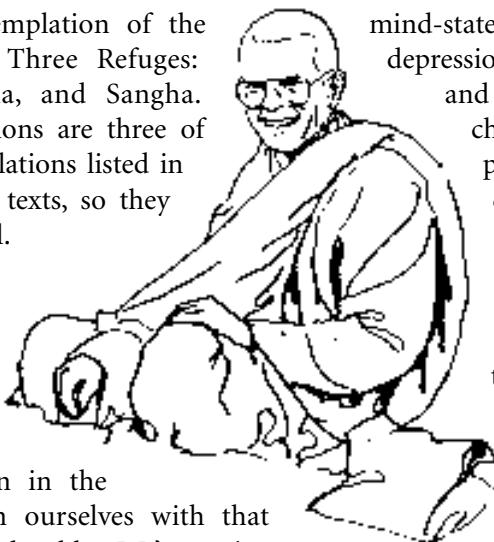
The act of chanting is a devotional meditation practice. It is a form of contemplation. The centerpiece of our own morning and evening chanting is built around the contemplation of the Three Jewels or Three Refuges: Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. These contemplations are three of the forty contemplations listed in the commentarial texts, so they are very traditional.

The benefits of contemplating the Three Jewels are manifold. We experience an uplifting sensation in the heart as we align ourselves with that which is higher and nobler. We're tuning

in to the frequency of our highest potential—the Buddha being representative of a human being who achieved his full potential; the Dhamma being the expression of ultimate truth; and the Sangha being the body of enlightened beings, past, present and future.

## Chanting the “Mirror of the Dhamma”

by Venerable Punnadhammo



mind-states, lift us out of dullness and depression, and bring us into joy and light. Joy is a very strong characteristic of devotional practice. It helps us to overcome the self-view and ego-clinging through the surrender to that which is the highest potential.

So, I thought I'd go through the words for what's called "The Mirror of the Dhamma," which is the chant that begins

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# FROM THE MONASTERY

## COMMUNITY

The first significant event of the fall took place on September 26: Samanera Ahimsako took full bhikkhu ordination. Tan Ahimsako's mother and eldest brother were there to offer his robes and bowl, along with other friends and community members who were there to witness the rare and noble event. The ordination took place on a beautiful sunny autumn day at the monastery, with preparations beginning first thing in the morning. The ceremony was held in the late afternoon and continued on into the evening. Ajahn Viradhammo came from Ottawa to join the event, and two monks and an upasika from KPY monastery, the small Thai forest monastery located beyond the ridge from Abhayagiri, also attended.

The following day Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Viradhammo, Ajahn Sudanto, Tan Karunadhammo, and Tan Nyaniko headed to Land of Medicine Buddha in Santa Cruz for the tenth annual Western Buddhist Monastic Conference. Monks and nuns from the Theravada, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Korean Zen, Soto Zen, and Ch'an traditions came together to discuss the topic of "simplicity and renunciation." Reverend Heng Sure of the Chinese Mahayana tradition and Venerable Drimay of the Tibetan Gelugpa tradition facilitated the conference, and the monastics engaged in friendly dialogues centered on practice issues, the balance between meditation with work, and the benefits of living a celibate life. Old friendships were strengthened and new ones formed. The fully ordained bhikkhus of the different traditions were able to recite the monks' *Patimokha* training rules together on the uposatha day, while the bhikkhunis recited their *Patimokha* together in another location. This made for a strong sense of connection and har-

mony between the different traditions. Speakers from all traditions told stories of their practice and of obstacles in their holy life. The sense of unity between these traditions led to expressions of hope that everyone would meet again next year and made for a colorful group photograph. At the end of the conference the total number of years in robes was added up: 500 for 30 monastics.

Our group returned October 1 to prepare for the third annual Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage, a two-day ride from Spirit Rock Meditation Center to Abhayagiri, with a stop at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The weather was much cooler this year, which made for a pleasant ride. One biker, when interviewed by a newspaper, exclaimed, "This is by far the best ride I've ever done. I rate my rides on food, scenery, and friendliness, and this ride had the best of all three." The community at Abhayagiri greeted the riders on the afternoon of the second day, and Ajahn Pasanno gave a talk about the benefits of pilgrimage. Reverend Heng Sure joined the event and closed with a powerful "Sharing of Merit" song.

The "Monastic Men of the West" Buddhist-Christian dialogue took place at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas this year and was attended by Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Sudanto. The group visited Abhayagiri during day three of their four-day meeting. Ways of spiritual practice and views concerning living a monastic life in America were discussed. In the same vein as the Western Buddhist Monastic Conference, friendships were made and wishes for a more large-scale Buddhist-Christian monastic dialogue were expressed.

Another special event this fall was the annual *Kathina*, or Robe-Offering Ceremony. This ceremony, which was originated by the Buddha himself, is held within one month after the rains retreat (*Vassa*) has finished. On this day the laity gathers



Participants at the 2004 Western Buddhist Monastic Conference

Photo by Dwight Smith



Venerable Ahimsako's mother presents his robes at ordination.

and offers cloth to the Sangha to be dyed and sewn into a robe by the monks. The robe must be finished before the next dawn in order to be a valid Kathina robe, so the monks have to work together in the stages of sewing and dying. The Sangha chose one monk who is pure in the discipline and who knows the rules and observances of the Kathina Ceremony as the candidate to receive the robe. Ajahn Pasanno received the Kathina robe this year.

Ajahn Jayasaro, along with about eighteen of his lay disciples, visited during the Kathina period. Ajahn Jayasaro, a former abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, is also a good friend of Ajahn Pasanno. Ajahn Jayasaro has been working with some of his lay supporters to help promote the teachings and practice of Buddhism in the education system of Thailand, mainly on elementary levels. Before leaving California, Ajahn Jayasaro also had the opportunity to meet with some of the teachers at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas schools and at Spirit Rock Meditation Center to discuss the integration of Buddhist principles into education.

In December, four monks and two anagarikas headed to Los Angeles to see the Body Worlds exhibit. Body Worlds is an exhibit of real human bodies—people who have donated their bodies to science when they died—that have been “plastinated.” Plastination is a process in which chemicals are injected throughout the body and gases are used to harden them, thus preserving the hardened corpse, dissected and posed in any way. This was a great way to get close images of the inside of the human body and use them in the meditative practice of body contemplation. Normally a monk in Thailand would see an autopsy for the same reason, but access to autopsies is very difficult in the U.S., especially if people have never heard of the various Buddhist contemplations around the human body.

The group then headed to Wat Metta to pay respects to the abbot, Ajahn Thanissaro (also known as Ajahn Geoff).

Wat Metta is located in Valley Center, near San Diego, and is comprised of eighty acres of avocado orchard. The group spent the night at Wat Metta, then joined the Sangha there for the meal the next day. The successful three-day journey ended with a long, long drive back.

Ajahn Pasanno left Abhayagiri on December 8 for his annual trip to Thailand. He returned from his travels on December 28 after spending time with family in Canada. This happened to be two days after the terrible tsunami disaster in Asia, so the next few days were spent chanting and wishing well for those who have died and those who have survived but lost family. Ajahn Amaro was in southern India at the time, but soon after the disaster he sent us an e-mail assuring us that he was alive and well and that he wasn't in an area hit by the waves. His year-long pilgrimage nearing its end, Ajahn Amaro has set his return date as June 16, and the community is looking forward to his return.

After five years of bhikkhu training, Tan Hasapañño, Tan Jotipalo, and Tan Phasuko now have a chance to leave *nissaya*, or dependence on the teacher, in order to train in different ways and in different monasteries. Tan Hasapañño has gone to practice and train in Thailand after spending about two years at Abhayagiri. Tan Jotipalo left Abhayagiri and is now on his Mississippi Pilgrimage, which began on March 1 (see page 7). Tan Phasuko spent two months away at his uncle's Laotian monastery in Houston, Texas, and then returned to Abhayagiri for the winter retreat. The community also welcomed back Tan Dhammadaso after his eight-month stay at Birken Forest Monastery in British Columbia.

## TEACHING

**O**n September 19 Ajahn Pasanno led a daylong retreat at Three Jewels Dhamma Hall in Fort Bragg. Ajahn Pasanno started with some guided breath meditation and focused his talks around the simple but profound theme of suffering and the ending of suffering. At the end of the retreat Mettika gave a talk on *dana* (generosity) and why it is so important for people to bring this quality into their lives.

Abhayagiri's annual ten-day Thanksgiving retreat was held this year at the beautiful Angela Center in Santa Rosa and was led by Ajahn Pasanno and Taraniya. Shirley Jayanta Johannesen assisted by providing yoga instruction, leading awareness of body meditations, and offering other reflections on Dhamma. The retreat was an opportunity for many of the monastery's friends, old and new, to come together and practice diligently in a supportive and delightful community environment. Two of the primary teaching themes throughout the retreat were the Five Hindrances and the Four Foundations of

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# These Are the Highest Blessings

by Kathryn Guta

*The following is based on a presentation given to the CALM (Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers) group on February 27, 2004. Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro as well as several members of the extended community were in attendance. Their reflections and lively discussion during the presentation have been woven into this article.*

We all want to be happy, but what sort of life leads to happiness? The *Mangala Sutta* begins with a heavenly being, a deva, asking the Buddha what might be the most auspicious talisman leading to a happy life.

*Mangala* literally means “protective amulet,” something you wear around your neck. The Buddha cleverly twists the meaning of the word away from superstition and into a discussion of living our lives in such a way that we abide in accordance with truth, thus bringing protection and blessings into our own lives and those around us.

So what is the highest blessing? What is the most perfect charm? What is the mantra that will always protect us against everything? One can see that the question is loaded.

It's significant that this question comes from a deva. According to Buddhist mythology, devas live in the heavenly realms where every sensual desire is fulfilled. When the deva reports that devas “are concerned for happiness and ever long for peace,” she is acknowledging that one cannot free oneself from suffering through satisfying the myriad sensual desires that may arise.

In our present day, we may feel too sophisticated to wear a rabbit's foot around our neck. However, we may still put a lot of faith in the Dow Jones, real estate values or sufficient insurance policies to protect ourselves, our families and everything we own. The whole Department of Homeland Security depends on putting our faith in security cameras and armed guards—the hardware and science of protection. Yet deep inside, our anx-

iety builds because we know that no piece of paper or camera can prevent untoward events. How can we be sure we will be safe?

In my work as a nurse, I notice people sometimes view following a healthy lifestyle as a lucky charm. I'm going to eat right, do yoga, take supplements, and nothing bad will ever happen to me. When people are diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, they may be willing to follow any regime, no matter how far out it might sound, as a way of ensuring that they will get better. When we hear someone has died, we may try to distance ourselves from our own inevitable demise by reflecting on aspects of our lifestyle that keep us “safe.” We may think: “Well, she smoked, so she got lung cancer. I don't smoke, so I won't get lung cancer. I'm safe from that one!”

We are trying to control things in our lives, everything. We are upset when life does not bend to our control. That is the ordinary human experience without the Dhamma. We say to ourselves: “I will do the research. I will do everything right, and it should work. If it doesn't, then I will sue.” This is how we respond to dukkha in America: I'm suffering and someone must be to blame. It doesn't occur to us that there might be no one to blame, not even ourselves. It might just be the nature of the way things are: undependable, unworthy of our confidence, impermanent.

In a way, we can use even meditation and spirituality like another lucky charm. We may use our practice as a way of controlling a difficult situation: I will practice metta and this problem person in my

life will stop saying troublesome things to me. We want to have some safety or protection even though we really have no control over another person's behavior.

So what did the Buddha say about staying safe, peaceful and happy? In brief, he said that sila, samadhi and pañña are essential for living a blessed life. In other words, the Mangala Sutta summarizes morality, concentration and wisdom; the entire map of the Dhamma is revealed in relatively few words.

*Avoiding those of foolish ways.* Foolishness means not observing basic morality or the five precepts. Conversely, we want to *associate with the wise*, or those who do observe basic morality.

*To honor those worthy of honor* is to honor teachers, parents and monastics. The best way to give honor to them is to live according to the Dhamma.

*Living in places of suitable kinds.* This refers to places made up of the fourfold assembly: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. It also refers to places where the Buddha's teaching can be found.

*With the fruits of past good deeds.* The idea is that we will be born in a suitable place if we have good kamma. It is assumed that we must have done something good to give us the kamma to come in contact with the teachings in this lifetime.

*Guided by the rightful way* means letting go of the unwholesome and cultivating good. This seems pretty obvious, a real "no brainer," but it is not always that obvious.

Ajahn Chah said that people want happiness but they never want to

create the causes of happiness. People don't want suffering but they love to create the causes of suffering. Even as you read these words and think that they make sense, in only a few seconds you may create the causes of suffering again. If you want to be protected, don't put yourself in situations where you will be vulnerable. If you don't want to get hit by a car, don't try to walk across the freeway.

*Accomplished in learning* is to remember and consolidate the Buddha's teaching. *Craftman's skills* are household arts and crafts, any work that's not against the precepts. "Houseless" skills would be working with the four requisites: i.e., gathering alms food, mending robes, cleaning the shelter, and caring for one's health.

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## The Mangala Sutta

Thus have I heard that the Blessed One  
Was staying at Savatthi,  
Residing at the Jeta's Grove  
In Anathapindika's park.

Then in the dark of the night, a radiant deva  
Illuminated all Jeta's Grove.  
She bowed down low before the Blessed One  
Then standing to one side she said:  
"Devas are concerned for happiness  
And ever long for peace.  
The same is true for humankind.  
What then are the highest blessings?"

"Avoiding those of foolish ways,  
Associating with the wise,  
And honoring those worthy of honor.  
These are the highest blessings."

"Living in places of suitable kinds,  
With the fruits of past good deeds  
And guided by the rightful way.  
These are the highest blessings."

"Accomplished in learning and craftsman's skills,  
With discipline, highly trained,  
And speech that is true and pleasant to hear.  
These are the highest blessings."

"Providing for mother and father's support  
And cherishing family,  
And ways of work that harm no being,  
These are the highest blessings."

"Giving with Dhamma in the heart,  
Offering help to relatives and kin,  
And acting in ways that leave no blame.  
These are the highest blessings."

"Steadfast in restraint, and shunning evil ways,  
Avoiding intoxicants that dull the mind,  
And heedfulness in all things that arise.  
These are the highest blessings."

"Respectfulness and of humble ways,  
Contentment and gratitude,  
And hearing the Dhamma frequently taught.  
These are the highest blessings."

"Patience and willingness to accept one's faults,  
Seeing venerated seekers of the truth,  
And sharing often the words of Dhamma.  
These are the highest blessings."

"The Holy Life lived with ardent effort,  
Seeing for oneself the Noble Truths  
And the realization of Nibbana.  
These are the highest blessings."

"Although involved in worldly ways,  
Unshaken the mind remains  
And beyond all sorrow, spotless, secure.  
These are the highest blessings."

"They who live by following this path  
Know victory wherever they go,  
And every place for them is safe.  
These are the highest blessings."

## The Highest Blessings (*continued from page 5*)

*With discipline highly trained.* The householders' discipline is abstaining from the tenfold causes of wrong action. The three bodily actions are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The four verbal actions are lying, slandering, rude speech and idle gossip. The three mental actions are covetousness, ill will and false view.

*Providing for mother and father's support.* It is considered impossible to repay the support one is given by one's parents. This is because parents give birth to us, feed us and introduce us to the world.

I was just with my mother, who recently had a hip replaced. Before going to see her, I had read a story of how Ajahn Sumedho had rubbed his aged father's feet. This seemed like a wonderful way to acknowledge the debt to one's parents, and I thought my mother might also really appreciate a foot massage. Just like Ajahn Sumedho's father, she at first refused with a big "No." Luckily, I had been prepped by the ajahn's story to persist even after being turned down. "Well, okay, if you really want to," my mother finally said, as if to please me. In a little while, she seemed very happy to have her feet massaged. There are things more easily communicated through touch than through words.

*Cherishing family* means caring for family with metta, karuna, mudita and upekkha and not indulging in attachment or affection. Attachment leads to grief, and affection leads to fear. In the Mangala Sutta, the Buddha lets us know how to relate lovingly to one another. But we must remember that pain and sorrow come from those who are dear to us. If something untoward happens to the one we love, we suffer. This is why the Buddha encourages us to connect through metta and karuna, loving kindness and compassion, rather than the worldly ways of attachment and affection.

*Work that harms no being.* This is work that brings no harm to yourself or others, work that brings no mental confusion and also avoids disturbing others.

*Giving with Dhamma in the heart* is cultivating nongreed and selflessness. Giving can mean both material things and the Dhamma. The gift of the Dhamma far exceeds any other material gift.

*Offering help to relatives.* This is not just familial relatives but the whole community.

*Blameless actions.* Once again, acting in ways consistent with the five precepts and right livelihood.

*Steadfast in restraint.* Seeing the danger in wrong-doing and restraining oneself.

*Avoiding intoxicants that dull the mind.* One cannot follow the precepts if one is intoxicated.

Now we are moving into the qualities that aid in the development of samadhi: heedfulness or constancy to stay with mindfulness.

*Respectfulness and humble ways.* Don't think you know the best way. Be open to the opinions of others. Be content with

the four requisites. Gratitude is a joy to the heart. While one is fingering one's rabbit foot, one feels fear. While contemplating one's blessings, one feels joy.

*Hearing the dhamma frequently taught,* we clear up our doubts.

*Patience* is the supreme virtue. *Willing to accept one's faults.* Being at peace, open and willing to endure the effects of past wrong actions. When we have done something unskillful, we must endure the effects of these actions. There is no way to get away from the effects of past wrong action. Patiently enduring our kamma leads to maturity.

*Seeing venerated seekers of the truth.* Dassana can mean "seeing" or "meeting." The implication is to meet fully with venerated seekers of the truth and respectfully and gratefully drink deeply of the truth of the teachings.

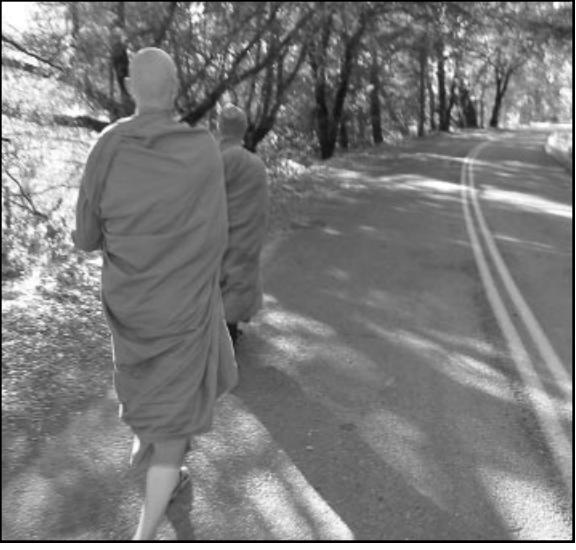
Next comes the pañña section. For the *holy life to be lived with ardent effort, self-restraint* is necessary. *Realizing the noble truths, realizing nibbana.* There is a whole description of arahantship: *unshaken the mind remains, beyond all sorrow, spotless, secure.*

Wisdom means understanding clearly how cause and effect works. An action that is wholesome and beneficial is just that, and we should make every effort to do it. Sometimes, a doubt arises. We worry that even though we are doing something beneficial, perhaps we shouldn't be doing it because we are going to get caught up in a sense of self. What is beneficial should be done. Getting "me" caught up in the mix is something extra. We should work to avoid identifying with our actions, but that doesn't mean we should avoid doing what is wholesome and beneficial.

In the Mangala Sutta, the Buddha declares that all the actions, attitudes and realizations he exhorts in the sutta are the highest blessings—all of them!

He is telling us that we need it all. One could say that the Buddha begins with sila and ends with liberation and that this sequencing implies that the latter is far more important than the former. Yes, there is a gradation from sila to pañña, and yet trying to realize liberation without sila would be like saying that your skin is not very important to your body. If you tried to live without your skin, you would see how important it is. You need your skin, brain, heart, liver. All of its parts are essential to a happy body. Someone might think that if nibbana is the most important thing, then let's just shoot for that. Forget about being grateful and nice to people—that's so tedious! But the Buddha tells us that all of it is important. All of it is the highest blessing and needs our attention and development. ♡

*Kathryn Guta is a long-term supporter of Abhayagiri Monastery. She has recently completed the CALM program and is a lay minister.*



# Mississippi Journal

*On March 1, Jotipalo Bhikkhu and Austin Stewart began a months-long walk from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Arrow River Forest Hermitage on Thunder Bay in Ontario, Canada. The walk is in the age-old tradition of pilgrimage, with an emphasis on living simply, meditation and dependence on the kindness and generosity of those that wish to see them succeed.*

*Following are excerpts from their ongoing online journal, available via the "News" menu at [www.abhayagiri.org](http://www.abhayagiri.org). To contact the pilgrims or to offer your support, write to [pilgrim@abhayagiri.org](mailto:pilgrim@abhayagiri.org).*

**Day 1:** We've decided to walk along the levee at first. We've walked three miles so far, and we're going to try to walk about nine miles a day. We have no idea where we're going to stay tonight, but we did see a couple of plantations up the way with some long, beautiful lawns. —*Jotipalo Bhikkhu*

**Day 2:** It feels like we're pushing the envelope—what are we doing disrupting these people's lives, this Buddhist monk walking into a beauty salon to get a gallon of water?! —*JB*

**Day 4:** Though we have met much generosity so far, it is not enough to sustain us day to day, so we have begun to use money that others donated to the monastery for this walk. At first I felt like we were cheating, but then I realized that we are still living on the kindness of others. —*Austin Stewart*

**Day 7:** If anybody says they have no fear of death, I challenge them to walk through Mississippi the way that we are dressed. —*AS*

**Day 8:** The Natchez Trace Parkway is not a heavily traveled highway right now. We've begun waving at every car that passes. People don't know who, even what, we are; but as soon as they see us smile and wave, they realize, "Okay, they can't be too bad." I think that's creating a positive energy around us. And we feel happier, too. —*JB*

**Day 11:** Last night ants and spiders were crawling on me as I slept, but all I found myself worrying about was not crushing them when I rolled over. I've been tickled (or not!) at how such things aren't bothering me now. These creatures are just part of what belongs here. We put ourselves out here in their place—what do we expect? —*JB*

**Day 13:** At night we didn't have any water and a large thunderstorm was brewing. So Austin and I decided to set up my poncho as a rain catcher. Austin and I are actually starting to have some fun with this survival stuff! —*JB*

**Day 14:** Tami Rose drove us to her home in Jackson. This evening I also made contact with Luke Lundemo, who asked if

we would meet with a meditation group that gathers on Wednesday evenings. . . . It is a bit strange sleeping in a bed tonight, but I remember how to do it. —*JB*

**Day 16:** I started an email conversation with Father William Skudlarek, a Benedictine monk. He gave me some advice and contacts to call in Jackson to see about developing a relationship with Catholic churches along the way. I like the idea of starting to see how this new twist of the walk will unfold. Part of me wants to resist planning anything, but at this point I think we need all the help and generosity we can get. —*JB*

**Day 19:** We have been at this for nineteen days now, and if I look to the future, it seems that Canada is an impossible distance away. We have both let go of the idea of walking the whole distance. We are finding that this trip really is taking us. We have so little control. —*AS*

**Day 20:** Here we met our second hard-selling Southern Baptist! I could have kicked Austin when he freely offered up that we were Buddhist. Didn't he see the large painting of the Last Supper right in front of him? —*JB*

**Day 22:** I've carried this belief that you only learn through suffering. No pain, no gain. But this last week I'm finding that I can also learn from joy and happiness. —*JB*

**Day 23:** Austin and I have noticed that the goodwill coming our way, even just smiles and waves, seem to be coming more frequently and at closer time intervals. I don't think I will ever cease to be humbled by people's generosity. It makes us feel so good, and those that give tell us they feel such joy in making the offerings.

What will tomorrow bring? —*JB* ☺



Jotipalo Bhikkhu



Austin Stewart

## Chanting (*continued from page 1*)

"*itipi so.*" It is the formal contemplation of the Three Jewels and occurs in our evening chanting.

The basis for this passage occurs several times in the Pali Canon. Perhaps the most important is in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta of the *Digha Nikaya*, the sutta concerning the death, or *parinibbana*, of the Buddha. At that time, when he was close to death, many of the bhikkhus were asking the Buddha what happened to such and such a monk or nun who died last year. The Buddha replied, "Well, she was an *anagami*; she's gone to the highest heavens and will have one more life there and then go on to final liberation." Or, "He was a stream-enterer; he has seven more births." He then went on to explain the characteristics of a *sotapanna*, a stream-enterer. In this formulation he described four traits, the first being very good morality, or *sila*, and the other three being faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha and their attributes. He listed these attributes, and this is the passage that begins "*itipi so bhagava araham.*"

I'll start with the attributes of the *Dhamma*, which is the shortest list.

*Svakkhato bhagavata dhammo. The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One.* The Dhamma is well expounded because it's meant to be perfect in meaning and perfect in letter. It's quite an amazing body of literature—a huge corpus of texts with a very high degree of internal consistency, a brilliant structure, and a lot of natural cross-references between teachings. When you study the texts in depth, you'll find all kinds of nuances: the way the different elements in a list of dhammas are ordered, the rich and very evocative similes and metaphors, even humor. Take advantage of this feature: the well expoundedness of the Blessed One's teachings. I encourage everyone to dip into this treasure house of spiritual literature and read the Pali Canon.

The next characteristic of the Dhamma is *sanditthiko*, which is translated as *apparent here and now*. This is a slightly loose translation. Basically, it means "visible." The root—*diti*—is "view." The Dhamma is something that can be seen. It's not some abstruse theory; it's immediate reality, and we can experience it.

*Akaliko* is *timeless*. That's a very literal translation. There are many levels and layers to this word. The Dhamma is timeless because it expresses universal truths that were valid 2,500 years ago, are valid today, and will be valid 2,500 years from now. The Buddha made it clear that the Dhamma was not something he invented; it's something timeless that he discov-

ered. He gives the analogy of uncovering a lost city in the jungle—overgrown with creepers and discovered by archeologists. This is what the Buddha did; he discovered an ancient truth.

Another meaning of timeless is that the Dhamma is immediate. The realization of nibbana is always just an instant away. The ultimate Dhamma is also timeless in the sense that it is outside of samsaric concepts such as space and time. It is completely "other"; it can't be framed in terms of time.

The literal meaning of *ehipassiko* is *come and see*. *Ehi* is an imperative verb that means "come." There is another use of this verb in the Canon; it's what was called the "*ehi bhikkhu*" ordination. In the early days of the Buddha's teaching, he would simply say, "Come, bhikkhu." It's said that the person would miraculously lose all their hair and have robes. So the verb *ehi* is an invitation. *Passiko* is another form of the verb *to see*. It means "come and see."

The quality of Dhamma is that it's inviting us to check it out. This is a very strong characteristic of the Buddha's teaching. There's no heavy-handed demand: "Believe this."

The faith element doesn't have the same role as in some other religions. We're asked, we're invited, to examine the teachings to see whether they fit. This is also an expression of the confidence that the Buddha and arahants had in their Dhamma; they realized it for themselves and know that we can, too.

The translation of *opanayiko* is undecided in our community; it's either *leading onwards* or *leading inwards*. I'm not quite sure what's the current "high church" dispensation on the issue, but both *inwards* and *onwards* are quite reasonable. In terms of the

Dhamma the two are almost synonymous. It's a characteristic of the Dhamma that it leads us into our depths, which is where truth and liberation and relief are found. They're not found anywhere else.

*Paccattam veditabbo vinnuhi'ti* is all one phrase. It means that the Dhamma is realizable for oneself by the wise. The Dhamma is of benefit for those with little dust in their eyes.

Taken together, these characteristics of the Dhamma emphasize its immediacy and possibility. This is very important.

Next, I'd like to speak about the characteristics of the Sangha. The meaning and usage of the term *sangha* is sometimes a bit confused and controversial. The original meaning of the word was simply "community" in the loosest possible sense. In some modern Indian languages it's still used in a similar way. But like many common words of the time, the Buddha gave them technical meanings. In the Pali Canon these are two:

### HOMAGE TO THE DHAMMA

(Hānda mayam dhammābhijjutim karomasc)  
*[Now let us chant in praise of the Dhamma]*  
(Yo so) svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo  
*The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One,*  
Sanditthiko  
*Apparent here and now,*  
Akaliko  
*Timeless,*  
Ehipassiko  
*Encouraging investigation,*  
Opanayiko  
*Leading inwards,*  
Paccattam veditabbo viññūhi  
*To be experienced individually by the wise.*

there's the Bhikkhu Sangha and the Ariya Sangha. The Bhikkhu Sangha is the order of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, the monks and nuns, the fully ordained ones. The Ariya Sangha, or the Noble Sangha, has a higher meaning; it's the sangha of beings who have obtained some degree of enlightenment on the Buddhist path. These are the stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners, and arahants, whether they are lay or ordained, male or female, past or present.

The current American Buddhist usage of the term refers to the people we practice with—our sangha. Some “purists” object to that usage because it's looser than the narrow, technical meaning. But it's close to the original broad meaning of *sangha*, so I really don't have an issue with it. But in terms of this passage in our chanting, the reference is clearly to the Ariya Sangha, and this will become clear below.

The first characteristic of the Sangha is *supatippanno bhagavato savakasangho*, the Blessed One's disciples who have practiced well. The word *savaka* literally means “one who listens, one who hears.” Those beings who became enlightened from following the teachings of a buddha are classed as savakas. Among the classes of enlightened beings there are also pacceka-buddhas and buddhas. A pacceka-buddha and a buddha are beings who became enlightened by their own effort without hearing a teaching, so they had a more difficult path. *Well-practiced* means they practiced the eightfold path to its completion.

The word *uju* means “straight,” as in upright as opposed to crooked. In English the word *crooked* has the connotation of being criminal or dishonest. The opposite is straight or upright. It has that sense in Pali, too.

*Nyaya* is “with knowledge” or “with wisdom.” The disciples of the Blessed One have practiced with knowledge.

*Samicipatippanno*: they practice the Eightfold Path completely. The description of enlightenment in some contexts—particularly in the commentarial and Abhidhamma texts—is based on two moments. The path moment occurs when the factors of the Eightfold Path are perfected and reach into the transcendental level, which results in the fruition moment. The path moment is considered karmically active, and the fruit moment is considered karmically resultant, or passive.

This leads to the next line: *Yadidam cattari purisayugani attha purisapuggala*. That is the four pairs, the eight kinds of noble beings. This refers to the four levels of enlightenment—stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and arahant—multiplied by two since each level has a path moment and a fruit moment. There is an interesting and controversial technicality here. In the orthodox Theravada interpretation, fruit moment always follows path moment instantaneously, so in any given moment the odds that there's anybody at path moment are pretty small. Some of the other early schools of Buddhism taught that it was possible for a path moment and fruition moment to be separated, that there may be beings who have perfected the path at one of the levels and are waiting for the fruition moment. In that sense, there could be eight types of noble beings. This is controversial, speculative stuff, which probably leaves you just as confused as ever!

*Ahuneyyo pahuneyyo dakkhi-neyyo anjali-karaniyo*. Worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect. Anjali is the gesture of placing one's palms together in respect.

*Anuttaram puññakkhettam lokassa'ti*. They give occasion for incomparable goodness to arise in the world. *Khetti* means “field,” like a farmer's field. The metaphor that's being alluded to here is that gifts, offerings, or respect given to noble ones is like throwing seeds into a field. They will fruit into meritorious karma or an “incomparable field of merit.” Some texts describe the multiplication factor of giving: if you give food to an animal, the

karma is such that the results will come back to you 100 times; if to an unworthy human, 1,000 times; if to someone who is practicing on the path to liberation, 100,000 times; and if to an enlightened being, myriads and myriads of times.

Finally, I saved a discussion of the characteristics of the Buddha for last because it's in some ways the most interesting of the three. *Buddhanusati*, or contemplation of the Buddha, is a highly recommended meditation. It's one of the protective meditations. When we contemplate the Buddha, we're contemplating the highest potential of a human being. What I find inspiring about the Pali Canon's descriptions of the

(continued on page 12)

## HOMAGE TO THE SANGHA

(Hānda mayam saṅghābhijithutim karomase)

[Now let us chant in praise of the Sangha.]

(Yo so) supatippanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho

They are the Blessed One's disciples, who have practiced well,

Ujupatippanno bhagavato sāvakā saṅgho

Who have practiced directly,

Nāyapatippanno bhagavato sāvakā saṅgho

Who have practiced insightfully,

Sāmicipatippanno bhagavato sāvakā saṅgho

Those who practice with integrity—

Yadidam cattāri purisayugāni attha purisapuggalā

That is the four pairs, the eight kinds of noble beings—

Esa bhagavato sāvakā saṅgho

These are the Blessed One's disciples.

Āhuneyyo

Such ones are worthy of gifts,

Pahuneyyo

Worthy of hospitality,

Dakkhi-neyyo

Worthy of offerings,

Anjali-karaniyo

Worthy of respect;

Anuttaram puññakkhettam lokassa

They give occasion for incomparable goodness to arise in the world.

## Chanting (*continued from page 11*)

Buddha is that they combine the attributes of a very human individual with those of a marvelous, liberated mind.

There is a discourse by the medieval Zen teacher Dogen in which he talks about seeing the Buddha and seeing the old man Shakyamuni at the same time. That is, when you see the old man Shakyamuni, do you also see the Buddha? And when you see the Buddha, do you also see the old man Shakyamuni?

In a certain phase of Buddhist history—medieval times—there was a tendency in India to reify and deify the Buddha. It was a gradual thing. First, they said that his feces didn't stink, next that he didn't defecate at all, then that he didn't need to eat but did so only out of compassion for sentient beings to allow them to make merit by offering him food. At the extreme, one particular text describes the Buddha as appearing miraculously on this earth—he had been enlightened from beginningless time—sitting in full lotus in a golden pavilion, remaining there for forty years without moving a muscle, continually emitting a single tone in which all the teachings and discourses could be heard by highly evolved beings who then wrote them down. This is an exaggerated example of seeing the Buddha but not seeing the old man Shakyamuni. There's no contact with humanity left in that sort of conception.

In modern times, I fear that some are swinging to the other extreme. There's a kind of mean-spiritedness; people love debunking and knocking their heroes down off the pedestal. It's almost a fanatical egalitarianism: if people raise their head above the common level, we've got to drag them back down. I've heard people say things like, "Well, the Buddha was, after all, a man of his times. He had some opinions that were incorrect because they didn't know any better in those days, and he didn't rise above that." This despite the Pali Canon's teaching that there's nothing the Buddha isn't enlightened about and that the teaching is perfect in word and letter. Whether one believes that or not, it loses the point if all we see is the old man Shakyamuni without seeing the Buddha.

The attributes of the Buddha included in the chanting emphasize the marvelous, but it's important to bear in mind that the vehicle for these attributes was a human being. He suffered in his old age from backaches and dysentery—very human, earthy experiences—and he obtained his enlightenment after great struggle and sacrifice. Yet a buddha is some-

one who has reached the full, absolute human potential, and the idea behind this is that our deepest level is intrinsically pure. The Buddha is someone who has removed all the obscurations and demonstrated the potential of a human life.

The first characteristic is *araham*, which is another grammatical form of the word *arahant*. This word was used prior to the Buddha's time in general Indian religious discourse to mean "a perfected one." Its technical meaning in the Buddhist texts is "someone who has eliminated all the defilements," or someone who has reached the state of great purity and perfection. Gotama Buddha is a special arahant because he's a buddha. All buddhas are arahants, but only a few arahants are buddhas.

*Sammasambuddho. Fully enlightened by himself.* In the classification of enlightened beings there are pacceka-buddhas and sammasambuddhas. A pacceka-buddha is someone who does not establish a teaching, sometimes called "silent" or "solitary" buddhas. They may teach in a small way—perhaps to a few individuals—but they don't establish a dispensation and are forgotten after their own time. Whereas a sammasambuddha establishes a teaching—a Dhamma and a Sangha—and their influence survives their time. The influence of Gotama Buddha is still vast in the world today.

*Vijjacarana-sampanno.* *Impeccable in conduct and understanding.* Carana literally means "walking fair in traveling." The Buddha walks through the world perfectly. This includes the concept of keeping perfectly all ethical principles, but it goes beyond that. It also includes being perfectly mindful. The Buddha makes no mistakes;

he is flawless. *Vijja-sampanno* means "perfect in knowledge."

This leads into areas that are somewhat controversial historically. There's been debate within Buddhism about the range of a buddha's knowledge. To my mind, it is a particularly pointless discussion for those of us who are not buddhas to speculate on the range of a buddha's knowledge. There is a strong tendency within the Theravada to want to give the Buddha one form or another of omniscience. In the commentaries, the official definition of the range of the Buddha's knowledge is that anything he wanted to know he could know—like the number of fish in the Ganges. He didn't automatically know it to start with, but if he turned his mind toward that question, he could find the answer.

What the Buddha actually said about his own knowledge is marvelous enough. He spoke particularly about the Three Knowledges he obtained on his enlightenment night. The first

### HOMAGE TO THE BUDDHA

(Hānda mayaṃ buddhābhītthutim̄ karomase)  
*[Now let us chant in praise of the Buddha.]*  
(Yo so) tathāgato araham sammāsambuddho  
*The Tathāgata is the Pure One, the Perfectly Enlightened One.*  
Vijjācaraṇa-sampanno  
*He is impeccable in conduct and understanding,*  
Sugato  
*The Accomplished One,*  
Lokavidū<sup>5</sup>  
*The Knower of the Worlds.*  
Anuttaro purisadamma-sārathi  
*He trains perfectly those who wish to be trained.*  
Satthā deva-maṇussānam  
*He is Teacher of gods and humans.*  
Buddho bhagavā<sup>6</sup>  
*He is Awake and Holy.*

was the penetration of his past lives for hundreds of thousands of world eons. He saw the pattern of his own karma and the enfoldment of his journey in great detail and in great depth. In the second watch of the night he obtained the knowledge of the rising and falling of beings, seeing beings taking rebirth in various lower and higher realms. This was a generalization of the first knowledge—of his own special case to universal law. In the final watch of the night, he came to the knowledge of the extinction of the *asavas*, sometimes called the taints or outflows. He knew that he had destroyed all the defilements to the depths. This was the moment of attainment.

This points to the Buddha's understanding that the mind is intrinsically enlightened—intrinsically void, blissful, and immeasurably, infinitely radiant—but obscured. We don't experience the mind's radiance all the time because of defilement on the surface of the mind. There are lists and lists of unwholesome mind-states, but they all boil down to ignorance, desire, and ill will. Not knowing, wanting, and repelling. In fact, they all really boil down to ignorance, not knowing. At that point, the Buddha had eliminated all the defilements. That's essentially all he did for buddhahood to arrive. It was not something created, something new. It was just allowing the deepest truth of his own nature to shine forth through the extinction of the *asavas*.

*Sugato* means “well-going.” *Su* is “well, good,” and *gato* is the verb “going” or “walking.” This is a very commonly used epithet of the Buddha in the Canon. It is sometimes translated as the well-farer.

*Lokavidu. The Knower of the Worlds.* This again points to the Buddha's knowledge and his penetration. Whether or not we take it that he was omniscient, the potential that he unleashed with buddhahood allowed him to know and experience many, many things and have a wide range of what we would call psychic powers, which are really just a natural potential. He could know things like whether someone coming to the discourse that evening that was ripe for enlightenment. If that person was late for some reason, the Buddha would make everybody wait until this one person arrived because the Buddha knew that he or she was just on the brink.

*Anuttaro purisadamma-sarathi.* *Anuttaro* means “supreme, without a superior.” *Sarathi* is a charioteer. *Purisadamma* is a compound word meaning “human, person.” *Damma* is not the same as *dhamma* with a *dh*. It's a different word entirely and is used to refer to horses and cattle and so on. The metaphor is of a trainer of horses. The Buddha came out of the noble warrior class, so this sort of imagery occurs fairly commonly. The idea is that his teaching is like a training, and as a charioteer trains horses, so he trains men and women to practice and attain on the path.

*Sattha deva-manussanam. Teacher of gods and humans.* *Sattha* is a word meaning “teacher,” and it's pretty well restricted to references to the Buddha. When you see “The Teacher” in texts, it's a translation of *sattha*. That the Buddha was a teacher of gods and humans is very significant praise.

There are many, many places in the Canon describing the Buddha teaching in the various heavenly realms. He spent an entire Rains Retreat in Tushita Heaven teaching the Abhidhamma. Whether or not you want to follow the mythology, it's very evocative. I encourage you not to be too dismissive of these stories, because we don't know the full range and potential of this universe and what other kind of possible existences there may be. In the Buddhist conception of the universe, the Buddha is the teacher of the gods. This was an important statement for religious understanding at the time, and later. Human beings were not helpless pawns of the gods, and the gods had something to learn from the Buddha.

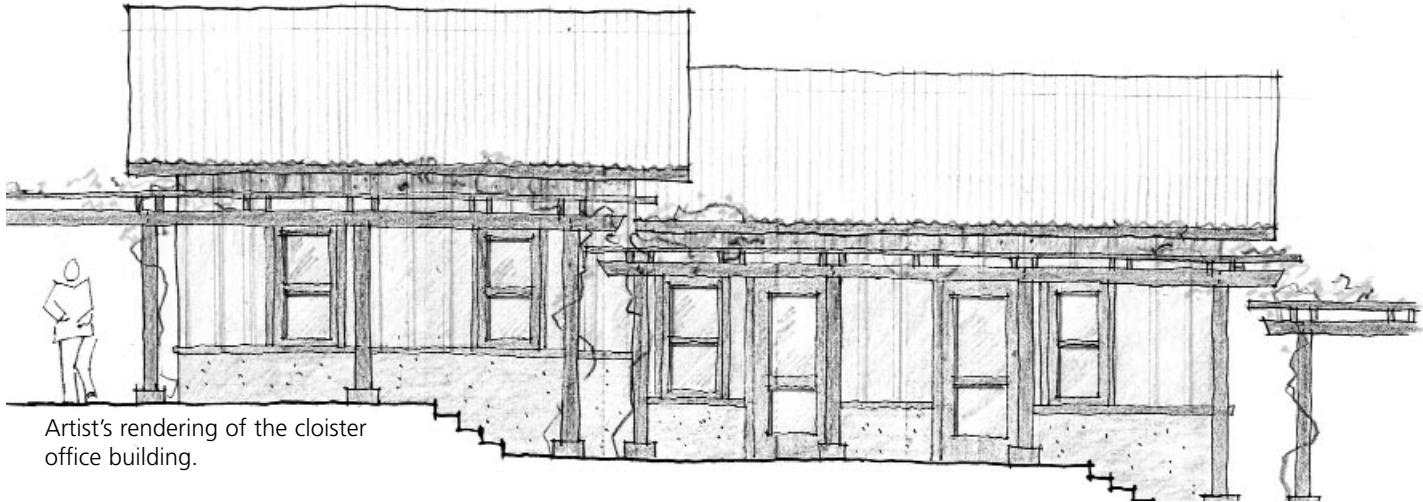
The attribute *buddho* is the same form as *buddha*. This is a particularly beautiful word; it simply means “awake.” This is what we call the Buddha today. It's an oddity, though, that in the Canon he is seldom referred to by this epithet. In the Canon he refers to himself as *Tathagata*, and other people refer to him very often as *Bhagava*, or Blessed One. If you want a simple form for contemplation of the Buddha, repeat the syllables *bud-dho* while visualizing the Buddha and thinking of “awake.” One of the times this term does occur in the Canon is shortly after his enlightenment. A wanderer asks him, “Are you a god?” And he replies, “No, I'm not a god.” Then, “Are you a demon?” “No, I'm not a demon.” Then, “Are you a human being?” “No, I'm not a human being.” And finally, “Well, what are you?” And he says, “I am *Buddho*.”

The final attribute is *bhagava*, which means “the Blessed One.” In the Indian languages it is a very common title of respect for holy people. One aspect of this term is that the Buddha was blessed by the previous buddha or, to be more accurate, by a previous buddha many, many buddha's ago not even on this earth. The Theravadan understanding is that the Bodhisatta vow is only considered binding when it's made before a fully enlightened buddha. The Buddha made his supreme Bodhisatta vow before Dipamkara Buddha many eons ago, and Dipamkara said, “Yes, indeed, you shall attain.” So, this was the seal, this was the esoteric transmission that goes back beyond the origins of this earth. That's one meaning of *bhagava*, but the more mundane level of meaning is simply as a title of respect for a Holy One.

So, taken together, this entire “*Itipi so*” passage that we chant, this list of attributes, is a formula of recollecting the Three Jewels. When we recite this chant, we are practicing a form of contemplation of Buddha, contemplation of Dhamma, and contemplation of Sangha. ♡

*Ajahn Punnadhammo has been studying and practicing Buddhism since 1979 and was ordained in 1990. He is abbot of Arrow River Forest Hermitage in Ontario.*

# BUILDING COMMITTEE



Artist's rendering of the cloister office building.

JSW/D Architects

## Phase I of the Development Plan To Be Completed This Year

by Peter Mayland

After a seemingly endless hiatus and at the risk of too many expectations, this spring we are planning a number of projects that will complete Phase I of our four-phase development plan.

The projects are:

- Cloister office building
- Accessible guest facility/public restrooms
- Cloister duplex (near the women's restrooms)

By the fall, our cloister infrastructure should be much improved. Given that everybody has been so squeezed for space, there will be a great sigh of relief. Similarly, we will get adequate toilet and hand-washing facilities. Finally, we will remodel the kitchen space in the house so there will be some elbowroom, along with improved appliances and prepara-

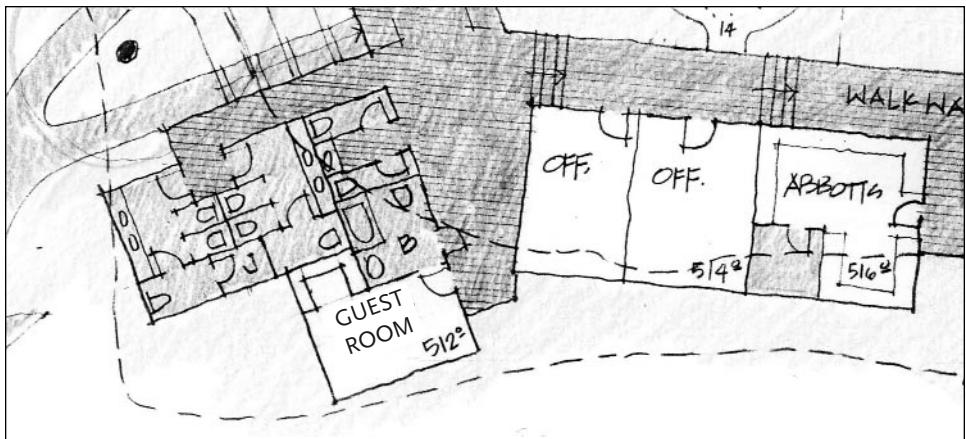
tion and storage facilities. This should tide us over until we are able to build the Reception Building.

In the broader view, we have made two major changes in our building team. We have hired a new architectural firm, JSW/D Architects of Berkeley, with Helen Degenhardt as our primary architect. This firm has worked with other Buddhist groups including Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Tassajara and Green Gulch Farm, so they are very experienced with work for spiritual communities.

We are also bringing a new contractor on board. He is Bob Madlem of Redwood Valley. We have seen examples of his excellent work and have heard rave reviews from his clients.

This year will see lots of activity, some inconvenience and, in the end, a much improved cloister area. ❤

Plan for the cloister office building and the public restroom building, which will both be located behind the current house and carport area.



JSW/D Architects

## From the Monastery (*continued from page 3*)

Mindfulness. Although Taraniya has led the Thanksgiving retreat with Ajahn Amaro before, this was Ajahn Pasanno's first long retreat in California. Everyone greatly appreciated the opportunity to receive his teaching.

In early winter Ajahn Sudanto made a visit to Portland, Oregon. He visited with the Dhamma group at the Columbia River Correctional Facility, joined the Friends of the Dhamma sitting group for a Friday evening, and led a daylong retreat.

The sittings at Yoga Mendocino in Ukiah have continued to attract attention on the second Wednesday of every month. In addition to the normal routine, Ajahn Sudanto led a day-long retreat on December 4.

## DEVELOPMENT

**A**bhayagiri has been hosting community work days once a month. These times provide an opportunity for people who don't come to the monastery often to offer service, to interact with the monastics, and to help with the physical development of the monastery. In October during the Casa Serena work weekend, people came and helped clear sites for women's day meditation huts. This included clearing for trails and building a bridge. In November, people helped to resingle the roof on the Dhamma Hall. A series of Sunday community work days is scheduled for 2005 as well. Guests are encouraged to arrive on Saturday for the evening talk and should contact the guest monk in advance to arrange for accommodations. (See the calendar for dates.)

The community also completed various smaller year-end projects including installing insulation under the floor of the main house and repairing odds and ends at Casa Serena.

The first phase of a long-awaited redesign of the Abhayagiri website ([www.abhayagiri.org](http://www.abhayagiri.org)) was finished and launched on January 10. The new website has a much-



A bounty of gifts offered at the Kathina Ceremony

improved layout and navigation scheme as well as many new features. A second phase of development will be finished this spring. The website is produced with software that will make it easier to contribute new material and maintain the site. Please visit the website and use the form to send us any feedback you care to share. While we can't satisfy everyone's desires, this feedback is critical to improving the site for those who use it.

Plans for spring 2005 include remodeling our kitchen. The back porch to the house has to be torn down in order to build several new buildings, so the remodeled kitchen will extend out into the current living room. After the kitchen is remodeled, we hope to begin construction of several small buildings in the cloister area, including offices for the abbots, a wheelchair-accessible guest accommodation, and additional facilities for the growing community (see page 14 for more details).

—The Abhayagiri Community



## Bicycle Pilgrimage ~ Sept. 24-25

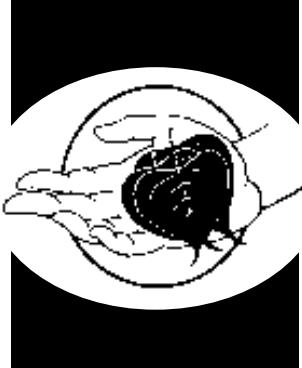
The Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage rolls again in 2005. Now in its fourth year, this inspiring journey will bring together riders, volunteers and monastics, who will venture from Spirit Rock Center to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to Abhayagiri over the span of two days. Don't miss this opportunity to build community, experience the challenges of pilgrimage, and enjoy the great outdoors all at the same time! We're looking for volunteers, riders and supporters.

For more information (and photos!), visit [www.dharmawheels.org](http://www.dharmawheels.org) or email [buddhistbike@yahoo.com](mailto:buddhistbike@yahoo.com).

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

## ABHAYAGIRI MONASTERY

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Join Us for the Monthly  
**Community Work Days**  
(see calendar for dates)

## 2005 Upasika program

**April 3\***  
(Commitment Ceremony)

June 5

August 7

October 2

December 4

Join your fellow community members for a day of practice and study at the monastery.

Schedule:

**11:00 am**  
Daily meal offering  
(bring a dish to share)  
*optional*

**1:00–5:30 pm**  
Chanting, meditation,  
Refuges/Precepts,  
Dhamma teachings  
& Discussion

\*For continuing and new program participants.

Registration Opens June 1

## Thanksgiving Retreat with Ajahn Amaro and others

November 18–27, 2005  
Angela Center, Santa Rosa, California

More information will be available after June 1  
at [www.abhayagiri.org](http://www.abhayagiri.org).