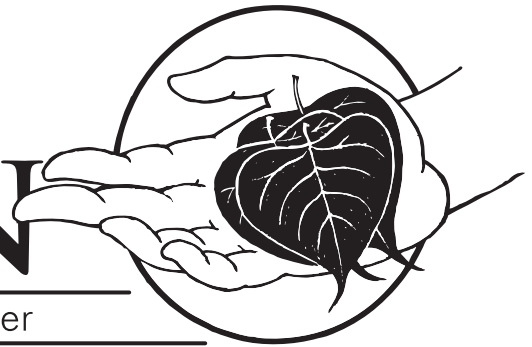


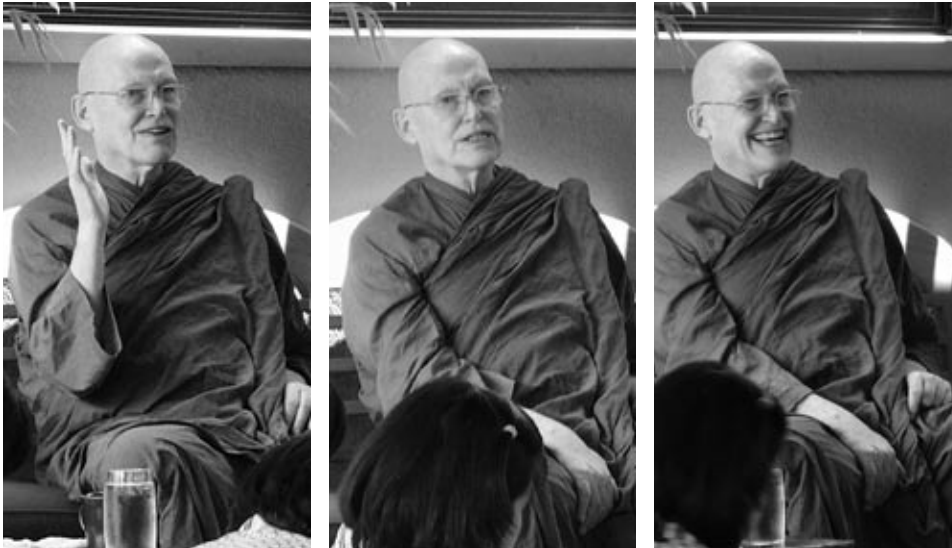
FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

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Ajahn Sumedho at Abhayagiri

Awakened Consciousness

A Dhamma talk given by Ajahn Sumedho at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery on the Lunar Observance Night, June 18, 2008

This is the Uposatha Night and the full moon, the month of June, and you've gathered to listen to the Dhamma—for practicing. This evening you took refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. This can be a Theravadin ceremony, or it can be a reminder of what a refuge is, and why we would repeat such words. Of course, this is the whole style of the Buddha's teaching, to awaken consciousness, to observe the way it is. Even though human beings consider themselves conscious, in Buddhist terms they are not always awake, even though they may not be asleep. But we are!

From the time that we are born we are usually conditioned to see and think and feel through the language, cultural attitudes and customs that we've acquired, and develop a strong sense of separateness as a unique person or personality. These are conditions that we acquire after we are born. We're not born with these. But when a baby is born it's born with a physical body, and it's conscious.

Consciousness and the body are natural conditions. To be able to see them in terms of Dhamma means to awaken to the way it is. The body, not as some personal identity but as this experience right now, is sitting here giving this reflection, and then there is consciousness. We usually don't recognize pure consciousness because we are highly conditioned to think—we are attached to views and opinions, memories, emotional habits, to a sense of self. Then we create ourselves out of these various conditions: as Americans, or whatever. Ajahn Pasanno is now an American—legally! This we can consider as a convention.

In Thailand, they differentiate the conventional realities and the Ultimate Truth. We tend to regard conventional realities as ultimate, as the real world, and live according to our conditioning, to our prejudices, assumptions, and personal identities. But in awakened consciousness we are observing this. The Buddha emphasized mindfulness, and as far as I know this emphasis is not found in any other religious convention. It is very interesting that the Buddha takes this mindfulness and calls it the "Gate to the Deathless." It's very difficult for us to define it because it is indefinable. But it is *recognizable*.

When we're obstructed by this sense of a separate identity as a personality, an ego, or by culturally and socially conditioned views that we've acquired, and the language that we think in, it always leads to some kind of insecurity or doubt. When these are not challenged or awakened to, then we tend to be operating from positions, taking sides, defining ourselves according to the religious convention, or the social condition we have, the gender of the body, the color of the skin, or whatever. These are

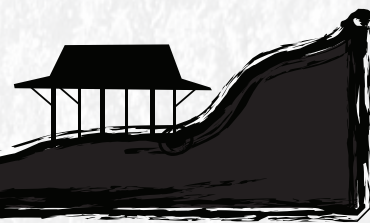
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Contributors: *The Sangha, Ajahn Sumedho, Mettika, Sāmanera Thitapañño, Dennis Crean and Rachel Starbuck.*

From the Monastery



Since the last report from Abhayagiri, we have enjoyed a long, nearly endless summer and are now experiencing the slow yet clear shift into autumn and winter. The oak trees are changing colors, and the days are short, but as these words are written we are still having very warm weather and clear blue skies.

At the beginning of the summer we were glad to have welcomed Bhante Gunaratana (“Bhante G”) for a one-week stay—his third visit to Abhayagiri (as briefly mentioned in the last issue of Fearless Mountain). Bhante G is the highly respected teacher and abbot of Bhāvanā Society, a monastery and retreat center located in rural West Virginia. During his time here he generously offered three Dhamma talks, and we all appreciated his willingness to engage with both the resident Sangha and the broader community. Bhante G presents his depth of knowledge of the Dhamma with clarity and humor. Furthermore, he has that rare combination of being both a Buddhist scholar and a meditation master.

Towards the end of July, Ajahn Amaro co-led the Spirit Rock Family Retreat, accompanied by Ven. Ahimsako. Ajahn Amaro joined Heather Sundberg, Betsy Rose, and Julie Wester for this five-day retreat, which was attended by approximately 35 families. The theme this year was *change*, with the teachers and counselors once again utilizing their gifts for being able to convey a Dhamma theme and then weave it into all of the daily activities.

On August 7, Abhayagiri saw two young men go forth as anagārikas; Louis Gegenhuber and Carl Braun, bringing up the total number of monastics here to 16: 11 bhikkhus, two sāmaneras and three anagārikas. Including lay-resident Debbie Stamp this was the largest resident community we’ve ever been. Anagārika Louis was born in Taos, New Mexico and was raised in the south-west and mid-western United States. He studied Fine Arts in college and has worked as a carpenter. He arrived at Abhayagiri in Spring 2008. Anagārika Carl was born in New Jersey in 1983 and grew up in the Midwest. After three

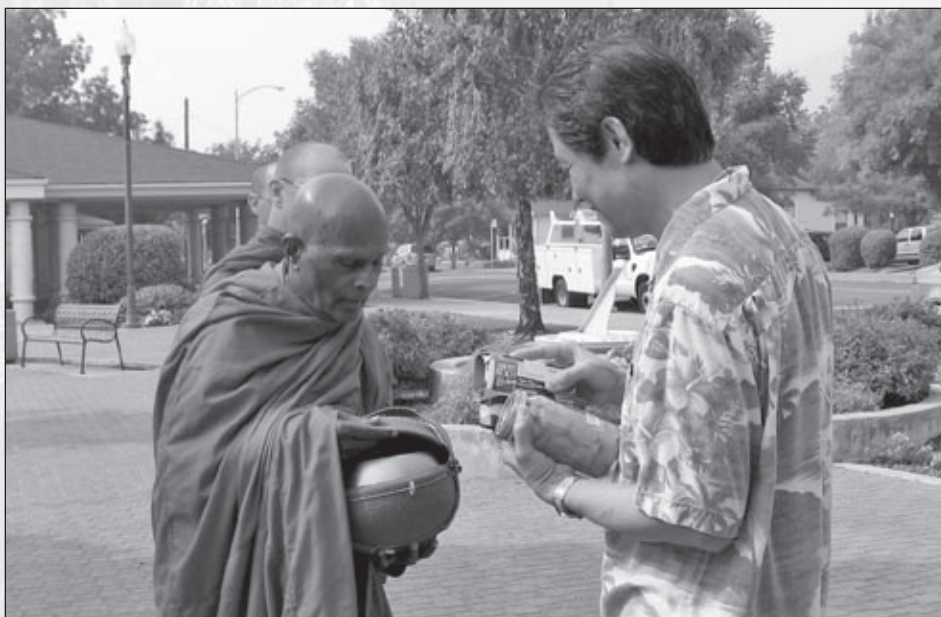


Ajahn Pasanno with Susan, Karen and Cassidy

years in the Army, where he was a linguist, and partway through a deployment to Iraq, his growing spiritual aspirations enabled him to secure a discharge. He spent a year travelling in Asia to find a compatible spiritual practice, settling on Theravadan Buddhism after staying in Thailand.

Towards the end of August the monastery hosted the annual Spirit Rock Teen Weekend—a two-night, three-day camping weekend for teens. The teens participate in the full monastic schedule, including morning meditation at 5:00 am, which they all attended! It’s always a joy for us to be able to share our lives with these young people who are sincerely interested in the Buddhaddhamma.

In early September Ajahn Pasanno led a seven-day Mettā retreat, held at the Padmasambhava Peace Institute in Cazadero, California. The retreat, which was attended by 40 people, was organized by long-term Abhayagiri supporters Susan Seitz, Karen Phillips, and Cassidy Trager. Also involved were old-hands Paul Friedlander, who lent his organizational skills, and Paul Eaton who was the head cook. Soon after the retreat ended, Ajahn Pasanno travelled to Metta Forest Monastery for a six-day visit, along with a number of monastics from Abhayagiri. This is the first time he has visited there since 2002. Monks from both monasteries commented on the benefits of coming together in this way, and on their return the Abhayagiri



Bhante G on almsround



Rev. Heng Sure at Ven. Kaccāna's ordination

crew were notably inspired. It is hoped that more gatherings of this nature will take place in the future.

September 27 and 28 saw the 7th Annual Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage, starting at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and ending here at the monastery. This two-day event covered 137 miles (and according to the organisers of the event "60,000 breaths") and had a number of stops along the way, including the City of 10,000 Buddhas, the large Northern-tradition monastery nearby. This year's ride had the highest number of participants ever, with approximately 90 riders and 30 support-people. The weather was excellent for cycling and everyone finished the ride without any major problems. As always, the pilgrimage was spiritually supported by members of the Abhayagiri Sangha, with Ajahn Amaro as the senior monk in attendance.

After the end of the rains retreat (vassa), on October 19, the Kathina ceremony was held at Abhayagiri. It was a joyous day, attended by approximately 250 people from as far away as Thailand and the east coast of the United States. The weather was "perfect" and people from diverse walks of life came together and parted in harmony having been enriched by the events of the day. One week later Sāmanera Kaccāna formally requested the Upasampada, or bhikkhu ordination. Rev. Heng Sure, abbot of Berkeley Buddhist Monastery and Abhayagiri friend, offered the Dhamma talk on that occasion. Only four days later, on Thursday, October 30, Sāmaneras Subhara, Dhammavaro and

Suvaco—three novices from Sītavana (Birken Forest Monastery in B.C. Canada) had their Upasampada. Ajahn Pasanno was the upajjhaya, or preceptor, for both of these ordination ceremonies. Sītavana's abbot, Ajahn Sona, attended the October 30 ceremony. Ven. Pavaro, the "second monk" at Sītavana, travelled here on November 1 for a one-month stay—his first time at Abhayagiri. Monastery residents and visitors have been delighted to have more contact with our closest branch monastery (a mere 1010 miles to the north!). Late October also saw another change in the Abhayagiri Sangha when Ven. Sampajāno left for Thailand to spend his third year as a bhikkhu at Wat Pah Nanachat and associated monasteries. We wish him well during his time away.

close friend and neighbor, J., died after a year-long period of treatment for cancer. Almost anyone who visited Abhayagiri since the summer of 2002 would have met J. He lived on the mountainside across the road from the monastery and generously dedicated his time to coming here and helping us with the upkeep and development of the monastery. During the past few years J. derived great pleasure from creating and tending a vegetable garden up at Dennis Crean's house, which is nearby where he was living. J. would use the food compost from the monastery to feed and nourish the garden, and then bring back copious amounts of vegetables to feed and nourish the Abhayagiri community.

On November 20 the first of two memorials for J. was held. Between



The three new Birken bhikkhus receive instruction from Ajahn Pasanno

The annual Thanksgiving Retreat, was held at the Angela Center in Santa Rosa again this year, and was led by Ajahn Amaro. Abhayagiri residents Ajahn Yatiko and Debbie Stamp both offered Dhamma reflections, as did Mary Paffard, a Yoga Mendocino teacher who also offered yoga sessions during the retreat.

Abhayagiri has recently witnessed the deaths of two members of the lay-community. On Monday, November 10,

15 and 20 friends of J. gathered at the monastery to offer the meal. In the early afternoon we held the first part of the memorial in the Dhamma Hall, with auspicious chanting and recollections of J. and his time here. We then went across the valley to J.'s mountainside hermitage. For most of us it was the first time that we had seen where he had been living in his small tent nestled beneath a grove of redwood trees with a meditation platform and shrine. More chanting was done and

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our precious identities that we will fight over, quarrel over, and abuse each other endlessly around—the conditions that we’ve acquired, not out of wisdom and understanding, but out of ignorance. In this sense, ignorance is not like being illiterate, rather it’s not understanding, not knowing *Dhamma*. In other words, as long as one is limited and bound into the conditioned realm then there’s this ignorance. Consciousness operates and remains the same, but ignorance influences how we see and create the world around us.

About “mindfulness,” then. In England, it’s now the kind of word that people are really interested in. Say, ten or twenty years ago, with psychotherapists or people in the field of psychology, I’d never heard them really use it or give it any importance. But now it is the flavor of the year in the psychotherapy world, and this is a good thing. But then we tend to see it not in the profound terms that the Buddha meant it, but merely as being aware of how you feel, or being aware of the things around you. We can direct our awareness outward, like being mindful of where this person is sitting, and aware of the weather and whether it’s going to rain or not. But in terms of *Sammā Sati* (Right Mindfulness), what the Buddha was encouraging was an awareness that comes from the very center, an awareness that includes the totality; which includes our own feelings, physical body, and the objects that we experience through the senses.

It’s an all inclusive awareness. It’s not aimed particularly at one thing, just being aware of some external thing, or identifying with awareness as some kind of personal quality. Or maybe we think we’re not aware enough. People say, “I’m not terribly mindful, but I try to practice mindfulness all the time. I’m trying to be mindful. I’m trying to become mindful, and I have mindfulness practices.” These are the words that we use for sati. But then, in terms of how the Buddha means it, the point is not to try to become *somebody* who’s aware, but to be awareness itself in the present. So that

is awakened consciousness here and now. It’s immediate, and it includes, it’s not excluding anything. It includes what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, think and feel; emotional feelings that one is having; personal views, opinions, memories or attitudes... They are *like this*.

Now with sati and *paññā* (wisdom), this leads to discernment, to seeing Dhamma, rather than in seeing a conditioned attitude or a positioning in the conditioned realm. With sati and *sampajañña*—awareness, mindfulness,

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apperception—there is the ability that each one of us has to open to the totality of this moment, in which it’s not a thought, it’s not a perception, but it is recognizable: it’s *like this*. That is consciousness. We’re suddenly recognizing consciousness itself, which is that which is ordinary and that we’re experiencing all the time. But when we’re always perceiving ourselves through conditioning, then we don’t recognize consciousness. We’re merely using consciousness and projecting into it our own sense of self, conditioned attitudes, emotional habits, and identities.

The actual word *Buddha* means *Awakened*. It’s a “wake-up” teaching. Somebody asked me one time, “Could you describe Buddhism in one sentence?” And I said, “I can do it in one word.” He said, “What’s that?” “Wake-up!” This isn’t about *me* waking up, but it’s an invitation to pay attention, to be open, receptive, here and now, in which the sense of your thinking process, ego, cultural assumptions, the thought process itself, recedes. It’s not about getting rid of desire, or getting rid of your self; but of not limiting

yourself to the language, the thoughts, the memories, the identities that we tend to when we’re not fully awake. Taking refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, on a practical level, a functional level, is this waking up.

Consider that we’re very attached to thinking—we want to figure everything out. We come from a society, a culture that has developed the thinking process.

We can think in rational terms, with logic. We can analyze, can manipulate the conditioned world, we have Western science, psychology, all these ways of thinking and perceiving through concepts that we’ve developed. And then we see ourselves through this same conditioned habit of thinking. So in mindfulness, we’re even getting outside our own thinking process. That was one of the great challenges that I found, because even though I understood that as an idea, at first I couldn’t figure it out because I was thinking about it. How do you let go of thinking? “I know I should let go of thinking; and yet, how do you do it?” You wind yourself up trying to figure how to stop thinking.

Now thinking is not something to be despised or rejected, but attachment to thinking always leads to division. The thinking process is a critical function, and that’s its purpose: to compare, analyze, criticize; “This is bigger than that, this is white, this is blue, this is green.” We discriminate, and then we decide what we like and what we don’t like; what should be and what shouldn’t be; right and wrong; good and bad. Then we apply this to meditation. How many of you practice meditation with the assumption of yourself, “I am an unenlightened person who has come here to practice meditation in order to become enlightened in the future”? During the retreat at Spirit Rock, I kept throwing this at the retreatants. I’ve noticed over the years of teaching how some people never get outside this thing, “I’m an unenlightened person who still has to get my *samādhi*, get insight, get all kinds of other things, in order to *become* enlightened, or hopefully to get some insight in the future.” This

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Awakened Consciousness (continued from page 4)

is all based on *sakkāya ditthi*—the ego, the self view, or personality view—and the grasping of Buddhism, not Dhamma. This is from the *sakkāya ditthi*, from the self perception, which is based on time. When I think of myself, then I think, “I am Ajahn Sumedho,” and then I can recite my history, my biography. I was born 74 years ago... that’s *sakkāya ditthi*, or just conventional reality—you can use the words in terms of the cultural convention. If I really believe that: I am this person, I was born at such and such a time, and I’ve done this and that; and never question it... This is not to dismiss it, but to be able to see that this is the thinking process. When I attach to this assumption, “I am this unenlightened person, who’s here to practice in order to become...” If I never challenge that perception, then I can spend the rest of my life with this blinding me to awakened consciousness. The other one is, “I am enlightened, I’m pure already, I don’t need to practice”: it’s still the same problem because it’s all attachment to the sense of, “I am somebody who is already enlightened,” or “I am somebody who is not yet enlightened.”

Now you’re probably thinking, well what am I supposed to do? It leaves you with really nothing. But you can start from that position—that’s how we all start. That’s how I started anyway: “I’m a confused person, I don’t know what to do with my life, I’m unhappy, I want to do something in order to find some kind of relief from the suffering.” Going to Thailand and practicing meditation, becoming a monk, it was all done with, “I need to do this, in order to become something.” It’s not to disparage that, but to point to it. I found various ways to try to figure this out. It doesn’t work. You have to really look at yourself thinking, and in order to see yourself thinking you have to deliberately think, intentionally think: “I am this unenlightened person sitting practicing here in order to become.” It’s as simple as that. There’s an awareness of this assumption, and I’m intentionally thinking this, but at the same moment being aware of it. And this awareness is not a thought. After a while, if you keep pursuing this, you

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Being with Elders

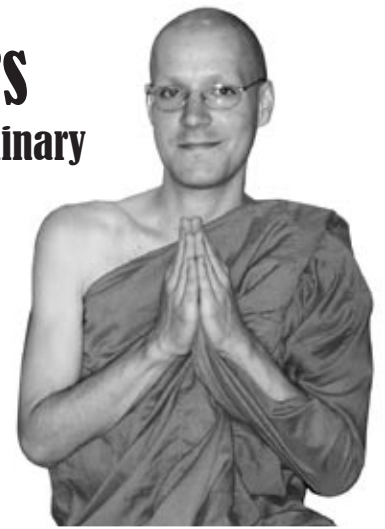
The Ordinary and the Extraordinary

by *Sāmanera Thitapaṇṇo*

At times the spiritual quest can feel like a grim struggle to conquer our defilements and become a flawless being like the golden Buddha statue on the hill. Thus, having the opportunity to spend time with Bhante G (Bhante Gunaratana) and Ajahn Sumedho, real humans that have sincerely dedicated their lives to the Holy Life, was a refreshing glimpse of the possibilities of practice.

In June I was fortunate enough to participate in Ajahn Sumedho’s ten-day meditation retreat at Spirit Rock. His teachings and presence were a helpful balance to my tendency to lapse into a “grit my teeth and strive” ethic. In addition to learning from his formal teachings, being able to offer Ajahn Sumedho a cup of coffee and spend time with him in an informal environment allowed me to see a lighter side of the most senior Western monk in the Ajahn Chah tradition. Ajahn Sumedho’s joyful nature and his continual reminders to “trust in awareness” stand out in my memories of the Spirit Rock retreat. Ajahn Sumedho helped me to glimpse beyond the various neat boxes of to-do’s and responsibilities that divide my life.

My good fortune continued in early July, when the date of my *sāmanera* ordination was set to coincide with Bhante G’s visit to Abhayagiri. Having Bhante G present as I went “into brown” allowed me to honor my connection to him and the *Bhāvanā* Society, the Forest Monastery and Meditation Center in West Virginia of which he is the founding abbot. I went to the *Bhāvanā* Society immediately after college and it was during my year as a lay resident there that I began to seriously consider monastic life. During that time I developed a great deal of respect for Bhante G. Furthermore, I am grateful for the opportunity and



guidance Bhante G gave me with his presence and by making the *Bhāvanā* Society available.

The times I enjoyed most during Bhante G’s visit were when I was able to show my appreciation for the role he has played in my life. Presenting Bhante G with a tray of offerings and providing him with hot water to drink at the meal were lovely, little chances to say, “Thank you.” Furthermore, seeing the excitement and awe Bhante G invoked in the residents and visitors at Abhayagiri reminded me of the rarity and value of those who have sincerely dedicated decades to the Holy Life.

I did not witness any psychic powers or supernatural occurrences during the visits from Bhante G and Ajahn Sumedho. Yet, it is the combination of the ordinary and the extraordinary within visiting elders that is so inspiring. Seeing Bhante G examine the sugar content of the offerings on the drink tray or talking to Ajahn Sumedho about the dangers of poison oak brings a human dimension to my spiritual aspirations. It is in light of their humanity that the genuine sense of well-being in Ajahn Sumedho’s grin and the twinkle in Bhante G’s eyes inspires my own faith in the possibilities of the path. 🙏

begin to see very clearly that the thinking process is one thing, but that consciousness with awareness is not thinking. It doesn't exclude thinking, it *includes* it. But it's not attached to thinking.

In this way the Buddha pointed out that the real problem lies in ignorance and attachment to conditions. It's not conditioned phenomena that are the problem. It's not desire, it's not the body, and it's not the senses. It's the ignorance, not knowing this simple reality, and the attachments we have. It's that blind way we commit ourselves to our sense of self, to the unquestioned attitudes we have about cultural ideals, or cultural assumptions, and then the strong obsessive attachment to the thinking process, trying to figure everything out, trying to figure Buddhism out, to figure out the Dhamma. You see it in the Buddhist world here in California. There's so many opinions and views circulating around Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, Hīnayāna, Zen, Nichiren... or modern variations, American Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, and on and on like this—there's a free range of "anything goes." And then we form views. Whatever group or convention we particularly incline to, happen to encounter first, or are influenced by, we tend to attach to. That's fine, because there was certainly a time when I attached to Theravada, Thai forest tradition... But at the same time Ajahn Chah was saying, "Wake up and see the attachment," to this sense of "I am this," and the way that I would attach to the convention of Theravadin views and opinions, Thai Buddhism, Thai forest Ajahn Mun tradition. Being attached to it still limits you.

So the aim is not to become a Theravadin Buddhist, or a forest bhikkhu, but to use these conventions for awakening. It's not liberating just to become a Buddhist, to just condition yourself with Buddhist ideas and Buddhist prejudices and attitudes, or take sides. You might be attaching to something very good, but there's still the suffering. It will not awaken you until you dare to question, to observe. Not to question in the sense of trying to figure it out, but taking that step from attachment to non-attachment, which is what awareness

really amounts to.

With this sense of awakened consciousness, when there is *this*, then we recognize, we realize Dhamma. We recognize the conditions in terms of Dhamma, we discern all conditions are impermanent. It's not attaching to a view that, "All conditions are impermanent." We actually know this, we discern it. And then we also discern the unconditioned. We recognize *nibbāna, anattā, suññata, nirodha*. These are the words for the unborn, uncreated, unformed, unconditioned. This is in the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, and is recognizable. I've used this teaching now for all of my monastic life and have been putting it to the test. As I get older, conditions change, so that whatever happens, whatever experiences, success or failure, praise or blame, prosperity or poverty, the aim is to be able to learn from both sides of the worldly conditions. That applies to one's ordinary life, in terms of living as a Buddhist monk and the changes that occur internally and externally; because you get praised, and you get blamed, and you have successes and failures, just like anyone else. This is not an easy ride, monastic life. But it is, if used properly, a form that helps, that encourages awareness. It's not for attachment, but for awakening.

So, how can we use this convention for awakening, rather than for attachment? Do we become a Theravadin Buddhist, or become a bhikkhu, or bhikkhuni, something like this; or we can awaken to Dhamma. Mindfulness in this way is non-critical, it's non-divisive. Mindfulness then includes everything, it embraces the totality, both the good and the bad, the praise and the blame, happiness, suffering—the whole lot. The critical mind will pick and choose: it wants happiness, it doesn't want suffering, wants to be praised and respected and appreciated; doesn't want to be blamed and despised, it wants to be successful, not a failure. In this way the worldly dhammas are formed out of thinking.

Again I reiterate that statement that thinking's function is divisive, it is dualistic. You have success and failure, happiness, suffering, heaven, hell, right and wrong. And that's why when we just

attach, when we try to figure everything out with the thinking process, it only takes us so far and then it doesn't work. You can't get enlightened through attachment to thinking, no matter how clever your intellect might be, because it's not that way: it's conditioned. English language is something I learned after I was born. I wasn't born speaking English, I learned it afterwards. But I was born conscious. Consciousness is not a thought; consciousness is reality, it's not personal, it's not "my consciousness" as my special kind of consciousness and you have a different kind of consciousness. That's how we talk, "my life" and "my reality" and "my world" and "what I think," and "what I like": it tends to create this sense of separation. If I'm always thinking in terms of "me and mine," and "I am this person, and you're that person," that is dividing, isn't it? On an ideal level we might think, "We're all one in the Dhamma" and that's a beautiful ideal, but that's not what we're really experiencing through thinking about it. When we think about it, then we always feel this sense of division, loneliness, and isolation, or we feel in conflict with somebody who doesn't agree with us. Or we're in conflict with ourselves, because we can be very clever on the thinking level, and emotionally very immature. We can have very high-minded, altruistic goals in life, and beautiful ideals, and at the same time, emotionally feel like a victim, like being persecuted, paranoia, on and on like this. So even though the intellectual side says, "Don't be silly, you're just making it up," if we don't understand the emotional side also, then we tend to criticize it, because our emotional life is not an ideal, but it is like *this*. We feel.

The emotions are "My love, my hate, my rights, my beliefs, my happiness, my greed, my sexual desire, my anger, my jealousy and fear." Emotions have this sense of really being *me*. When you're really feeling some strong emotion, it's more *real* and more *me* than anything else, but there's also this awakenedness to it. Whatever the emotion is, no matter how strong or powerful, or how subtle it might be, there's an awareness of it. So this is

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what the Buddha was pointing to: waking up to conditioned phenomena, in whatever form, in the myriad forms that might be appearing in your consciousness.

Now, the thinking process is limited to a linear way of looking at everything, and that's why it's dualistic. You can only have one thought at a time; you can't think two thoughts at the same moment.

One thought connects to another, they associate. The thinking process is about conditioning yourself with grammar to communicate messages to other people. We have a thinking habit that's based on the grammatical structure of a language, and one thought associates with another. Also, memories will

become very strong, will arouse emotions: somebody criticizes me, says some kind of harsh criticism, and I feel it emotionally. Or you can remember things in your past, things where you've been mistreated or abused in the past, and even though those conditions aren't present now, when you start grasping at memory, you can get just as angry. I used to experiment in Thailand with this. I noticed how I could really wind myself up, sitting in a kuti in the forest. You're getting bored and dull, and you think of some indignity you suffered, something that was really unfair that happened in your past, maybe 20 years before. I could be sitting in that kuti with none of the conditions present, and, without really intending to, get all excited and indignant over something just by attaching to a memory of being mistreated in the past. You can see this all the time in yourself, like the racial prejudices, or the memories of what people have done, ethnic wars, and the problems that we have in terms of racial issues, the way the white people treated the blacks, or the Native Americans... one could get very indignant. In Northern Ireland—now it's getting better—but just between Catholics and Protestants, just remembering what the Protestants did, or what the English did to the Irish. That's no longer what's happening, but one still carries the memories and associations of

a culture and the prejudices that generate from that particular conditioning.

We have the Croats and Serbs, Israelis and Palestinians, Shias and Sunnis, Tamils and Sinhalese, and it goes on and on. One can carry things from one generation to the next just through remembering the indignities, and we can feel very angry and resentful. But with awareness of

There's this awareness that includes the whole gamut, the whole range of conditioned phenomena. It's also seeing conditioned phenomena no longer in the critical way, but in the discerning: "All conditions are impermanent, sabbe sankhārā anicca."

this present moment here and now, that which is aware is not indignant or angry, but it's aware of this emotion: righteous indignation is like *this*. The feeling, the emotional impact of feeling really wired-up to seek revenge, a vendetta, to get even with the oppressor, is like *this*. In this way you're opening yourself to observing the way it is. When there's attachment to this emotion and I keep thinking and believing and feeling this memory, then I feel like *this*: I'm angry, and righteously indignant, and want to seek justice and revenge. This is all from ignorance: not understanding Dhamma. Then we seek revenge, we get angry and believe it, we carry the religious biases or ethnic biases, racial biases, from one generation to the next. That's why the world is like this; why there's so much war and persecution, because human beings are not awake, they are operating from their conditioning.

So this awakened mindfulness, *sati-sampajañña*—seeing, knowing, investigating, realizing, and taking refuge in Dhamma—it's Buddha that knows the Dhamma, or the Truth of the way it is; it's not me, Ajahn Sumedho, knowing the Dhamma. It's not "*my* Dhamma," or "*I* know the Dhamma," things like that—that doesn't make sense. But it's this *knowing*...

In the Thai forest tradition they use this word *Buddho* (which is a kind of mantra

form of Buddha) and means awakened consciousness. Buddha, then, is a word that has great meaning to me because I've used it for so long. It's not just sentimental or an attachment to the founder of what we know as Buddhism today. It is a real sense of awakened consciousness, recognizing, realizing "this is real," and relating to the conditions, to my karmic tendencies,

my sense of myself as a separate person in whatever way that is; emotional habits, pleasant, unpleasant, good, bad, foolish, intelligent, whatever. There's this *awareness* that includes the whole gamut, the whole range of conditioned phenomena. It's also seeing conditioned phenomena no longer in the critical way, but in the discerning: "All conditions are impermanent, *sabbe sankhārā anicca*."

That which knows conditions are impermanent is not a condition. One condition can't know another condition. My right hand can't know my left hand, but they're both in consciousness. There's an awareness of the left hand's here, the right hand's here, simple as that. How do you feel about my left hand? It doesn't make sense, it's ridiculous! But that which is aware of the right hand... If I just get absorbed into my right hand then I forget about the left one, and I'm getting caught and bound into my right hand—where's my left one? But if I don't absorb into a condition, just receive it, then both have equal value in consciousness. This consciousness receives and it discerns. But discerning isn't a thought process; it's discernment, a wise recognition of the way it is, that conditioned phenomena are impermanent, not self. I might say, "My right hand, my left hand": that's a convention, but it is what it is. I don't have to call it "mine" to be fully aware.

As you develop this practice, more and more you begin to recognize that this unconditioned is reality; when you let go of conditioned phenomena, when you're no longer clutching after things, trying to get hold of, get rid of, trying to control or figure everything out. One begins to relax and open, to receive; not in order to

(Continued on page 12)

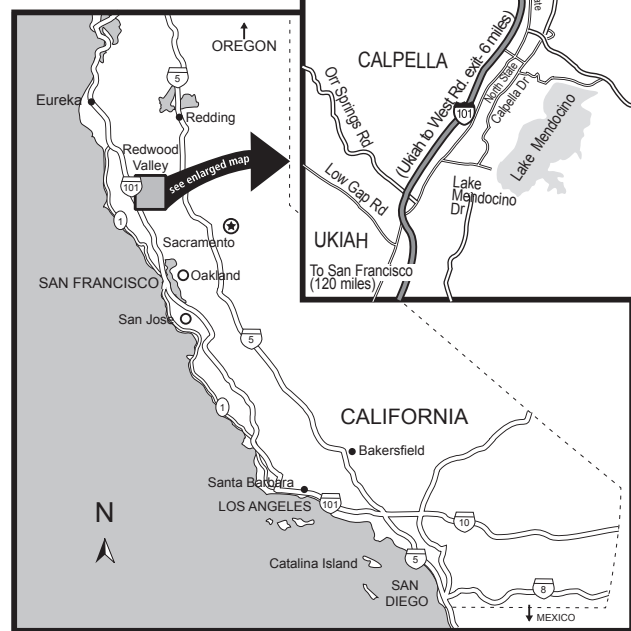
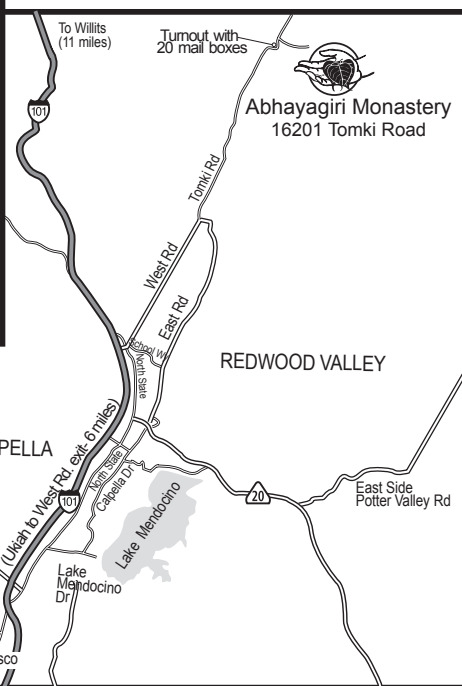
Lunar Observance Days

2552	Dec '08	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
	FRI 3	SAT 3	MON 2	TUE 3	THU 2	FRI 1
	FRI 12	SAT 10	MON 9 ¹	TUE 10	THU 9	FRI 8 ²
	SAT 20	SUN 18	TUE 17	WED 18	FRI 17	SAT 16
	FRI 26	SUN 25	MON 23	WED 25	THU 23	SAT 23
						SUN 31

1. Māgha Pūjā. 2. Visākha Pūjā.

Directions to Abhayagiri

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



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

Jan	3	Abhayagiri community enters three-month Winter Retreat period, ending on March 31st.
	6	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery led by nuns from Amaravati and Chithurst Monasteries in England.
	14	Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA (with guest teacher).
	16	Ajahn Chah Memorial Day.
Feb	3	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery led by nuns from Amaravati and Chithurst Monasteries in England.
	9	Māgha Puja.
	11	Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA (with guest teacher).
Mar	3	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery led by Abhayagiri lay minister.
	11	Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA (with guest teacher).
	31	Abhayagiri Winter Retreat ends.
Apr	4	Daylong at Spirit Rock — “Spring Fever” with Ajahn Amaro.
	7	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
	8	Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA.
	12	Community work day at Abhayagiri.
	19	Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
May	5	Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.
	6	Meditation Series at Yoga Mendocino (Ukiah, CA), with Ajahn Amaro— “The Four Noble Truths: The Art of Letting-go” (Part I)
	8	Visākha Puja.
	10	Community work day at Abhayagiri.
	13	Meditation Series at Yoga Mendocino (Ukiah, CA), with Ajahn Amaro— “The Four Noble Truths: The Art of Letting-go” (Part II)
	20	Meditation Series at Yoga Mendocino (Ukiah, CA), with Ajahn Amaro— “The Four Noble Truths: The Art of Letting-go” (Part III)
	27	Meditation Series at Yoga Mendocino (Ukiah, CA), with Ajahn Amaro— “The Four Noble Truths: The Art of Letting-go” (Part IV)

Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Community List

Vassa (Rains Retreats/years as a monk)

Pasanno Bhikkhu	35	Kassapo Bhikkhu	2
Amaro Bhikkhu	30	Cunda Bhikkhu	1
Yatiko Bhikkhu	16	Kaccāna Bhikkhu	0
Sudanto Bhikkhu	14	Sāmanera Thitapañño	1
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	11	Anagārika Ian Hillard	1
Ahimsako Bhikkhu	5	Anagārika Louis Gegenhuber	1
Cāgānando Bhikkhu	4	Anagārika Carl Braun	1
Thitābho Bhikkhu	2		

Contact Information for events

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

NORTH AMERICA

Sitavana Birken Forest Monastery
PO Box 5
Knutsford, B.C. Canada V0E 2A0
+1 (778) 785-6059
email: meditate@birken.ca
(preferred method of contact)

Tisarana Buddhist Monastery
1356 Powers Road, RR #3
Perth, Ontario K7H 3C5
Tel: +1 (613) 264 8208
www.tisarana.ca

Stewards: Tisarana Buddhist Monastery

Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
Institute for World Religions
2304 McKinley Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94703
Tel. (510) 848 3440
Fax. (510) 548 4551
www.drba.org

Portland Friends of the Dhamma
1422 SE Tacoma St., 2nd Floor
Portland, OR 97202
sakula@notjustus.com

Spirit Rock Meditation Center
5000 Sir Francis Drake Blvd.
Woodacre, CA
Tel. (415) 488 0164
Fax. (415) 488 1025
www.spiritrock.org

Yoga Mendocino
206 Mason St.
Ukiah, CA 95482
Tel. (707) 462 2580
www.yogamendocino.org

UNITED KINGDOM

Amaravati Buddhist Monastery
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ.
Tel. +44 (0) 144 284 2455
Fax: +44 (0) 144 284 3721
www.amaravati.org

Cittaviveka
Chithurst Buddhist Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield,
Hampshire GU31 5EU.
Tel. +44 (0) 1730 814 986
Fax. +44 (0) 1730 817 334
www.cittaviveka.org

Aruna Ratanagiri
Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland NE20 0HF.
Tel. +44 (0) 1661 881 612
Fax. +44 (0) 1661 881 019
www.ratanagiri.org

AUSTRALIA

Bodhinyana Monastery
216 Kingsbury Drive,
Serpentine, WA 6125.
Tel. +61 (0) 8 9525 2420
Fax. +61 (0) 8 9525 3420
www.bswwa.org

Bodhivana Monastery
780 Woods Point Road,
East Warburton,
Victoria 3799.
Tel. +61 (0) 3 5966 5999
Fax. +61 (0) 3 5966 5998

NEW ZEALAND

Bodhinyanarama Monastery
17 Rakau Grove
Stokes Valley,
Lower Hutt 5019
Tel. +64 (0) 4 5637 193
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz

Vimutti Monastery
PO Box 7
Bombay, 2343
Tel. +64 (0) 9 236 6816
www.vimutti.org.nz

THAILAND

Wat Pah Nanachat
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubon 34310

❁ 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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16201 Tomki Road, Redwood Valley, CA 95470 Tel. (707) 485-1630 www.abhayagiri.org

On Monday, November 10, Abhayagiri friend J. died. Just hours after his passing, Dennis Crean, who was present for J.'s death, wrote the following email, which he has generously allowed us to reprint in this issue of Fearless Mountain Newsletter.



J. Steiber-Buckley 1948-2008

POEM

Red tail hawks wind surfing
on Pine Mountain
Sky blue—deep turquoise
Sun stuck at one o'clock

The warm breeze
on a September afternoon
Soarin' on the mountain
Today...free!

Pine & fir scent thru
the slope on Pine Mountain
Such a fine place
To be...

*Gerald A. "J" Steiber-Buckley
Died November 10, 2008*

Friends,

I just got home after nearly 24 hours at the hospital. It's been a long day for many of us.

I'm sad to report that today was J.'s last. He passed away peacefully at 6:00 p.m., surrounded by his friends.

Last night turned out to be fairly uneventful for J. under the circumstances. Four of us sat with him throughout the night. He surpassed everyone's expectations and continued to breathe steadily, albeit with a few rough patches, on into the morning. He seemed to be comfortable and didn't show signs of real pain or distress. Probably the worst part was a fever that reached 103.6 degrees. The very kind nursing staff helped reduce the fever with ice packs and showed up every few hours to wash him and change his position.

The same scenario unfolded for much of Monday. His fever was down. His pulse gradually weakened by the afternoon, and his breathing became much shallower. Several other community members spent good chunks of time with J., and there were several chanting sessions for him. He received a lovely bouquet. Around 5:30 p.m. and in anticipation of heading back to the monastery after two days or so at the hospital, Ajahn Pasanno led some Paritta (protective) chanting for J. There were about eight of us present with him. J.'s breaths became noticeably less frequent during this time. After the chanting ended, a nurse was unable to measure his blood pressure because it was too low.

As we discussed plans for spending another night at the hospital, we thought that J., being the private fellow he is, might actually like a short bit of time to himself. He'd not been alone for a few days. So a couple of us told him we would all leave the room for a while to give him some space. (Although he remained unconscious throughout the entire day, we figured he could hear us on some level). Ajahn Pasanno re-entered the room only a couple of minutes later, but within even that short span, J. had already seized on his moment of solitude and breathed his last breath. It was 6:00 p.m.

For the next half hour we sat quietly with J.'s body and did some more chanting. We then notified the nurse and doctor, who declared him deceased. The hospital staff had already agreed to allow us time to clean and dress him and to offer funeral chants. We slipped him into his jeans and flannel shirt. We put on his "trademark" round wire-rim glasses, his amulets, and his mala beads. More community members arrived from Abhayagiri, as did a few other local lay friends. We chanted for J. and spent some time with his body. At around 8:30 pm it was taken to a nearby crematorium.

Thanks for all your kind words and moral support from out in the wider world. I'm sure J. was just as touched by the generosity shown to him by all of his friends as we have been by his own generosity to us over the nearly seven years he's been in our midst. Personally, I was very inspired by the love shown to J. by the monastery folks (ordained and lay supporters), and I truly felt the warmth that results when a community gathers to care for one of its own in his time of vulnerability.

Kind regards,
Dennis



Monks' Utility Building Plan 2009

From the Monastery (continued from page 3)

flowers placed on J.'s shrine, along with a portion of his ashes. The second memorial took place on December 7, when another portion of J.'s ashes were placed at a shrine in the monastery forest where he spent a great deal of time during his early years here.

On Tuesday, November 18, Kondañña (Barry Kapke) died from colon cancer. He was one of the early monastery supporters and was instrumental in creating both the Upasika Program and the original Abhayagiri website. He was also the creator of one of the first Dhamma websites in 1991, originally called DharmaNet International, and he was also an Abhayagiri lay minister, having completed the CALM Program (Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers) training. A memorial celebrating Kondañña's life also took place on December 7 at Abhayagiri, and similar to J., a small shrine was created in the forest. We wish to express our appreciation for both of these members of our community—they will be greatly missed.

Ajahn Pasanno travelled to Portland, Oregon in mid-November for a five-day visit, accompanied by Ven. Thitābho. The visit was hosted by Portland Friends of the Dhamma and included a daylong retreat on the theme of Mettā

(loving kindness). At the beginning of December Ajahn Pasanno left for Thailand for a one-month stay, during which time he plans to offer Dhamma teachings as well as to reconnect with fellow monastics and lay-supporters. Also in early December, Ajahn Sudanto travelled to Canada to spend the next few months at Sitavana Monastery. He is scheduled to return to Abhayagiri in mid-April for two months before going back to Sitavana for the rains retreat, which commences in early-July. December will also see us finishing off work projects as we wind down in preparation for the annual winter retreat, which commences on January 3. The two new kutis (cabins) being built this year are nearly completed. One is a larger kuti, with a bathroom, which is suitable for visiting elders (where Ajahn Sona stayed during his recent visit). The other kuti is of a more standard size and is located in the forest below the ordination platform.

In April 2009 we plan to commence construction on a new building which will be situated higher up on the mountain-side, in a meadow overlooking the valley. This building will be the Monks' Utility Building, which will include showers, laundry and dyeing facilities, a sewing room, an office, and meeting rooms. As with all



The Visiting Elder's Kuti



Inside the new Visiting Elder's Kuti

of the more recent building-projects here, this new structure will be built by Madlem Construction of Redwood Valley. 🌲

make myself at ease: “Because I’m so tense I want to relax,” it’s not for personal needs on that level. It’s an attitude of receptivity and allowing conditioned phenomena to be the way they are rather than liking this and not liking that. Reflecting, then, that this realization, the reality of awareness with consciousness at this moment, is *this*. This is not a fantasy I’ve made up or a Buddhist doctrine; this is real—this is reality. The Dhamma is reality, and that which knows the Dhamma isn’t a person. That’s why you can’t claim it personally: “I know the Dhamma.”

In this tradition we take refuge: “Buddham saranam gacchami, Dhammam saranam gacchami, Sangham saranam gacchāmi,”— the Three Refuges. The English word refuge is a place where we feel safe. We are seeking a place of safety, or that which is safe from the dangerous conditions that one can experience. We’re looking for *refuge*, and this refuge will never fail you. It’s always safe, no matter where you are, even in the battlefield, if there is this sense of awakened attention, collectedness, awareness, and seeing Dhamma rather than judging everything according to cultural conditioning, personal preferences, the ego, likes and dislikes, and ideals.

Just think of how much we suffer in this country from our idealism. I’ve watched this a lot in my life, because the United States is a very idealistic society. It is founded on very fine ideals of freedom and equality and rights, and it’s very high-minded in its ideals. But then the reality... We’re always feeling disappointed and critical, because the United States isn’t living up to its ideals, its principles, its standards. At this point in time we can feel incredibly cynical and embittered by the fact that the United States isn’t what it should be, because it should be a country where everything is perfect, and it’s not.

In this sense, the Buddha wasn’t coming from idealizing how things should be, but pointing to the way things *are*: All conditions are impermanent. That’s not an ideal, that’s not the Buddha’s ideal, somehow idealizing

impermanence. Impermanence is still a word, it’s a suggestion, a way of looking, it’s not a belief, and it’s not for grasping. But it is an awakening suggestion to the mind, to see how thoughts, emotions,

*This is not a teaching
for specially refined types
of human beings, but it’s
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being; suffering, dukkha,
the First Noble Truth.*

sensory experiences, physical experiences, emotional experiences, when you really observe, are always changing. There’s no permanent substance or essence in any of them. But the Buddha wasn’t an annihilationist either. He wasn’t saying that because everything is impermanent all conditions are bad and we should just get rid of them, or that there’s anything wrong with conditions, that we’ve got to sort it all out and promote all the good ones and annihilate all the bad ones! We’ve got to kill the devil, annihilate the axis of evil, kill the enemy, kill Saddam Hussein, get rid of the wicked and the bad; and then we’ll have only the good left. That’s not how things really are. In the very act of killing, we are doing something unwholesome. We want a utopian society where everything is good but we try to create it by annihilating the pests and things that we don’t like. That’s certainly not going to lead towards this utopian ideal we cherish. People tried it with genocide and attempts to annihilate the enemy in various ways, and it only leads to more anger, hatred, vendetta, misery for everybody concerned.

In this way, awakenedness, mindfulness, and wisdom, is within the potential of human individuals. This is not a teaching for specially refined types of human beings, but it’s based on the most common experience of any human being; suffering, dukkha, the First

Noble Truth. There’s nothing esoteric or subtle about it. It’s a common experience that every human being can recognize, whether you’re rich or poor, male or female, European, Asian, African; there’s nobody that gets away from it. From Queen Elizabeth, the King of Thailand, people in the most fortunate, wealthy positions, to the most miserable beggars, suffering is common to all of us. This is why this awakening to suffering is not grasping hold of suffering as a kind of negative, depressing resignation to misery. But it’s awakening to understand suffering. We have to recognize it. How many of you really are aware of suffering? People would say, “I don’t suffer, I’m happy all the time.” They’re not. They don’t understand it. And happiness is something depending on the conditions supporting it. It’s impossible to be happy all the time, because that’s not the way it is.

Sometimes life is miserable and unfair and unjust and painful. Things change. You’re not just independent, living in a bubble where you can create the illusion of a permanent happy state. Like the cyclone in Burma, or the earthquake in China, or the hurricanes in the Southeast, they’re natural catastrophes that can affect us. We can have the most fortunate life, yet it’s subject to change in ways that we most dread and fear. Then the society changes. When you’re my age, you’re seeing inexorable change, in ways that I never expected when I was young, both in my own life and in the society around me. But what doesn’t change? That which isn’t changeable—consciousness—remains the same all the time. That you can’t find; you recognize it. That’s what awareness is, you suddenly recognize: this is it. It’s not an object that you can get by getting rid of the conditioned realm, or by blindfolding yourself and plugging up your ears, or sensory deprivation. Consciousness is now. It’s not created out of ignorance, it’s not cultural, it’s not male or female, and it’s not good or bad. But it is real. This is vipassanā practice, investigating, looking into suffering, its causes

(Continued on page 13)

and its cessation. Then you realize the way of non-suffering. The Buddha said, “I teach only two things: suffering and the end of suffering.” Then one thinks to end suffering, “Maybe I should kill myself, because I’m getting old, the body isn’t like it was, it’s stiff and clumsy and going up hills is no longer very easy for me, my knees ache, I have lousy feet and my digestion isn’t very good any more.” Suffering, indigestion, arthritis, stiffness, old age. But do I *suffer* from it? This is the way the body goes: it’s born, grows up, gets old and dies. That’s the way it’s supposed to go.

Even Gotama the Buddha got old and died. It’s not like the end of suffering is that you don’t feel anything anymore, that you’re so evolved that you don’t feel arthritis or painful feet; you don’t feel it, you’re beyond all that, so you don’t suffer: that’s not it. You just don’t create suffering around the way it is. Not to create suffering around the body is to receive the body in all its aspects, the way it is, in its illnesses, sicknesses, fevers, its good health, its vigor, its fatigue, its youth, and its old age. And that’s not the suffering of the person, that’s just the way conditioned phenomena are. The nature of conditioned phenomena is dukkha, it’s changing. The body has no ability to sustain itself in a peak moment, where I could reach this peak age, maybe 25, and just stay that way forever. Now at my age, 74, you don’t want to live forever in a 74 year old body. I’m quite looking forward to death, getting rid of this thing, but there’s no need to create suffering around it.

This is where mindfulness allows us to receive the conditioned realities of the present with non-attachment: they are like *this*. The suffering, then, is not wanting them to be like this, not wanting to get old, not wanting physical discomfort; wanting to be young again, wanting to be healthy, wanting to be vigorous. That’s the suffering we create, that’s the unbearable misery of human ignorance: always wanting something you don’t

have, or not wanting what you have or for a thing not to be the way it is.

This is a society based on discontentment, isn’t it? It wants you to be discontented with what you have. The economy would collapse if everyone were content. To make you envious and jealous and discontented is to keep the economy going. The society we live in is very much based on creating this sense of yourself, self-importance, “what I think,” “my rights, my attitudes, my life is the important one.” This is very much part of our cultural conditioning. The result of that is a lot of stress, fear, self-consciousness, insecurity, in so many personal ways. Then as you get older, if you’ve never challenged or looked any deeper than that, it gets worse: “I’m old; nobody loves

It’s not like the end of suffering is that you don’t feel anything anymore, that you’re so evolved that you don’t feel arthritis or painful feet; you don’t feel it, you’re beyond all that, so you don’t suffer: that’s not it.

you when you’re old and gray. I might as well die, I’m no longer productive in this society, and I’m just a drain on the economy.”

Now they talk in Europe about how they’re going to have all these old people to look after, because we live longer now. You’re getting an enormous amount of the aged, who just hang on, that the young people have to support. “I’m not economically producing anything, just a drain on the economy.” You can think things like that! But in terms of Dhamma, old age is not suffering, no matter how pleasant or painful it might be: disease, suffering, terminal illness, loss; all these are part of a human lifetime, aren’t they? We all have to experience the loss of loved ones. Our parents get old and die, we lose that which we love and are attached to—this is part of every human experience of life. Old age, sickness, death, loss of the loved... This is not suffering, this is the nature of this

realm, the conditioned realm, the sense realm is *like this*, being a human being is *like this*. We feel, we’re sensitive, intelligent creatures, but we’re ignorant until we awaken. We create more suffering for ourselves than other creatures, because we can really worry about the future in a way that animals don’t at all. Even when we have lots of money in the bank and guaranteed security to the grave, we can still be totally miserable through what? Ignorance, attachment to conditions, not wanting things to be the way they are, wanting something we don’t have.

In this way the Buddha encouraged us to really look at this wanting—desire. And that which is aware of desire is not desire. It’s not annihilating desire. This is the desire realm. But rather recognizing desire is *like this*, without attaching to it. Once you recognize desire then you’re not just blindly attaching to every desire that enters your consciousness.

So this is an encouragement for you to reflect on what I’ve said this evening. Here in California the opportunities now are very good for hearing the Dhamma and practicing it. When I lived here 50 years ago there was nothing like this, or Spirit Rock, or anything. There were no teachers. I looked everywhere for a Buddhist teacher. I lived in Berkeley and I couldn’t find any, not even in Berkeley! Now every street corner has some meditation group or yoga group or something. I’ve seen this over 50 years, this incredible interest which was, say 50 years ago, hardly noticeable in the average life of American society. This is really something to appreciate—a good thing about living here. It allows for monasteries to develop, meditation centers, where we can be reminded. We need to have things that remind us, because it’s so easy to be forgetful or to be intimidated by all the worldly pressures and demands that our society places on us, or that we project onto it.

So I offer this for your reflection. 🙏

The following letter was written by Rachel Starbuck, a student of Kondañña's, and was sent to Dennis Crean. The letter was read out at the memorial service held for Kondañña on December 7.



First upasika meeting in July, 1997. Kondañña is to the right of the front row.

Dear Dennis,

Kondañña was my teacher. I now live in Taiwan, so I will not be able to join you at the memorial, but I wish I could be there.

I had the good fortune to study shiatsu with Barry at the San Francisco School of Massage. He really did teach bodywork as nothing less than a spiritual practice. He said: The heart of our work is simply to offer our presence. Don't push, just use the weight of your own body; don't diagnose, just be aware; don't try to help, but also don't turn away—just be with the person, that's all you have to do. And Barry really practiced what he preached. You could see it clear as day, watching him work. It was an amazing and beautiful thing.

When I attended my first week-long silent retreat at Spirit Rock, Barry was there too. The retreat wasn't easy for me, and on the last day I felt quite overwhelmed. I couldn't stop the tears streaming down my face even when it was time for lunch. I remember standing in line, holding my plate, weeping and embarrassed to be weeping, thoroughly miserable. I took my food to the farthest corner of the farthest table and sat down, but I was too upset to eat. Then I noticed that someone had come to sit with me. It was Kondañña, Barry. He didn't say anything, he didn't do anything, he didn't even look at me. He did exactly what he always taught us to do—he just sat there, slowly eating his lunch, being with me in my suffering, neither trying to help nor turning away. But it was so profoundly comforting to me, even now tears come just to think of it.

Some years later my sister was birthing her first child at home and I was there to assist her. I had taken a special class on massage for birthing mothers, but once my sister's labor had started she couldn't stand for anyone to get near her, much less touch her. All she did was scream and scream and there was nothing we could do. Then I remembered what Barry had showed me. I sat down next to her on the floor. I didn't say anything, I didn't look at her, I didn't touch her. I just sat there with her while she suffered through her labor pains, neither trying to help nor turning away. I don't know how long we sat together like that. But later, after her son was born, she told me how profoundly comforting it had been for her, how my just sitting there had somehow allowed her to relax and feel less afraid.

Now Kondañña has died. But what he taught is still moving through those of us who learned from him. Now when I see my sister quietly holding her son after a bad dream, neither trying to help nor turning away, and then I see the comfort he feels as his little body starts to settle and relax, then I see Kondañña's work, alive.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to tell this story. I truly wish I could be at the memorial service to express the deep gratitude I feel for Kondañña's presence in my life.

Respectfully yours,
Rachel Starbuck



Kondañña at Wat Pah Nanachat
July 2007

From Māra's Desk

By Cindy Mettika Hoffman

I am Māra, king of deceit, deception, fear, pride, ego, vanity and delusion; master of suffering, of inducing the desire for having things one does not have and getting rid of things one does not want.

Aging men and women elders are the perfect target for my products. With the aging baby boomers I can acquire trillions of dollars without entering those pesky unstable housing, insurance and stock markets. All I have to do is plant and nurture the fear of sickness, old age and death.

I have special "siddhis," also known as unclean spiritual powers, which make elders disappear from sight as the aging process begins. Their panic and desperation makes them ripe candidates for my products. I hear their thoughts when they look in the mirror - "Whose face is that with all those wrinkles and age spots. Whose neck and arms are those, with all those wattles? Why is the print getting smaller; why are sounds fading, the need for medicines and supplements increasing, knee joints locking up, memory diminishing, and doctor's visits increasing?"

Corporate empires flourish and thrive with my minions on Madison Avenue. Billion-dollar industries spawn products that are devoted to the image of youth and beauty. These are all attributed to me.

This is the perfect scenario for me:
You look in the mirror one
day and see
an old

person. Who is that? It must be a mistake. Someone else must be in the room that sort of looks like you but can't be. That person is old and you are not old.

There are surgeons who perform surgeries to add and subtract body parts, with promises to make you more beautiful, vibrant and appealing. Where would the sagging, nagging and dragging population be without plastic surgeries and poisonous Botox injections? The American Medical Association gives their blessings. This is all mine.

The hair industry is mine. You are an elder who is old and gray and maybe a tad ugly. You can find products to dye your hair so that you can try to look young and beautiful. No more gray for you—just buy and dye before you die. Do you want thicker, thinner, straighter or curlier hair? How about buying a wig or rug if you have no hair? My products are an endless assortment for you to use in the hope of reestablishing the vigor, suppleness and beauty that was once yours.

The media industry is mine. Pictures of products in magazines show you how the perfect elders live. "80 is the new 60." That motto surely sells the products quickly as I laugh up my sleeve hauling money to the bank.

I, Māra, do not want you to know that Lord Buddha said there was a way out of these endless cycles of birth, life, sickness, old age, death and suffering. It is so much fun for me to see you spinning on the Wheel of Life and Death. The clues and hints are everywhere for everyone to see if they have the eyes to see. The Buddha said, "I teach only one thing—the path that leads to the end of suffering." I, Māra, do not want you to see this truth. The more you see the less you will buy. The more peaceful you are with things as they are the more agitated I become. I hate being foiled and that is what some of you are doing down there, meditating, practicing, going against the stream, ordaining, waking up. DRAT foiled again.

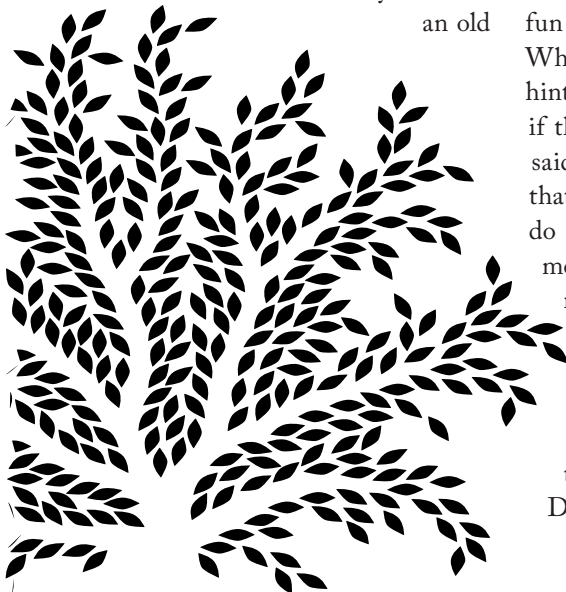


Winter Retreat

From January 3 to March 31, 2009, the residents of Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery will be taking a period of silent retreat. During these three months there will be no overnight guests accepted. This, however, does not mean that the monastery is closed to day visitors. Day visits are still possible and the weekly Saturday night chanting, meditation, and Dhamma talk will take place as usual. The Lunar Observance night Dhamma talk and meditation vigils will also take place (see newsletter calendar for lunar observance days). People wishing to visit the monastery to make meal offerings and offerings of requisites are also welcome.

Fearless Mountain Production Team

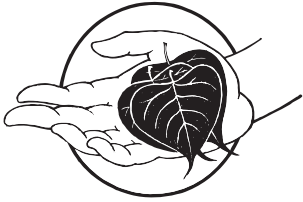
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