

FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

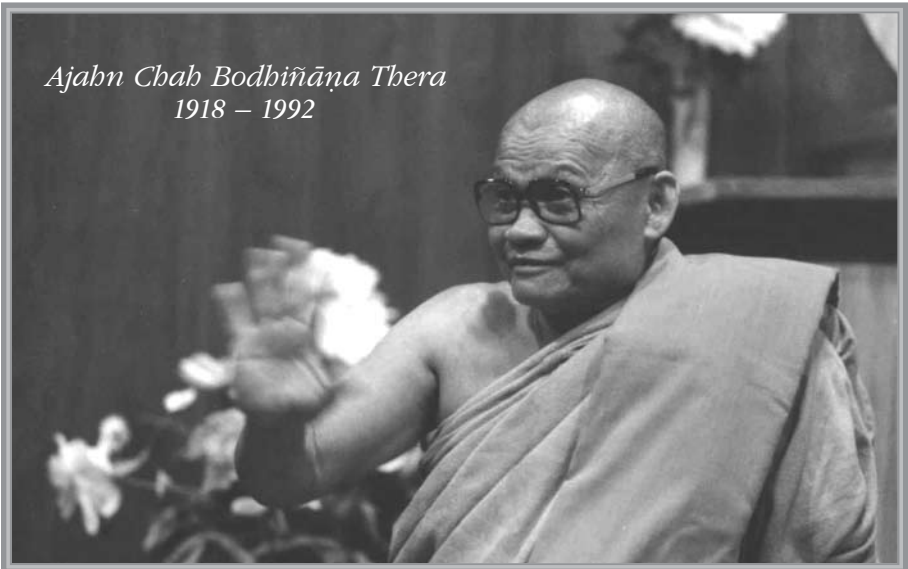
The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter

AN OFFERING OF GRATITUDE

Adapted from a talk given by Ajahn Anandabodhi on the occasion of the 16th anniversary of Luang Por Chah's passing.

I was last here almost ten years ago, and it's been very nice to look around and see the changes that have happened. From England we hear about the hard work at Abhayagiri so it's nice to see the fruits of that hard work. Ajahn Santacitta was here just the year before me so this is our second visit after a very long gap. It's quite heartening to see what the community has done with the place and the property. Many people who have come through here and people connected to Abhayagiri have benefited from it. When we were coming today, we felt it was auspicious that it was both the late-night sit (the lunar observance day), and Ajahn Chah's memorial day.

I was just remembering the day Ajahn Chah died in 1992. I was living as a lay woman near Harnham Monastery (Ratanagiri) in the north of England with my partner. I remember a friend coming to the door and asking if we had heard that Ajahn Chah died. We hadn't, so we went off to buy some flowers, white lilies, and went up to the monastery to pay our respects. I remember that as we were there, as I was in the shrine room—there had been a large shrine made to Ajahn Chah—we were chanting the funeral chant and just sitting quietly taking in the fact that he had died. I first came across the Thai forest tradition in 1990. I haven't ever been to Thailand so I didn't meet Ajahn Chah, but I did feel incredible gratitude to him for the teaching that he passed on, both what was written and also what was living in the Sangha that I was visiting in Amaravati and Harnham. So I felt this very deep gratitude to him. I had been wavering for some years already about whether I should ordain or not ordain; wondering if it was the right thing to do. That evening, I decided I would offer one year of my life to the Sangha, to Ajahn Chah, as a gift or offering of gratitude to him. I didn't really know when that would happen but it was quite clear that was what I wanted to do.



*Ajahn Chah Bodhiñāṇa Thera
1918 – 1992*

It must have been about a half a year later, I felt that it was time. In those days it was very easy to stay at Amaravati and there wasn't a long waiting list (for anagārikā training) like there is now. It was easy to just book for three months with the hope of staying longer, so that's what I did. Now fifteen years later I'm still in the monastery with a real sense of gratitude for the opportunity. Through the whole process there was a sense of confidence, faith that this was the right direction.

I first came across the Four Noble Truths when I was a teenager, with a very strong sense of, "Oh, this is it. The Buddha knows the way out of suffering." I had a very strong confidence in that. Although I didn't really understand the teaching very well, I did understand, "there is suffering" and I also understood that, although I didn't know how to do it, "there is a way out of suffering here and now." And it's not something that I have to wait until I die to see whether I've been good enough, or not, to go to heaven. I knew there is a way out of suffering in this very life and I felt a very deep confidence in that when I heard the teaching. I just trusted that, "Okay, even though I don't really understand how to do it or how to meditate, if I just keep taking

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Contributors: The Sangha, Karunadhammo Bhikkhu, Nāṇiko Bhikkhu, Anagārika Nic Grueff, Janejira Sutanonpaiboon, Pamela Kirby

From the Monastery

It is a lonely Sunday afternoon in early February, after about a week of fluffy snow interrupted by cold rain. The monastic community has been on retreat for a month now, and without much activity or coming and going, the ordinariness of life is highlighted. The mind suddenly takes interest in the trickling of a nearby stream, or the hum of a far off airplane. The sun has just broken through the clouds, and vague memories of our last Kathina ceremony flit through the mind: "Yea, I guess that's where we left off last time." Now is the time for interest and energy to flow into the next newsletter.

KATHINA

Kathina is a robe making ceremony established by the Buddha to maintain harmony within the monastic community and to give laypeople a chance to make a special offering of robe cloth to the Sangha. This takes place any time during the month after the end of the three month rains retreat, or *vassa* (after the full moon of October). This final month of the monsoon season is traditionally known as the *robe making season*, when bhikkhus would wander in search of cloth for new robes. At least five bhikkhus must have lived together in the same monastery during the vassa for a Kathina to take place.

Over the years, the Kathina has grown into the biggest gift-giving day of the year for the Sangha, and could be likened to a "Buddhist Christmas." Bolts of robe cloth are offered during a formal ceremony, as well as anything the Sangha needs, from medicines to power tools. According to tradition, the Sangha will choose which among them is suitable to receive the kathina cloth, and a collective effort is made to produce a robe for that bhikkhu before the next dawn. This includes cutting, sewing and dyeing the cloth. This year the kathina robe was given to Tan Jotipālo, who has lived at Abhayagiri since 1998 and has given great service to the monastery over the years.

The 2007 kathina day illustrated the principle of *samaggi*, or harmony. In the early morning tents were erected, prayer flags were hung, and free distribution Dhamma books and CDs were set out. Friends of the monastery came throughout the morning, brought offerings of food, and the giving of the cloth to the Sangha was done after the meal. A special thanks goes out to this year's kathina cloth donors: Mahesh Jayasinghe, Regan Urbanick and Krit Leekamjorn. Everyone

Formal offering of the Kathina cloth to the Bhikkhu Sangha



helped with taking down the tents and cleaning up afterwards, and by five pm the monastery looked as if nothing had happened. The robe was sewn and dyed quickly, and the procedure for the giving of the new robe was finished before 9:30 pm, a rare occurrence.

COMMUNITY AND TEACHINGS

Another ancient tradition that takes place after the vassa is that of wandering to new locations. On November fourth, just a few days after the Kathina festivities, Ajahn Amaro, Tan Jotipālo, Tan Nāṇiko and Tan Khemaratana headed together to San Francisco for a three-way dispersal: Ajahn Amaro and Tan Jotipālo to Wisconsin, Tan Nāṇiko to India, and Tan Khemaratana returned to Bhāvana Society in West Virginia.

Ajahn Amaro, accompanied by Tan Jotipālo, led a six day retreat at the Christine Center in Wisconsin. The center is located in west central Wisconsin on 120 acres of wooded land, and the retreat was well-attended with about 40 participants. Tan Jotipālo continued on to Arrow River Forest Hermitage in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He is currently enjoying an extended period of practice in the cold and quiet Canadian wilderness. His current duties are limited to clearing snow, chopping firewood and carrying water, so most of the day is open for meditation practice and study of *Dhammavinaya*.

Tan Nāṇiko spent the months of November and December in India, having been generously sponsored by his friend Manu Sahay. Also in December Ajahn Karunadhammo, along with monastic and lay friends, did a pilgrimage in India. Khun Ploen visited Abhayagiri during kathina time. She invited Debbie to join in with the Indian expedition. It is not possible to fully express the gratitude we feel towards Khun Ploen for organizing this trip, and for the support she gives to the Sangha in general. See more about the India travels on page 10.

On November 16th, Ajahn Pasanno left for his travels abroad, starting with a visit to Wat Buddharatanaram in Keller, Texas to join with their kathina ceremony. Ajahn Pasanno then joined with Ajahn Karunadhammo to depart for Thailand, with a plan to do a pilgrimage in India starting in early December. Just two days before travelling from Thailand to India, Ajahn Pasanno suffered an unknown illness and was unable to make the plane trip to India to lead the pilgrimage. Fortunately, Ajahn Cattāmalo, having been to the Holy Places three times, stepped up to lead the group of Thais and Westerners. After the pilgrimage, Ajahn Karunadhammo returned to Thailand to help care for Ajahn Pasanno.

The 2007 Thanksgiving Retreat at the Angela Center was led by Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Mettā (a nun from Amaravati Monastery). There were over 50 participants, most of whom were quite well known to the Abhayagiri Sangha while some new faces also appeared. This was the first longer retreat that Ajahn Mettā had lead. Mary Paffard, who founded Yoga Mendocino, was also in attendance as the retreat yoga instructor. The cook for the seventh year running was Paul Eaton, who yet again filled the monks, nuns, and lay practitioner's bowls with healthy and nourishing food.

The retreat schedule included lively Dhamma discourses, regular interviews and lots of sitting and walking meditation. A special highlight this year was the attendance of Sāmaṇera Kaccāna's mother, and Anagārikā Santusikā's mother as well. The retreat was also joined by Tan Cāgānando and Sāmaṇera Cunda from Abhayagiri, and Sister Jotipaṇṇā from Chithurst Monastery. As always the retreat was

WINTER RETREAT

held on a dāna basis and was funded solely on the generosity of the participants. This will have been the tenth Thanksgiving Retreat at the Angela Center.

Come December, Ajahn Sudanto left for a two week visit to Birken Monastery in British Columbia, Canada, then continued on to New Zealand, where he spent the winter at Vimutti Monastery with Ajahn Chandako. Ajahn Chandako has been living in New Zealand for over three years now, almost completely by himself, so very little building has happened in the monastery. Much appreciation to Ajahn Sudanto for going to help build a kuti there.

A monk from Chithurst Monastery in England, Tan Nārado, spent the first couple weeks of December at Abhayagiri. It was his first visit to the US, and he visited local sites like Montgomery Woods, home of some of the tallest redwood trees in the world. Tan Nārado continued on to join the community at Bodhiñāṇarama Monastery in New Zealand for a one year stay.

On December twelfth, Jackie Miller departed for England to take up training at Amaravati and eventually take ordination as an anagārikā. Jackie has, over the past three years, spent almost a year at Abhayagiri, has been very generous with her time and service and has been a joy to have in the community. She left us with a Dhamma poem by her nephew, Brinn Enders (see end of this article). We wish her all the best in her aspirations to enter the sāmaṇa's way of life.

Our good friend and local eremitic off-property resident, Jay, entered the hospital on January ninth to have a large tumor in the right side of his mouth surgically removed. The procedure was extensive: the removed tumor had to be replaced with a large flap of skin from his left arm, his lymph glands in the neck were removed, all his teeth were removed, and a tracheotomy was necessary, along with a feeding tube. The monastic and lay community constantly sent out their best wishes and lovingkindness. The surgeries were successful but there is a lot of swelling and a full recovery will take many months. Some radiation therapy will be necessary over the next period of time. Jay returned to us on February fourth in very good spirits, after three weeks in the hospital.

The community warmly welcomes Ajahn Yatiko, who has spent the last 17 years training in Thailand. He had the opportunity to spend the 2007 vassa period in Canada and has come to live at Abhayagiri for an indeterminate period of time. Someone asked him the other day "Do you like this monastery? Isn't it beautiful?"

He replied, "Yes, very beautiful. I think this is the second most beautiful monastery I've lived in, but the first would have to be Dtao Dum." (Dtao Dum is a remote and rugged forest hermitage in western Thailand, where Ajahn Yatiko was the abbot for the past five years).

The annual commemoration of Ajahn Chah at Wat Pah Pong in Thailand took place on January 16th. It has been 16 years since Luang Por's death, and the day happened to correspond with the lunar observance day at Abhayagiri (the 15th in the US overlaps with the 16th in Thailand). Ajahn Ānandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta joined us for the all-night vigil, with Ajahn Ānandabodhi offering some Dhamma reflections. Meanwhile across the globe, Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Karunadhammo, and hundreds of other monastics and laypeople joined the circumambulation of the Ajahn Chah monument at Wat Pah Pong, which houses Luang Por's coral-like bone relics.

The monastic community began their winter retreat on January third, with three weeks of all-day group practice. Normally we try to not have people coming and going during this time, but with Ajahn Yatiko arriving on January 11th, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Karunadhammo stuck in Thailand until January 21st, and Jay in hospital, some movement was unavoidable.

During the month of January the weather was cold, with periods of snow, which provided a quiet atmosphere for the group practice. Ajahn Amaro read teachings each morning, beginning with Bhikkhu Bodhi's "Noble Eightfold Path." Next he read the new Ajahn Sumedho book, "The Sound of Silence." The daily teachings and the absence of work and duties for three months gives Abhayagiri monastics the opportunity to truly focus on the path of serenity and insight.

Near the end of January the schedule opened up more, with free afternoons to be used for sitting and walking meditation up at one's hut in the forest. This gives the opportunity for people to use nature to calm the mind. Sometimes people would spend an afternoon just sitting somewhere off the trail in the forest. As February came about, along with cold, sunny days, readings from Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro's upcoming book "The Island," a compilation of the Buddha's teachings on Nibbāna, were given. What joy, to contemplate the "stilling of all formations, cessation, *Nibbāna*" in the forest quietude.

The all night sits on the lunar quarters, and the Saturday night talks continued during the winter retreat. Also much appreciation goes out

Tan Nārado in front of the new wood shed, December 2007



to the 2008 support crew who have taken over duties from the monastics during this time. When there is a lack of duties, one notices the support we get all year long: Pamela Kirby looking after the library and constantly transcribing and editing things for the monastery, Kamlah and Tina bringing huge offerings of food on a regular basis, and others who are so devoted to giving offerings that there is a tendency to take it all for granted.

SĪLADHĀRA NEWS

With the Siladhāras looking to start a branch monastery for nuns in the US, they are becoming more of a presence at Abhayagiri. In November Ajahn Mettā and Sister Jotipaṇṇā paid us a visit. In January Ajahn Ānandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta joined us for the commemoration of the 16th anniversary of Ajahn Chah's passing away.

Siladhāras led the February and March "First Tuesday" gatherings at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery. During these gatherings there is an informal tea and discussion period in the late afternoon, followed by evening pūja and Dhamma reflections. During the February gathering, the tea time gave people a chance to ask about the development of the new nuns' community in the US. There was a good crowd and lots of enthusiasm. In the evening, rather than giving talk on Dhamma the nuns answer questions about Dhamma practice.

DEVELOPMENT

In October and November a small firewood shed was built near the sauna, allowing us to clean up the whole sauna/solar shed area. This is a possible site for our next large building, the "Monk's Utility Building," and the first step to surveying the site was cleaning up the scattered piles of firewood. The November and

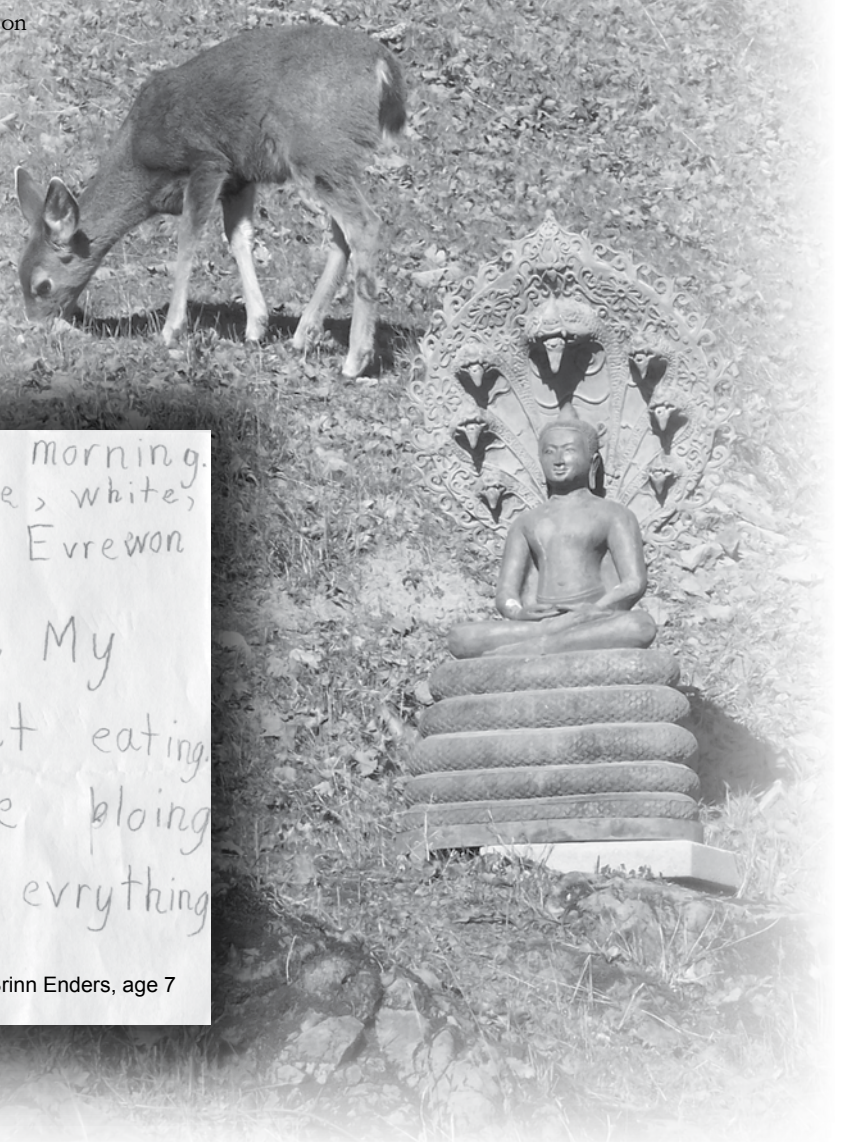
December community work days were used to split and stack firewood, finish off random painting projects, and do a general cleanup of the monastery before the winter retreat. Continued appreciation arises for the immense generosity of the laypeople who come to help with the community work days.

As for the coming year, there is a plan to build a third elder's cabin to provide a place for visiting senior monks and elders to stay. The cabin will be located at the end of the road up in the forest. This site is very accessible and gas, electric, and water have already been run to the location. The first two elder's cabins were built near this area in 2006.

Another standard size monk's cabin will be constructed in the forest near our ordination platform.

Also the entire year will be devoted to making plans for the "Monk's Utility Building," deciding upon things like location, whether to make it one building or two, size and logistics. The actual construction might take place in 2009 or 2010. 🙏

- The Sangha



It is a sat. morning.
The sky is blue, white,
yellow, purple, and pink. Evrewon
is still sleeping. My
cat has finisht eating.
The trees are ploing
in the wind. evrything
is still. ♡

By Brinn Enders, age 7

(Continued from page 1)

a step at a time, then it will come.”

In my first year as an anagārikā, I went through enormous doubt and struggles because I am someone who *stumbled* across the Buddha’s teaching, and *stumbled* across the Thai forest tradition as well. I remember that a few of the other sisters were very excited about some of the Suttas and they would show me this or that Sutta, and I would just get really depressed because I thought, “I just can’t understand it. I can’t understand the language of it, what it’s pointing to, maybe I can’t do this at all.” I remember once being in tears in my room. “Oh, I just have to leave. I just can’t understand these complex teachings.” Fortunately, a nun knocked on my door by chance and asked what was happening. She said, “Rubbish. You understand the teaching fine. You just understand it in a different way.” That was helpful. Ajahn Chah’s way of teaching is so simple and immediate. He’s pointing to learning from nature and learning from the body, learning from the breath, learning from observing the mind. So I found I can do all of that; I can manage. I can be with the mind and whatever is going on. I can stay present with various different mind states. I can be with the breath and learn to be with the body.

In the beginning I had a very strong resistance and aversion to being present with the experience of being human. This evening, as I was sitting in the meditation, I was thinking, “It took a long time to arouse a sense of gratitude for this human birth.” In the beginning there was a very strong sense of, “I just want to get out. I want to find the way out of suffering and I don’t want to be born again.” This was a very strong motivation and then gradually I realized I was trying to get away from the situation I was in. It took a long time to acknowledge that, “there is this body and as long as I am alive, I had better get to know it and make friends with it because we’re going to be together for a lifetime.” It was much more attractive to go into blissful meditation—to concentrate the mind and enjoy a very pleasant meditation—but I would find that once I came out of the meditation I would be very irritable, sensitive, judgmental and reactive to people. So I recognized, “This is not really working. Even though the meditation might be nice, it’s making the rest of my life more miserable so I must be doing something wrong.” Then I started to practice more consciously with body awareness, being with the feeling of the body, which I actually found a very unpleasant practice. I didn’t like it but it did bring a sense of grounding and integration of the practice.

For a while I doubted that perhaps I shouldn’t have started doing this because my meditation seemed to be worse than before. “I no longer get blissful meditations and I’m with the rather unpleasant experience of being embodied and perhaps I’ve made a mistake here.” But I just kept going. Intuitively, it felt like this was the right way to go, gradually, with this practice of being with the way things are. The sense of acceptance grew and with that, much more interest and wanting to



Ajahn Anandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta

learn from this body rather than wanting to get away from it or get out, get away from being born. Really taking interest in the limitations of it, the wonders of it and the feelings that arise and cease in the body. Also with the mind and mind states, rather than trying to get away, feeling depressed or fearful or whatever it might be that was in the mind, I decided to just take an interest in it, in what’s it like, looking; “what are the qualities of depression, what does depression feel like? How does

it feel when it’s beginning and how does it feel right in the middle of it? How does it feel when it’s lifting at the end? What’s the feeling afterwards, when it’s gone?” Just to really make friends with this mind state of depression.

In my teens and early twenties I experienced a lot of depression and through making friends with it and getting to know it, being with the movement of it, it became a much less frequent visitor. It was like there were two doors; the depression would come in but it could go out again.

Just by being present with it, investigating it and befriending this rather unpleasant mind state, it started to lift and move away. Similarly with fear, of course I still experience fear, I feel a little bit anxious sitting here (in the Dhamma Hall) talking. It’s not something I often do but it’s just an experience; there’s this feeling in the legs, a little tingling feeling, the chest is a little tighter than usual. Just getting to know it and be with it and accept it as it is.

The motivation of the practice over the years has moved away from, “I desperately want to get out of saṃsāra, I don’t want to be reborn, I want to get out.” Somehow it doesn’t have the same meaning to me now. This isn’t to say I’m no longer interested in enlightenment—I’m very interested, but the sense of being somebody stuck in saṃsāra is different and I see how my mind very much creates that saṃsāra and that “me” that is stuck in it. So the motivation in practice has changed to one of gratitude—gratitude for this opportunity and an interest in how to share what I’ve received with others, how to be part of opening up to the Path.

Earlier last summer I was fortunate enough to spend seven days

listening to His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaching on dependent origination. At the end of that teaching I sent a card to my mother and father saying to them, “Thank you for this precious human birth.” From the bottom of my heart I was really thanking them for this precious human birth. Somehow it was amazing to get to that

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point from having been really quite depressed and desperately wanting to get out, to a place of, “Wow, thank you for this great opportunity. What an amazing opportunity this is!” Also from having had quite a difficult relationship with my father, and at times with my mother, as many people do, coming to a point of genuinely feeling grateful to them for this opportunity. It seems that so long as we expect life to be other than how it is, then we experience suffering. That simple turning around, embracing, investigating and receiving life as it is, however it is, is the key to freedom. Really, it’s a very immediate practice.

The thing I was struggling with in the beginning of my monastic life was the idea that I should be something other than how I am, or I should be able to understand some concept before I can practice the Dhamma. What the Buddha was pointing to, what Ajahn Chah was pointing to, what Ajahn Sumedho frequently points to, what nature points to, is to come back to this, be with this, learn from this and accept this, however 'this' is. And the magic is that embracing things as they are allows for the unimaginable to happen and it allows for transformation because we're no longer operating according to a set pattern. We're opening up, allowing life to guide us and even though sometimes it might seem it's taking us through quite dark places, if we stay with it, it can lead us out again into the light of understanding.

If I think back to 1992, the year Ajahn Chah died, I couldn't have imagined that my life would evolve in the way that it has or that I would have the sense of gratitude for life in the way that I have now. Even just in the last few days the reminder has come from various different places, because we do need reminding; it's easy to forget. Just to keep open and keep listening and not to try to plan or shape or form the future, to be open in the present and to take care of the present and allow the future to take care of itself. It's an interesting act of faith, really.

I'd like to talk about some of my experiences on *tudong*, just walking on faith with an almsbowl, robes, and another sister. I notice that when you're walking in that way, where you don't know whether you're going to eat that day, where you're going to sleep or even where you're going to end up, it brings up real joy to the heart and brightness to the mind, because the only thing you can do is be completely present. There is no alternative. You can plan, but you know your plans aren't going to go anywhere. They're not going to work. You're not going to be where you thought you would be. You're not going to eat what you hoped you would eat or thought you might eat. You won't end up sleeping in the situation you imagined. It will be different to whatever you planned. So even though the compulsive habit is to plan, after a while you just drop it. You might be able to plan half a day where you're going to be but you can't even plan where you're going to be that night. I find this brings a real aliveness and joy, because it's actually how it is all the time, but we forget and we try to control life.

Two years ago, I went on a long *tudong* in Wales for two months with Sister Tithamedha. When I came back to the monastery, it was so difficult to adjust to having to plan things, have meetings, decide when things were going to happen and look frequently at my clock. What was particularly difficult was to keep that sense of openness and unknowing in a context that's so formed. But it is possible, it just takes more effort and awareness to keep that openness of mind in an environment where, like here during the Winter Retreat, the daily schedule is set out and is printed on the door, everybody knows what it is. Okay, today we're doing this, tomorrow it's going to be the same and then probably the breakfast will be the

same tomorrow . . . We can lose the openness to life if we take these things for granted. But actually, we don't know what's going to happen next. I didn't know I was going to be sitting here giving a talk tonight. We don't know what will happen or what kind of shifts the mind will make. We can only see from the place that we are looking from now but there's much more.

This is also normally our Winter Retreat time but Ajahn Santacitta and I decided to come and see what the possibilities are of starting a nuns' community on the West Coast of America. This is also an act of faith that arose for us unexpectedly last summer. There's certainly a need for our nuns' community to have another option of a place to live, to have more space because the nuns' community in England is very full. There's been an interest for a long time to find somewhere to start a place. Rather to our surprise, the energy and momentum seem to be quite strong, alive and connected in terms of coming here to the West Coast. We don't know what's going to happen, whom we'll meet, where we'll eventually end up or whether it will work or not work. I can see that already, even though we've only been here a few days, my mind starts to say, "We have to have a plan and we need more facts." But actually what I have to do is open the mind, let go and be open to receive whatever happens. It feels like a very interesting space to be in.

Also I'm very fortunate to have found myself in a lineage that so clearly points to the four requisites as a means of support. Tonight there is this shelter and today there is this meal. If needed, there can be basic medicine and these robes. How wonderful to have that kind of support which is so simple and so practical. It's very easy when reflecting on this to bring up a sense of gratitude and abundance. Just today we were staying in the new nuns' day room. It's quite a little room and there were three of us in there and yet I thought, "Oh, this is such a great space." Everything was there that we needed for this day, for a day. This is just perfect. Everything we need is here. It's important to reflect on what we have and to arouse a sense of gratitude

for what we have. It's so easy to take things for granted and to expect more, or want something different. It seems if one is really present with what is, with a sense of gratitude, then there is this feeling of abundance. William Blake said "Gratitude is heaven itself." So, no longer having to always look for the perfect conditions but realizing the conditions of this moment are perfect, and there are great possibilities.

So I do feel very much gratitude and respect to Ajahn Chah for what he shared with so many people and even long after his

death, continues to share, it seems, with more and more people. I feel very fortunate to have stumbled across this Path. I really wish that each person here takes in the teaching and the practice and makes full use of it and that each of us are able to dwell in a state of happiness and well-being in our hearts, whatever our circumstances may be. 🙏

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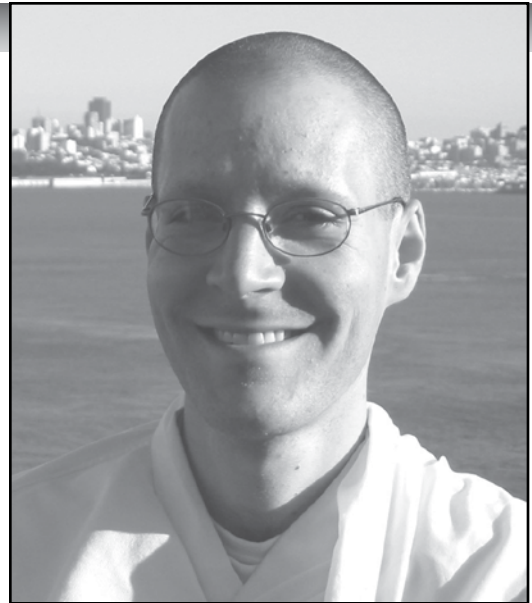
Anagārika Life

Anagārika Nic Grueff reflects on his life so far at Abhayagiri

Every fortnight after the bhikkhus, sāmaṇeras and anagārikas chant their precepts, a talk is given by a senior bhikkhu. The talks are often quite memorable and motivating, especially when you are wearing white and the opening theme is harmony or rather the lack thereof in the anagārikas' chanting. Having to project my voice in a melodic manner is an activity that I conveniently avoided in lay life, since the inability of anyone in my family to carry a tune has been dubbed a "genetic disability." After explaining the importance of chanting in monastic life my mother commented, "Oh. That could be a deal breaker." Indeed, a notable feature of anagārika life has been taking up activities concerning which I have little experience or inclination. Upon arrival I had never mended a garment of my own and my cooking repertoire had expanded only slightly since graduating from college in 2005 on a diet of peanut butter and jelly, carrot sticks and trips to the dining hall. Yet shortly after going into white I became kitchen manager and I realized that I would no longer have the luxury of simply buying new clothes to replace wear, tear and stubborn stains in the whites I inherited.

By putting on those whites I became a representative of the Abhayagiri monastic community. With the large sheet that I draped over my shoulder at my going forth came the eight precepts, the 75 training rules, numerous monastery protocols and general expectations of proper deportment for a monastic. Immersed in the details, routines and hierarchy of monastic training I have felt at times like a cadet at the Naval Academy, striving to keep my dwelling tidy, my whites white and my work swift, efficient and mindful. Yet, on other occasions Abhayagiri is just one really big family. Sometimes I am wrapped up in the good feelings of caffeine, camaraderie and chocolate at the weekly midnight tea. Other times I am lost in the frustrations of coping with different opinions on how to cook oatmeal, dry clothes or drive the truck up the hill.

Although, being an anagārika is a unique experience that defies easy descriptions, "challenging but worthwhile," is a synopsis that I have used. Some nights after evening pūja, it is cold and dark and late and morning pūja is much too early. All I can do is put one foot in front of the other, trudging up the hill, trying not to look up at how much farther I have to go or to calculate how many hours of sleep I will be able to squeeze in. However, a tiny inner voice of wisdom knows that it is not despite such challenges, but because of them, that monastic life is so valuable. For instance, learning to sew is a continuous lesson in patience and letting go while chanting has been a fertile ground for cultivating perseverance and the willingness to learn from my



Anagārika Nic, San Francisco outing with the monks

mistakes. In addition, being in charge of Abhayagiri's sustenance has illuminated many aspects of my personality. I became acutely aware of my food preferences when someone commented, "Do we really need *more* peanut butter?" Also, I noticed how much I feared upsetting others when I found myself worrying, "Did I put out enough cheese?" or "Is it really okay to serve quinoa for breakfast instead of oatmeal?"

Amidst the difficulties there has been great gratitude—for the opportunity to practice, for the support of the laity and for the inspiration, guidance, leadership and even admonition of the abbots and community members. One day, in awe of one of my spiritual companions, I thought to myself, "If I stick it out, I get to live in a place with people like this." Seeing my fellow community members, despite all their responsibilities, walk around as light as air reminds me that even if the food shed is a disaster, my whites are stained and my chanting is lacking, I need not carry my endless "to-do's" around on my shoulders. The spiritual environment prods me to question the sub-conscious story in my head that says, "If I only could wash my whites *properly* with hot water, stain remover and regular detergents *then* I would be happy." Living at Abhayagiri nourishes that tiny voice reminding me that I cannot run from suffering because its causes are within my own mind. Furthermore, although it takes time, effort and perseverance, I have seen that change is possible. In the most recent fortnightly talk, Ajahn Pasanno began by describing how with practice over time, things slowly begin to click. What example did he give? The anagārikas' chanting has improved by "quantum bounds." 🙏

NEWSLETTER EDITOR STEPPING DOWN

Nāṇiko Bhikkhu

Just over a year ago Dennis Crean stepped down as our newsletter editor and I offered to take the reins from him and do four issues. This year I plan to go to Thailand to continue my monastic training, so this issue will be my last.

In the summer 2007 issue there was a resubscription form included. At that time we mailed out 750 paper newsletters to people and about an equal number received an email notification about a website version of the newsletter. Less than 300 people sent the resubscription form back to receive a paper newsletter, and now there's over 1000 people who get an email notification about the online newsletter, and thousands more worldwide who rely on the website

as their main source of Dhamma and news coming from the monastery. As a result of this shifting balance, it seems logical to focus more in-house energy on updating the website.

This is not to say we're definitely doing away with a paper version of our newsletter. All things considered, we're leaving the future of Fearless Mountain newsletter wide open. If you're interested in helping Abhayagiri to continue with a paper newsletter, even in a small way, don't hesitate to send us an email: abm.newsletter@gmail.com. If you have editorial, layout, or other skills and you would like to contribute to a newsletter we'd like to know about it. If you're interested in helping with a one-time project such as a pamphlet or writing articles for us, drop us a line. 🙏

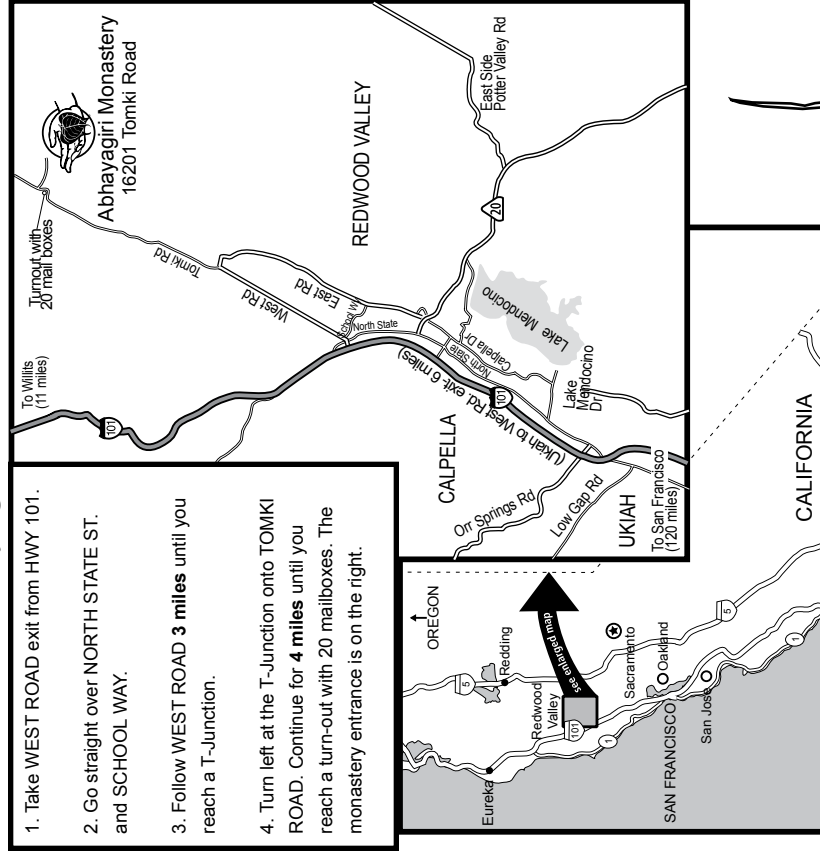
Lunar Observance Days

2551	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
	SAT 5	SUN 4	TUE 3	WED 2	FRI 1		
	SUN 13	MON 12	WED 11	THU 10	SAT 9	SUN 7	TUE 7
	SUN 20	MON 19 ¹	WED 18	THU 17 ²	SAT 16	SUN 14	TUE 14 ³
	MON 28	TUE 27	THU 26	FRI 25	SUN 24	MON 22	WED 22
					SAT 30	MON 29	TUE 28

1. Vesākha Pūjā 2. Āsāṅhā Pūjā 3. Pavāraṇā Day

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.



Apr

- 1 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 2 Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers (CALM) gather at Abhayagiri.
- 5 Upasika Renewal Day.
- 6 Ajahn Amaro and Amelia Barili daylong retreat at Spirit Rock, "Entering the Now."
- 7 Ajahn Amaro in England and Italy.
- 9 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino.
- 13 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- 23 Ajahn Sudanto returns to Abhayagiri from New Zealand.
- 27 Todd Tansuhaj second anniversary memorial.

May

- 6 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 11 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- 14 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino.
- 17 Ajahn Amaro returns from Europe.
- 19 Vesākha Pūjā.
- 21 Ajahn Amaro begins three week series, "Violence and Non-Violence" at Yoga Mendocino.
- 22 Bhikkhu ordination ceremony at Abhayagiri. Ajahn Sopa to visit.
- 24 Ajahn Pasanno leaves for two week wilderness expedition in Alaska.
- 26 Ajahn Amaro gives public talk at the Vedanta Center, Olema, at 10:00 am. For information call (415) 663-1258 or visit website: www.sfvedanta.org.
- 28 Ajahn Amaro leads Yoga Mendocino series, part two.

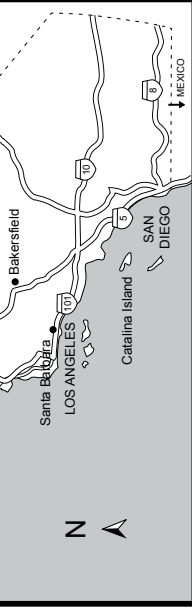
Jun

- 1 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
- 3 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 4 Ajahn Amaro leads Yoga Mendocino series, part three.
- 6 Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Amaro lead ten day retreat at Spirit Rock.
- 8 Community work day at Abhayagiri.
- 8 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino.
- 16 Luang Por Sumedho visits Abhayagiri for two weeks.
- 21 Ajahn Amaro leads daylong retreat, "Maximum Brightness - the Cultivation of Lovingkindness" at Spirit Rock.
- 22 Luang Por Sumedho to give public talk at City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

Jul

- 1 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
- 13 Community work day at Abhayagiri.

Also visit our online calendar at www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/days for the most up-to-date information.



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Wat Pah Nanachat

Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubon 34310

Aug

5 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

9 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.

10 Community work day at Abhayagiri.

22-24 Spirit Rock teen weekend.

2 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

8-14 Ajahn Pasanno leads week long Mettā retreat at the Padmasambhāva Peace Center. For information contact:
Karen Philips
20260 Alder Road
Monte Rio, CA 95462

14 Community work day at Abhayagiri.

21 Ajahn Amaro leads daylong retreat at Spirit Rock.

27-28 Buddhist bicycle pilgrimage.

Every Saturday evening at Abhayagiri

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

Every Lunar Quarter at Abhayagiri

Chanting, meditation, Precepts, Dhamma talk, and late night vigili, beginning at 7:30 pm.

Second Sunday of each month at Abhayagiri

Community work day, 8:00 am-4:00 pm.

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

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Journey to the Source: Mother India

Ajahn Cattāmalō and Ajahn Karunadhammo led a group of Thai and Western friends on pilgrimage to the holy sites from December 8–18. Janejira Sutanonpaiboon writes about some of her experiences . . .

Kushinagar

I have read about the reclining Buddha (in his Parinibbāna posture) in Kushinagar, and how his face looks different from different angles. That is, it looks like the Buddha is smiling if you look straight from the front angle; looks like the Buddha is sad if you stand by his feet and look from that angle; and looks like the Buddha is sleeping if you stand by his head and look from there. I have also read about people shedding tears when they come here, and our group was no exception.

Kushinagar is another crowded place, yet we managed to offer robe cloth to the reclining Buddha. After that we went to Ramabhar Stupa (the Buddha's cremation place) and a Thai monastery called "Wat Thai Kushinagar." This monastery is exceptionally beautiful.

Sravasti

"Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi, Dhammam Saranam Gacchāmi, Saṅgham Saranam Gacchāmi."

That was not the chant by our pilgrims, but a "song" sung by a little boy in front of the Jetavana (Jeta's Grove)—the first place we visited. Once the bus stopped, we were welcomed and greeted by several beggars. I heard this little boy playing his hand drum and singing the above verse. He sang loud and clear, and continued to sing even after we walked into Jeta's Grove.

As you walk into Jeta's Grove, you can see the Ānanda Bodhi tree on your right. The tree is so old that there are now a few metal props to support its branches. There were monks from other traditions chanting and meditating under the tree. We too chanted and meditated under the tree for a while before going to the Buddha's kuti. Jeta's Grove is not a crowded place, so we had some quality time to meditate and listen to the Sutta (read by Ajahn Cattāmalō) in the Buddha's kuti. We also took a few pictures at the Maṅgala Sutta spot—where a *deva* came down to ask the Buddha about the greatest blessings.

I was pretty well-armed with Ajahn Amaro's advice on how to handle Indian beggars: don't indicate you've seen them. However, when we were leaving Jeta's Grove I happened to look into one female beggar's eyes and felt as if my heart was squeezed by those poor unfortunate eyes. From that moment on, I intended not to look into any beggar's eyes anymore.



"Kings of the road"



"Give, give"



Ladawan, Janejira, Debbie

Lumbini, Nepal

It took us a while to travel from one place to another on the bumpy roads in India or Nepal, and it felt even longer to pass the border of the two countries. After a long pause at the immigration, we finally arrived at Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha. Inside Māya Devi Vihāra, you will see the Buddha's footprint and a sculpture of Queen Māya Devi giving birth to the Buddha. There is a stone slab marking the exact spot of the Buddha's birth, and an Asokan pillar. Our group had the opportunity to meditate at both places.

Lumbini is very beautiful, with a pond where the baby Buddha was bathed, green grass, nice gardens, lots of trees, and Tibetan prayers flags everywhere.

Bodh Gaya

We arrived in Bodh Gaya at night, and it was another speechless moment for me. The Mahā Bodhi Temple is such a wonderful thing: you see it in the distance and there you are, struck by its power and can't even say a word.

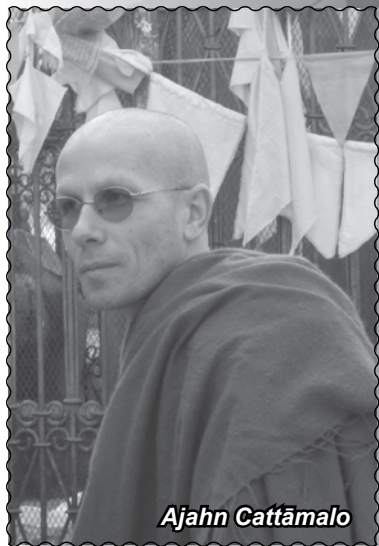
There are faithful monastics and laypeople from every tradition in Bodh Gaya, and it is the most crowded place among all the holy places. It is always packed inside the Mahā Bodhi Temple, and this is where someone may step on your hand while you are bowing or bump against you while you are meditating. I usually get frustrated by such an environment, but Ajahn Cattāmalo's words shed light on my *kiḷesa*-covered mind: "We will never have this place all to ourselves. Instead of feeling irritated, we should have *mudita* since these people are here because of their faith in the Buddha Dhamma." Thank you, Ajahn.

We spent two days in Bodh Gaya—longer than we did elsewhere. We went to pay respects, chant, and meditate at the temple and under the Sri Mahā Bodhi tree several times. We also offered a robe to the main Buddha Rūpa in the temple. At times we listened to a Sutta and/or a Dhamma talk, and meditated under another Bodhi tree. It is also interesting to see different Pūjā rituals all around you: how Tibetan monks and laypeople bow, how Sri Lankan laywomen offer their prayer flags, etc. Sometimes I found unusual peace in my mind, regardless of everything that was going on in the area.

While in Bodh Gaya, we visited Dhungasiri Cave (where the Buddha practiced *dukkhāra kiriya*—austerities), Sujata's village, and the spot where Sujata offered milk-rice. Needless to say, there were beggars everywhere. Some were sitting in a long line waiting for us. Some walked with us all the way up the mountain, or all the way to Sujata's house. It is sad to see that most of these beggars are little kids; some are just about three years old. Their innocence made me wonder whether they really knew what they're doing.



Dhungasiri Cave



Ajahn Cattāmalo

Varanasi and Sarnath

Our India trip wouldn't have been complete without a visit to the Ganges River. One cold day in Varanasi, we headed to the river before dawn and took a boat ride from one dock, where people take a holy bath, to another dock, where dead bodies are cremated. There are all kinds of people: merchants, beggars, yogis, Hindu practitioners, etc., but cows are still the "kings of the road." We had a chance to see one "march past" by friends and family of a dead person, a corpse all covered with flowers. The friends and family sang happily along their way to the river, since they believe that the dead person, if cremated here, will go straight to heaven.

Sarnath is where the Buddha preached his first sermon. We chanted and meditated in the area, and walked around the Dhamekh Stupa three times. Then we went to Sarnath Museum where we saw the original 200 BC Buddha Rūpa in Dhammacakka mudra, depicting the Buddha sitting above the first five bhikkhus.



Left: Dhamekh Stupa

*Ajahn Karunadhammo and Tan Hasapañño
During a boat ride on the Ganges River*



Rajgir: Vulture's Peak, Nalanda, and the Bamboo Grove

Another great place we visited was Vulture's Peak in Rajgir (Rājagaha), where you have to walk up the mountain to the Buddha's hut. But to me, walking up the mountain here was nothing compared to walking up to the ordination platform at Abhayagiri. Here you will see the cave where Sāriputta was fully enlightened. This is also where Mahā-Mogallāna saw ghosts and smiled as he walked down the mountain. I am not sure if I should be happy since I didn't see any ghost there that day—not even the "ghost" (kiḷesa) in my mind.

The beautiful name "Nalanda" belongs to the ancient town where Sāriputta and Mahā-Mogallāna were born. There once was a Buddhist university here, but it was burned down and the monks were killed by Muslim soldiers. The only thing that survived all the invasions was a Black Buddha Rūpa. We went to pay respect and offer a robe to the Black Buddha, and then we walked around Nalanda "campus" and visited the spectacular Sāriputta stupa.

The last holy place we visited was the Bamboo Grove (Veḷuvāṇa), where there is still a lot of bamboo nowadays. We got there in the evening, not too long before its closing time, so we could only meditate briefly and listen to a short Dhamma talk, yet it looks like a very peaceful place to practice.



Khun Ploen

Ajahn Karunadhammo reflects on his time in India:

My second pilgrimage to India, this past December, was much shorter, 10 days in all, than my two month stay there some 12 years ago. This pilgrimage was with a group of 20+ people, mostly Thai with a few Westerners, including four monks, and was an opportunity to make offerings and to practice the Dhamma

at the major Buddhist holy sites.

Of course, each individual often resonates with one or several particular sites (mine being Savatthi and Vulture's Peak), and the chance to make offerings at all of the sites brings about an opening of the heart beyond the rational mind. Pilgrimage renews the spirit and introduces a tangible reality to all the stories from the scriptures.

In some ways, though, the extremes of India are what leave some of the strongest impressions: the grinding poverty, the frailty of the sick and malformed bodies, the endless river of people and animals constantly in motion through the alleys and streets. It is impossible not to see the suffering that saṃsāra brings.

With the recognition of this truth of dukkha, though, comes the opportunity to really open to the truth of freedom that the Buddha taught us is possible. On pilgrimage, one sees the seeds of release being planted in the recognition of that suffering. The holy sites themselves then offer a multidimensional reminder and inspiration that there is a path out of pain and confusion. Being there with good friends and companions, making offerings, chanting pūjas, sitting quietly in meditation and supporting each other in our Dhamma practice gives us the renewed energy and faith to stay on the Path. Inspiration, gratitude, and a feeling of joy in practice returned with me from India. 🙏

At the site of the Buddha's cremation



In the End . . .

This Indian pilgrimage was a great trip, even though we spent every morning at a holy place and every afternoon on a bumpy road to another holy place (except for the two days in Bodh Gaya). In addition to this tiring schedule, almost everyone on the trip got sick with one thing or another (cold, flu, or diarrhea). Despite all these difficulties, I still consider this a great opportunity of a lifetime (and yes, despite the fact that Ajahn Pasanno couldn't go with us). India is so raw, real, and full of life. And as I think back on those breathtaking things I saw in India, I should remember my practice and "see" the thoughts in my mind as well... or the purpose of this pilgrimage would simply go to waste. So... did your mind already go to India, just like mine? 🙏

LETTING GO IN INDIA

Tan Nāṇiko spent the months of November and December visiting Holy Sites with friend Manu Sabay

During the first three months of 2004, an Indian man named Manu was part of the winter retreat support crew. I had been ordained for one Rains Retreat at the time and Manu had become a good friend over the past year. A newly ordained bhikkhu understands that he has made a five year commitment to the training under his teachers. After this, if his teachers think he is ready, he can go to other monasteries, study under other teachers, go on pilgrimage, in short, spread his wings. I was talking with Manu one day and said, "I really don't know if I'll make it to five years. That's a really long time."

"Well Tan Nāṇiko, if you make it to five years I'll invite you to India."

"That's way off in the future, how can you make an invitation like that now?" And thus it came about. In late 2006 I asked Manu if his invitation still stood and in 2007 we planned a two-month journey, my post-five-vassa wing-spreading. Manu happened to be experiencing some difficulties in his life; it was the right time to go. We travelled across India together, and the experience was as new for Manu, who had never "roughed it" before, as it was for me.

There were two levels to the journey: one was the basic act of travelling to different places. The other more profound level was that of friends looking out for each other, letting go of selfishness. The fact that the various pilgrimage places exist allowed this to happen. We travelled to ancient cave monasteries in Ajanta and Ellora, beheld the relics of Sāriputta and Mahā-Mogāllana at Sanchi, walked in the Deer Park at Benares, paid our respects to the Tree of Enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, saw the Buddha's hut on Vulture Peak, and strolled the ancient ruins of Nalanda. Many hours were spent on trains, buses, and motorized rickshaws. The extremes of India surrounded us and washed through us. A detailed travelogue would be too much to fit into a single article, so the following are just a few reflections and observations.

The first thing that struck me in India was the traffic. After only a few days I learned the rules: A honk means you want to pass. If someone is about to hit you head on, flash your lights. Never drive defensively. The Indian driving style, I would learn, is a reflection of the culture. But how to describe this? Anyone who has been to India will know what I'm talking about, but it's so hard to put into words. Everything is extreme, but also subtle. The criticism is extreme, but the praise is also extreme. Wherever people place their faith, they place it in an extreme way. The sickness, aging and death is right there in front of you. Life . . . it *throbs* here.

I got acclimated in Dehra Dun, a town in the Himalayan foothills,

where Manu lives with his mother and the Nepali servant, Bhadur. I couldn't speak much with Manu's mother because she is hard of hearing and there's a language barrier. One night, though, she wanted to question me, and Manu translated. She asked various meaningful questions about the Holy Life and was satisfied with my answers. She proceeded to give me encouragement: "You eat only between dawn and noon. You don't use money. You are a very pious person, cultivating kindness. You live the *brahmacariya* (celibate life). Ordinary people find these things extremely difficult to do. Your parents are very supportive of you. You obviously have made a commitment to the training, having lived this way for over five years now. It takes a long time. Please be patient with yourself. If you don't leave the training, you are bound to reach whatever goals you set for yourself. I am happy to have you here and think of you as I would my own son." I found this encouragement very useful, since I am someone who habitually doubts myself.

We "sealed" the pilgrimage at Mindroling Monastery in Dehra Dun. Soon after I arrived Manu drove me there, and we circled a huge standing golden Buddha three times, turning prayer wheels

and making aspirations. Manu was having some health problems, back pain in particular, so he determined that his health might stabilize by the power of pilgrimage. After travelling we went back to Mindroling and reaffirmed the aspirations.

Even before coming to India I had a desire to go almsround in some poor villages. I got this opportunity first in Sanchi then later in Bodh Gaya. My impression is that resident Buddhist monastics in these areas tend to not go almsround, at least not in the villages. Most of the monastics use money and there's no need to go almsround. The villagers in Sanchi didn't know how to react to my walking through the village but Manu was with me and explained to them what I was doing. One by one they came out with chapatis, fruits, steamed vegetables and biscuits. I went back the next day. In Bodh Gaya

I did the almsround alone and the village children took me to their parents' houses, ensuring that I got plenty to eat. One mother told her son, "It is a rare opportunity to give to a *sāmaṇa*."

The cave monasteries at Ellora affected me deeply. Huge monasteries and temples carved into solid rock provided shelter for real Buddhist monks in ancient times. The weather was not too hot or cold, with a slight breeze. The caves are located a few miles from the nearest town, with a waterfall cascading over one section and down into a gurgling forest stream. When I looked into one of the monk's quarters (a small room carved into the rocks which contained a stone bed, complete with a stone "pillow" shaped on top of it), a saying of the Buddha came to my mind: "Secluded dwelling places frequented by cool breezes, these I praise."

Due to an auspicious coincidence, the last day of our five-day stay



Tan Nāṇiko and Manu, Christmas Day, New Delhi

at Sanchi was the one day of the year that the relics of Sāriputta and Māha-Mogallana were put on display. Any difficulties while travelling, putting up with cold, heat, smells and discomfort became worth it, to gaze upon the real remains of the two great disciples.

Ajahn Jayasāro had told me to expect to get sick in the first week or two in India, but I had a delayed reaction. After a month in India I fell ill, and it was caused by my own foolishness. I had eaten some tamarind syrup, kept as a seven day tonic, but it had gone off after a few days. I ate a bit of the syrup one evening in Bodh Gaya, and by the next morning I was throwing up violently and had a fever. This went on for the whole day, and after that was recovery: lots of sleep, very little food (the stomach was too weak to hold very much), bananas and electrolyte solution. The food, at this point, seemed to be my enemy. On the day of my sickness I ate some rice which was full of sand, and the next day I discovered rat feces floating in my cup of tea. “Can you let go of that one, Tan Nāṇiko?” Manu had asked. Sickness can wake people up. It can say, “slow down, be more careful.”

I had planned on doing a three-day walk from Bodh Gaya to Rajgir, but had to cancel it due to the illness. I had sorely wanted to do this walk and was distressed that it wasn't going to happen. I was also unhappy that Manu and I had some rough moments in the past weeks. Now, my intention of going to India “to help out a friend” had become unclear and I was seeking answers. One evening after a quick cup-o-chai and watching two boys play soccer with an old sandal, I went again to the Mahā Bodhi Temple, feeling lost. I did my usual three circles around the temple and tried to think of a way to ask the Buddha for advice concerning my own practice. I went to one of the stone-cut temple shrine rooms and sat.

I tried to formulate somewhat of a clear intention: “My standard of practice is low these days, and the mind is not clear. If, Buddha, you are present here, please give advice for my situation.” Right then, as if on cue, Manu came in to that room, bowed, and left. The answer was clear: My duty at this time is to learn how to be there for another person, to forget myself and be present for others. My job is to have no *my way*. A feeling of coolness arose along with a subtle kind of

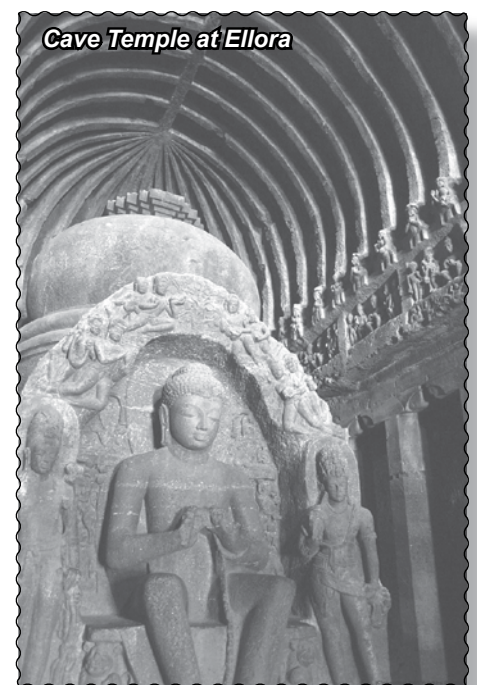
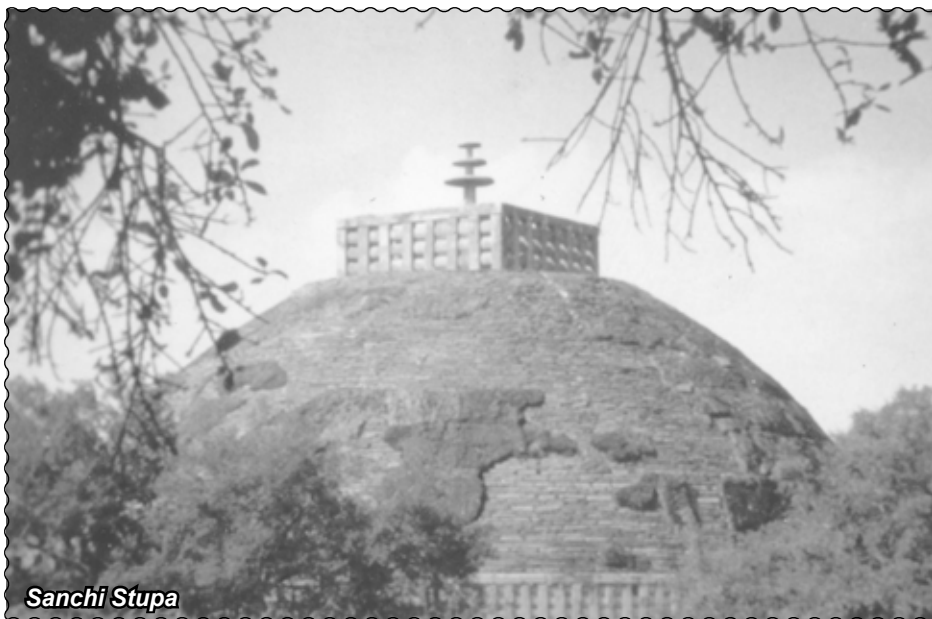
happiness and expansiveness.

The journey reached a climax for Manu when we visited the Buddha's hut on Vulture's Peak. Apart from Ajanta and Ellora, this was the only place we visited that was surrounded by wilderness. One could imagine the Buddha going for alms in Rājagaha then mindfully ascending Vulture's Peak to his hut and quietly taking his meal. Then he would enter seclusion for the afternoon. The place was so powerful for Manu and, as I circumambulated the hut and did my bows, his tears flowed.

Sickness can wake people up. It can say “Slow down, be more careful.”

After twenty-five days of travelling and surviving, we'd had enough and returned to New Delhi, then to Dehra Dun. This gave a fortnight of downtime before my return to the US. Time to compile notes and digest things.

I could say so much more about each place, how we made a connection with some very special people in Sarnath, how there was so much sincerity of heart coming from the monastics in Bodh Gaya. I could say so much about the experiences in the train stations and on the trains, about how I got yelled at by a man in Benares, about how the servants at the rest house in Sarnath thought I was some highly accomplished yogi and had so much faith that the tears flowed down their faces. I could say so much more but it seemed that the whole point of the journey was not the adventure of going to many places, but to let go of *my way of doing things*. That was the real lesson I learned this time. And my gratitude for Manu sponsoring me on this trip is endless. He didn't really know what he was getting in to, and reflecting back after the end of the journey, he said he was so glad that he didn't decide to back out of it, and glad that he has a friend in the robes. 🙏



ABSOLUTE SINCERETY

*One of Ajahn Chab's disciples
reflects on the early days at Wat Pah Pong*

The heart of what Luang Por was teaching, the two things he was stressing above all else, were the Vinaya and meditation practice. The monastic regimen was not to be discarded or interrupted under any circumstances. If it wasn't absolutely necessary then there was no break from group meetings. He laid great emphasis on meditation practice. You were told to do walking and sitting meditation, to put forth effort frequently: morning, noon and night. If you had some task to perform then you were to see to it and then return to your meditation. The monks weren't interested in chatting or playing around. Everyone kept to themselves and did their practice. The laypeople who went to the monastery did the same. They listened to talks and learned about the Dhamma. They took meditation practice seriously and applied themselves to it at the appropriate times.

Sometimes we'd practise until eleven or twelve at night before he'd let us go back. That would give you two hours of rest. How could you go to sleep for two hours? You just ended up sitting propped up against a wall or a tree somewhere near the meditation hall. You'd never be in time to ring the bell: Luang Por would always be there first. We tried our best but who could make do with as little sleep as him? He endured great physical pain, but the results appeared.

The first thing he told us to do was to establish stable mindfulness: to make it continuous, not to get lost or distracted or let it be cut off. He taught us to establish mindfulness, nurture our faith, incline our minds towards the Triple Gem of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. He himself had genuine reverence and he taught that reverence to us too. 🙏



Photos: Dtu
Wat Pah Pong
January 16
2008



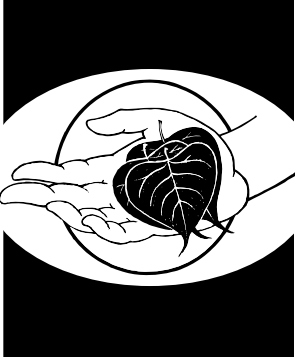
MONASTIC RESIDENTS

	vassa		vassa		vassa
Pasanno Bhikkhu	34	Ñāṇiko Bhikkhu	5	Kassapo Bhikkhu	1
Amaro Bhikkhu	29	Ahiṃsako Bhikkhu	4	Sāmaṇera Cunda	1
Yatiko Bhikkhu	15	Cāgānando Bhikkhu	3	Sāmaṇera Kaccāna	1
Sudanto Bhikkhu	13	Sampajāno Bhikkhu	2	Anagārika Nic Grueff	1
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	10	Ṭhitābho Bhikkhu	1	Anagārika Michael Bodman	1

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

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May 22, 2008: Bhikkhu Ordination at Abhayagiri

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newsletter editor stepping down.
See page 7 for details.

Ajahn Amaro

May 21, May 28, June 4, 2008

Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA

*Teaching Series:
"Violence and Non-Violence"*

