

FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

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Attending to the Here and Now

by *Luang Por Sumedho*

Bring your attention to this moment, here and now. Whatever you're feeling physically or emotionally, whatever its quality, this is the way it is. And this knowing of the way it is is consciousness; it's how we experience the now. Be aware of this. When we're fully conscious, aware of here and now with no attachment, then we're not trying to solve our problems, remembering the past, or planning for the future. And if we are doing these things, then we stop and recognize what we're doing. Nonattachment means that we're not creating anything more in our minds; we're just aware. This is reflecting on the way it is.

When we're thinking, planning, dreading, anticipating, hoping, expecting something in the future, this is all taking place in the here and now, isn't it? These are mental states we're creating in the present. What is the future? What is the past? There's only now, this present moment. We may then wonder, What is it that knows? We always want to define the subject. Is that the real me? Is that my true

self? This subjectivity and questioning and wanting to find some identity is also a creation in the now. If we trust in the silence, there's nobody. We can't find anybody in the sound of silence. The whole problem ceases.

How much substance does any memory have in the present? Does it have any permanent essence? Is somebody you remember really a person? Think of your mother right now. Even if your mother passed away many years ago, you can still think of "mother" and perceptions, memories come up. Where is your mother right now as you're sitting thinking about her? She's a perception in the mind. Knowing that memory and perception are created in the present is not a criticism or negation; it's simply putting thoughts into a context of what they really are.

We often live in a realm of time and self and believe it totally, lost in our own creations. But in seeing the Dhamma, we're finding a way out of this trap of the mind. Our society totally believes in these delusions, so we can't expect much help from society. For instance, we love history, don't we? "You know, Buddha was actually a living human being. It's a historical fact." That makes it real to us,

How much
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FROM THE MONASTERY

COMMUNITY

This spring began with an atmosphere of change and flow. Long-standing resident Tan Phasuko travelled to Thailand in early April, with the aim of spending a few years there, and possibly visiting his native Laos as well. Since then we have heard he has settled well into Wat Pah Nanachat, the International Forest Monastery in Ubon, and is enjoying the change of scenery. We will miss his warmth and buoyant presence here, and we wish him well for the next phase of his bhikkhu life.

The mood of change was also marked by a temporary move out of the house and kitchen, to accommodate the beginning of the year's building projects. While the kitchen was being remodeled and expanded, the Sangha made their way over to Casa Serena for the midday meal, and set up a makeshift refectory in the main shrine room there. Many remarked on what a refreshing change this was, even if only for a few weeks, and how much they enjoyed both the walk over and the general atmosphere. This was also a time to receive visits from two bhikkhus—Ven. Khemaratana from Bhavana Society in West Virginia, and Ven. Khemavaro from Bodhinyana Monastery in Perth, Australia. Ven. Khemaratana had met Tan Karunadhammo when he visited Bhavana Society in 2004 and was interested in coming to stay at Abhayagiri for a while. His visit was very fruitful and it was a pleasure to have him in our midst. Ven. Khemavaro arrived after Ven. Khemaratana's departure, and although his stay was short, he was able to participate in a number of events and spend some time with the bhikkhus here. He coincidentally arrived on the day of Pa Auk Sayadaw's visit, and was also able to attend the California Institute of Integral Studies Asian Art Museum event in San Francisco. It was remarked how well he fit in to the routine and spirit of the community here, and delight was expressed at how monastics in the Ajahn Chah Sangha share a common feeling for the practice.

Having just finished teaching a two-month retreat in Lake County (only ninety minutes from Abhayagiri), renowned Burmese meditation master Pa Auk Sayadaw graciously took the time to visit the monastery before heading to San Francisco. The community of Abhayagiri had been fortunate in being able to visit his retreat and pay respects to him on March 31, and at that time he readily accepted an invitation to come here before leaving the U.S. Having arrived at Abhayagiri accompanied by two attendant monks, two nuns, and many carloads of people from his retreat, he took a seat in the Dhamma hall while we paid our respects in the traditional way. Ajahn Pasanno then invited him to take a tour of the monastery with the community. Although the plan was to drive to the end of the road, have a look at some of the kutis



Monastery photo

Pa Auk Sayadaw with Ajahn Pasanno

and then drive back down, Sayadaw insisted that the group take the 2.5-mile loop trail back to the house and delighted at the opportunity to go on a walk through the forest. It was a pleasure to have him with us for this brief time, and a rare honor to be able to come into contact with such an accomplished elder bhikkhu.

On May 7 Abhayagiri conducted a special novice ordination for nine-year-old Todd Tansuhaj. The son of Chusak and Patriya Tansuhaj, Todd has a rare blood disorder and will be having a bone marrow transplant later this year. The ordination was intended to generate blessings and good feelings for his upcoming ordeal, and it certainly did so—for both Todd and the community here. Having been given the Pali name Piyasalo, Todd stayed with us for about a week; his time was well spent by learning a few of the essential chants, meditating with the community, and on one occasion going on almsround down Tomki Road with Tan Ahimsako. He also enjoyed creating comics in the monks' room and scanning the ground around the new duplex construction site in the early evening with a large magnet for picking up used nails. His open and joyous nature added much lightness to the routine (which included the thrice daily event of several bhikkhus helping him put on his robe with straps and safety pins), and our hearts go out to him for the upcoming challenges he will face with the transplant and the year of recovery following it. In his own words, "I will remember everyone at the monastery always." Needless to say, the feeling is mutual.

Ajahn Thanasanti, a senior nun in our tradition, came to visit for a few days in mid-May. Originally from Santa Cruz, California, she was in the country visiting family and friends and offering Dhamma teachings. Having spent three months in India last year and most recently a long spell in Australia,

where she had once lived for three years, she will be spending the *Vassa* (rains retreat) in England with the community at Chithurst Monastery.

In mid-June, the community was privileged to have a rare visit from Luang Por Sumedho, the most senior Western disciple of Luang Por Chah and founder of Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand and Chithurst and Amaravati Buddhist monasteries in the U.K. Accompanied by his long-time attendant, Ajahn Panyasaro, Luang Por stayed with us for just over a week. It was his first visit here since 2001, and it was a treat to have him with us giving teachings and spending time with the community. Many nights we would forgo our usual evening puja for an impromptu question-and-answer session with Luang Por, who spoke about his own practice and shared stories from his life. Many long-time supporters of the monastery came to pay respects and ask questions on Dhamma, and Luang Por Sumedho's energy and generosity were an inspiration. One notable evening was the Saturday night talk, which was attended by an unusually large crowd that spilled out of the Dhamma hall into the courtyard area.

A few days after Luang Por Sumedho's arrival, we also had the great pleasure of welcoming Ajahn Amaro back to the monastery after his year-long pilgrimage in India. Adding to the already festive atmosphere were Ajahn's tales of his treks through the holy sites and his accounts of some of the characters (dogs included) he had met along the way (see also page 4). To be able to spend time with all three ajahns together in

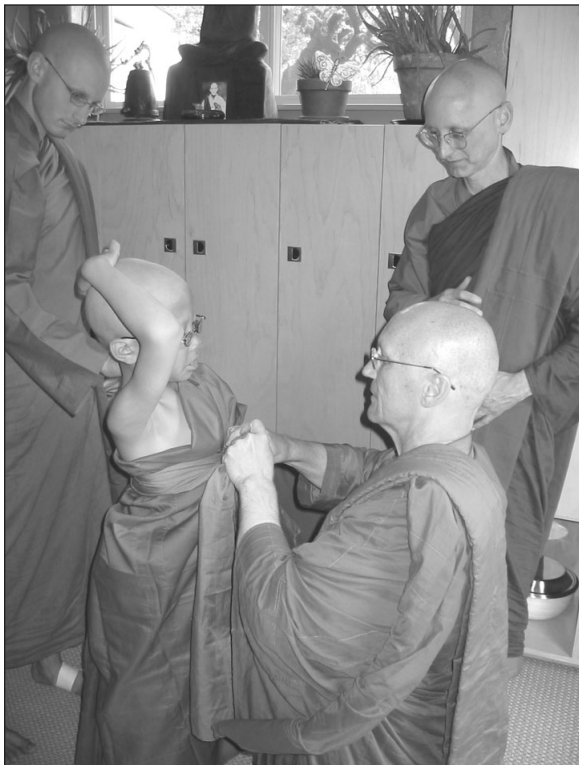
this way was quite special. Ajahn Amaro, however, was only here a few days until he headed off to accompany Luang Por with his retreat at Spirit Rock. His settling into the community began to happen a few weeks later as he rejoined Ajahn Pasanno in the abbots' seat with remarkable ease.

Around this time, Tan Ñaniko left to spend some time at another monastery—a custom for bhikkhus training at Abhayagiri as they approach their third rains retreat. Tan Ñaniko felt that it would be a good opportunity to travel to Thailand and experience the practice and training environment in Wat Pah Nanachat. In a recent fax we received from him, he expressed his gladness at being in the new setting, as well as his encounters with some of the many interesting creatures one meets in Thailand such as “giant biting geckos, poisonous toads, and stinging ants.” Despite these, he assures us he is *sabai* (Thai for “well” or “at ease”). His departure draws attention to the many ways he has benefited the community here over the last four years—both in terms of his wide range of skills and also his good friendship. We wish him a fruitful and enjoyable year away.

From June 27 to July 5 Ajahn Sucitto visited Abhayagiri, his first visit here since Spring 2002. He is currently on a year-long sabbatical from Cittaviveka Buddhist Monastery in Chithurst, England, where he is abbot. During this year he will be offering teachings, visiting branch monasteries in the Ajahn Chah tradition, and undertaking personal retreat time. While at Abhayagiri, Ajahn Sucitto had plenty of time to be on retreat, delighting in the forest around the strawbale kuti in which he was staying. When asked if there was anything he needed, he replied that just being in the forest was enough, a feast in itself. Ajahn Sucitto also spent some valuable time with the community and gave a much-appreciated talk on the Saturday night, as well as the talk at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery on the first Tuesday of the month. We extend our gratitude to Ajahn Sucitto for sharing his presence and teachings with us for this time.

During his stay, Ajahn Sucitto was present for Minh An Ly's anagarika ordination as well. For the reflection on this occasion, Ajahn Pasanno gave a talk based upon *pasada* (one of the Pali words for “faith”) and refuge, and Ajahn Sucitto used those themes to provide an accompanying encouragement. The peaceful atmosphere of the evening was a fitting mood for Minh An's entry into the monastic community here. Having served the winter retreat as a layman and lived at the monastery for the three months following it, Minh An has been very patient in waiting for the opportunity to take on the anagarika training, and we rejoice in his commitment and enthusiasm for practice. In May, Anagarika Darren returned to lay life to continue with his studies at U.C Berkeley. Darren

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Monastery photo

Novice Todd Tansuhaj gets some help with his robes.

Not Being Ajahn Amaro

A Year-long Sabbatical in Asia

by Ajahn Amaro

Following are a few of many tales, reflections, and images from Ajahn Amaro's year away, as told to Fearless Mountain assistant editor Kathryn Guta.

From June 2004 to June 2005 I was grateful to have a year-long sabbatical away from the many responsibilities of teaching and the structures of a monastic routine. During my sabbatical year, which I spent in Asia, I was supported by the monastic discipline without a calendar of events requiring my attendance. The word *whim*, which had long been absent from my vocabulary, was reintroduced, and that was a real treat.

I have been a monk for over twenty-five years and had never visited the Buddhist holy sites. Living so close to a tradition and yet being so geographically removed from the homeland, I had wanted to visit the holy places that are so much a part of the lineage and teachings of Buddhism. I had heard the names—Rajgir, Buddhgaya, Varanasi—and yet they just existed as concepts. I wanted to bring these places to life.

Letting Go of Roles

I had no fixed route and no schedule. Only my sisters and Ajahn Pasanno knew how to contact me in case of emergency. This gave me a precious quality of space: the ability to pick up and go. In a way, this is the ideal of a wanderer's life. The Buddha said, "Just as a bird in flight takes nothing but its wings wherever it goes, so too the samana just takes whatever they have wherever they go and leaves no trace behind."

No one in his or her right mind would go to the holy places of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the hot season, so to avoid running into people I knew, that's when I went. The effort I made was rather like the effort to create noble silence in a retreat setting—to limit the self-creating signals. When we interact with others, we create ourselves. Thus, for a year, I didn't have to be the persona of "Ajahn Amaro."

Since visiting senior monastics are usually asked to give a talk or expected to participate in some role, I avoided the Theravadan institutions. By doing so, I was just another dust-gathering body in India. While I have no problem with step

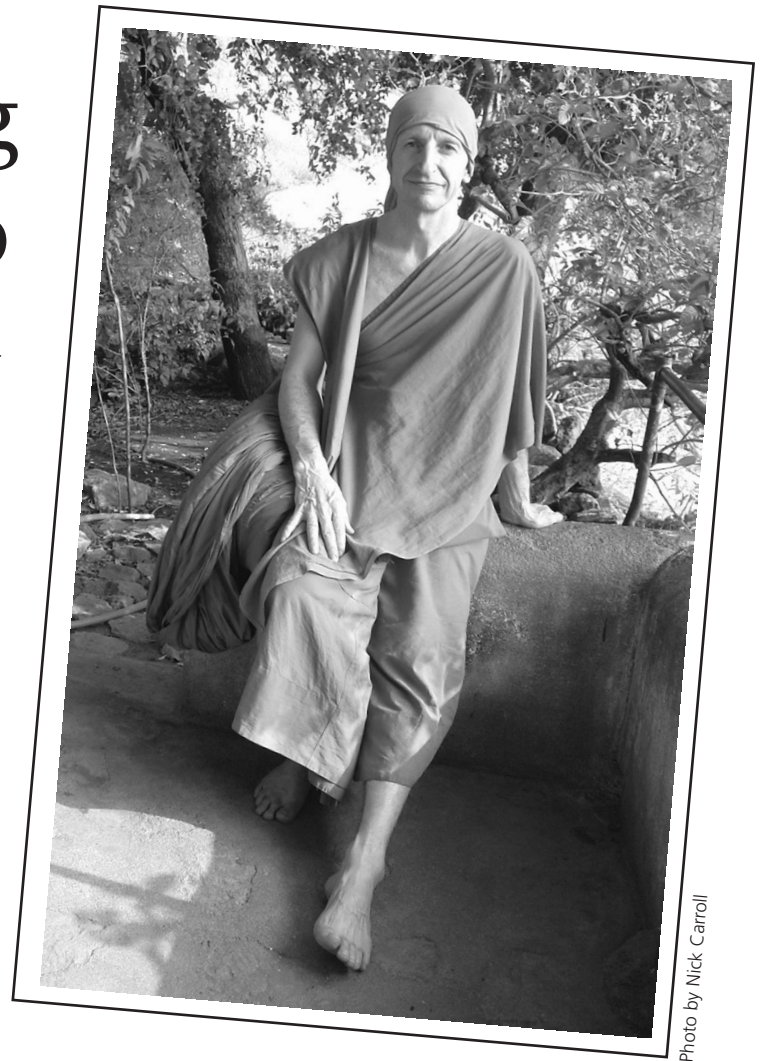


Photo by Nick Carroll

ping into the role of Ajahn Amaro, I was grateful to live away from it for a time. By stepping out of the familiar, I experienced a helpful contrast, rather like living in another culture. I could see how the self-creating processes work, and I could visit the holy places without the baggage of "Ajahn Amaro," with his life, his world and all his stuff.

One of the things that surprised me was that, to the people in India, I was 98% white and only 2% monk. In the West, when you walk around as I do, wearing a brown robe with a shaved head, you are definitely a religious "something." That is the defining perception, or *sañña*. I was continually surprised that people saw me primarily as a white person and only secondarily noticed that I was wearing strange clothes. The definition of one's place in society as a foreigner seemed to override the role of religious seeker. The perception of caste and color is a dominant feature of how people judge each other. Even though the caste system has been outlawed since the time of Gandhi, simply creating a law will not stop these perceptions from carrying on. The colonial past of the British keeps the association of pale skin with the sense of "other." Also, so many foreigners run around wearing rather strange gear!

Begging

I was viewed as a sahib primarily in the context of people begging for money. I learned how to say: “I haven’t used money in twenty-five years.” I felt how uncomfortable it is to be the object of begging. It’s probably like being an attractive woman or a wealthy person: you are an object of desire. Eyes turn towards you, and then people move in your direction to try to get something. You may say, “I don’t have any money,” but still they persist. I felt the violence and brutality of shutting people out when saying “no.”

The first step in meeting this challenge was to cultivate a complete noncognizance. I consciously screened people out. This was less aggressive than saying no, but still there was a hardness to it. So I began to craft a practice: on the one hand, there was complete noncognizance, on the other hand complete loving kindness. When I started to practice this, it felt wonderful. It is not that you don’t care. It’s the realization that you can’t function in the way the person wants. You do not pick up on the unconscious statement of “I am a poor person and you are a rich person, and so if you do not give to me, you are bad and selfish.”

The approach I found was balancing. There wasn’t a shutting off, and so it seemed to generate less resentment or retaliation. I did not engage with people and thereby did not give them false hope. Yet, by sustaining a quality of genuine kindness and compassion, I could feel I was walking the middle way—the way leading beyond suffering.

Everyday Death

Like any other culture, India has its rough edges. Yet, I am struck by its relative sanity compared to the West. I believe this has to do with the average person’s frequent acquaintance with the rude realities of death. In Varanasi, there are bodies and body parts of human beings floating past you in the Ganges River every day. There you are, out for an evening walk, and you see and smell a rotting corpse beside you still ripening from the day before. It still hasn’t been collected.

Death in our culture is looked on as something unfortunate that can be avoided—an unpleasant accident. If you work hard, it won’t happen to you. In India, death is not seen as an aberration

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A Visit to Ramana Maharshi’s Ashram

The Ramana Maharshi Ashram in Tiruvanamallai is a spiritual magnet not only for thousands of Indians but also for Westerners from all over the world. On the January full moon we circumambulated Arunachala Mountain (about 14 km) along with about 500,000 other people. This happens every full moon. Traditionally the walk is done barefoot. I lasted about three-quarters of the way on the rough tarmac but had to resort to sandals eventually. I still sport a pair of neat half-moon, apostrophe-shaped blood blisters on my heels to remind me of the great occasion.

I felt very much at home there at the ashram, especially since most of the people are interested in meditation and silence. This was the best Buddhist monastery I encountered in India! One of the most striking things is the daily presence of people at all stages of life—from newborn to those far bent with age. Somehow in the West we mostly see very limited ranges of humanity in our daily traffic with the world. Here it’s all fully visible. The complete range of sickness, deformity, loss and death are given equal room with the currently able-bodied. Nothing is hidden away. The pitiless violence of samsara is to be witnessed daily, so there is a deep sobering in the heart when it comes to the pulls of the senses.

*—from a letter sent by
Ajahn Amaro, February 2005*

Not Being Ajahn Amaro

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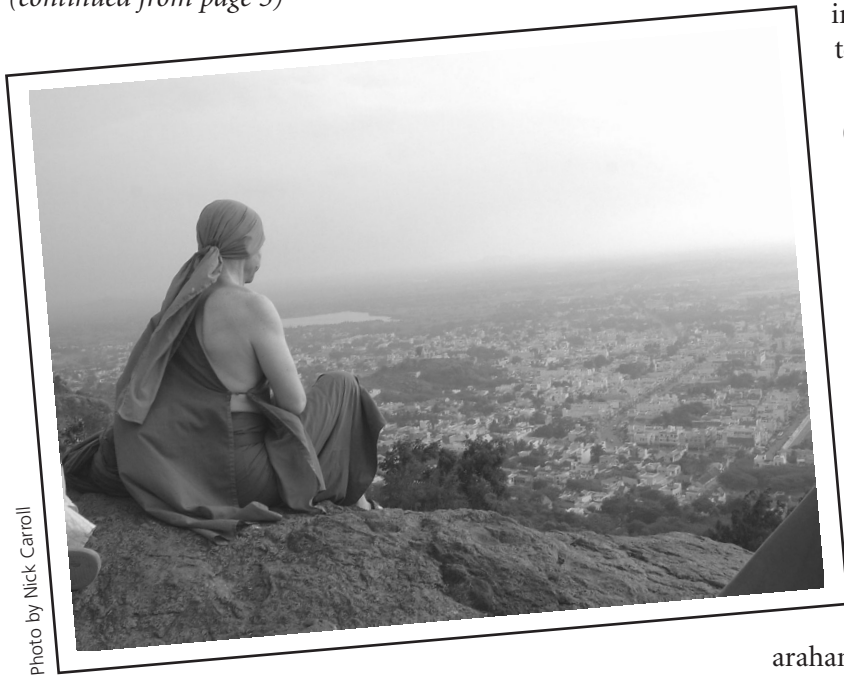


Photo by Nick Carroll

but rather the inevitable outcome of birth. The more we can accommodate this sane view of sickness, aging and death, the saner our society will become.

Amaravati

One of the places I was interested in visiting was the original Amaravati. I knew that Ajahn Sumedho had chosen this name for our English monastery from the ancient Buddhist city. Our monastery opened in the early '80's—in the middle of the “Mutually Assured Destruction” era of Ronald Regan, Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev. Ajahn Sumedho wanted to use a name that reminded people of something other than imminent death, so he chose *Amaravati*, meaning “the deathless realm.” It was a conscious choice of a name that was an antidote to “limited nuclear war.”

The original Amaravati is a small village, hardly even a market town on the Krishna River in Andhra Pradesh. The old stupa, which in the Ashoka era was the wonder of the area, is now virtually just a lump on the ground. Almost all the old carvings and pillars have been removed. There are a few pillars remaining like broken teeth in the mouth of an aged person. Still, I found Amaravati to be a peaceful and powerful place.

While there, I had a long and vivid dream that ended with a wall upon which was written: “Life beyond desire is unaffected.” I reflected on this, and a whole variety of things came up. One meaning of *unaffected* is “undisturbed”; another is “not having pretenses or airs.” When the heart is free of *tanha* (craving), it is a heart that is unaffected or undisturbed. This seemed a perfect expression of the Deathless Realm, and it has been a helpful reflection to carry and investigate especially when some “affecting” is happening.

Also, *Amaro* has the same root as *Amaravati*. It can be translated as “Amaro’s place.” I took great delight in writing a postcard to Ajahn Sumedho, which said: “Greetings to the Deathless, from the Deathless, in the Deathless.”

Getting to the Roots of the Tradition

My trip was quietly wonderful without spectacular events. The most powerful element was the coming-to-life of all the places that are associated with the Buddhist tradition: Spending four months of the monsoon in Savatthi. Going to the Jeta Grove every day, where 60–70% of the sutta teachings were given. The Buddha spent nineteen rains retreats there. What a delight to be able to walk every day in this grove and spend half the day sitting in meditation. The site of the Buddha’s kuti was there in front of me. Ananda’s kuti was right next door. The Buddha, Sariputta, Moggallana and Rahula walked this ground. This is where Angulimala, the mass murderer became an arahant. HERE. The ground was literally littered with shards of earthenware, old cups, and pot lids. Some of the shards looked so similar to those I had seen in museums that I couldn’t help but wonder if they were from the Buddha’s time. I felt the palpable presence of the tradition: Kosambi, site of the infamous quarrel between factions of the monks; Vesali, where the Buddha spent his last rains retreat—these places came alive.

Now, when I think of Vesali, I think of the huge man-made lake. I see the Ashoka pillar and the stupa. It is not just a name and concept as it was before. Ah, Rajgir! It’s hilly there. That’s why they call it the city of the five hills. This is the Sattapanni Cave, where they had the first council after the Parinibbana. It’s this ledge. They held the meeting in the cave on the north side so they wouldn’t get cooked in the day. Smart guys! Well, they were *arahants*.

You have the physicality of these places in your memory and senses. You can smell them. It’s rather like the color coming into a black and white picture. Or when the spring rains fall on the garden and the fragrances come forth. These words, these ideas, these stories, they happened here! There’s a qualitative change that words do not capture. There is a connectedness and relatedness. You can see why the Buddha said: “Those who visit the places where the Tathagatha was born, enlightened, gave his first discourse, and passed away, those people will experience the benefit and happiness of the pilgrimage for a long time.” It brings a quality of faith, commitment and connectedness that is much more alive. This is the spot. Here in Lumbini is where the Buddha had his last birth. Vesali: this is where the Vajjians took the relics of the Buddha after the Parinibbana and made this little stupa. This stupa! You can feel the sounds of the chanting. You can feel the love and reverence for the Buddha and his life.♥

An Interlude in Bhutan —from a letter sent by Ajahn Amaro, February 2005

Ajahn Sumedho, Ajahn Nyanarato & I were invited to visit Bhutan by Richard Smith, a friend and Sangha supporter from Michigan, and joined by Edward Lewis from teh Bay Area. Richard was the same person who initiated our highly memorable visit to Svalbard, 1,000 miles north of the Arctic Circle, in 2003. It was his delight to be able to offer us the opportunity to visit and pay our respects to the ancient shrines, holy places and unspoiled Himalayan vastnesses of that sacred kingdom.

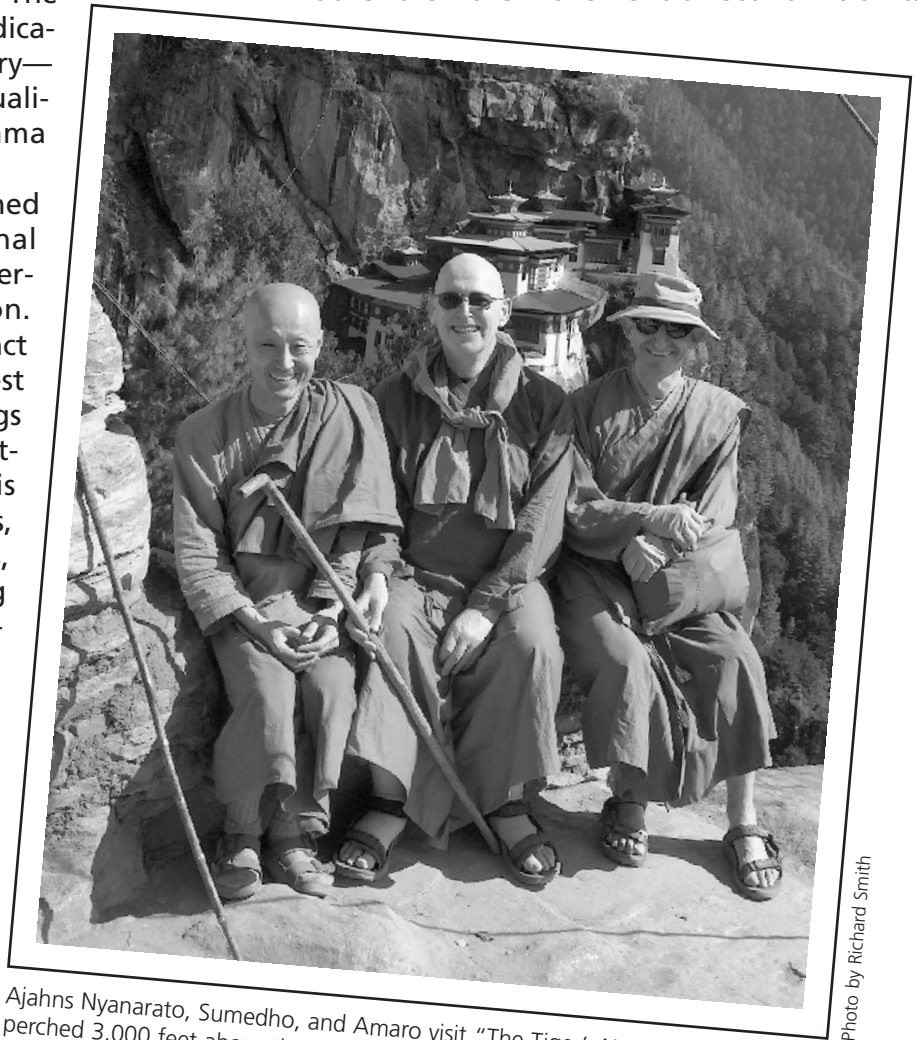
The flight to Bhutan followed the southern rim of the Himalayas, so we were able to see the great jagged wall of the snowy peaks at close range and at eye level. The airport buildings at Paro were like a cluster of temples; the control tower looked more like a stupa crowning the building than a place from which to observe planes. The architecture of the airport was indicative of the whole style of the country—devotion and respect for spiritual qualities that make it truly a Dhamma Kingdom.

A few years ago, the king launched a concept called “Gross National Happiness,” and it seems to be cherished by most of the population. People genuinely care about and act in ways that contribute to the best quality of life possible for all beings rather than absorption into the bottom-line. For example, no one is allowed to fish the lakes and rivers, 26% of the land is in national parks, and not once did anyone try to beg from us. The temples and monasteries were all immaculately clean and well tended. When the great Dzong (monastery and administration complex) of Punaka was destroyed by a flood, the whole thing was rebuilt in five years.

This random list indicates a rare and beautiful tone that pervades the entire place. It is a refreshing joy to live for a time in a nation that runs according to Dhamma. On the other hand, it is also a Dhamma autocracy. The king has

virtually complete authority. It is a great good fortune that he is wise and noble. Even so, national dress is compulsory. People of other faiths are allowed to live in Bhutan, yet no one is allowed to proselytize for the Christians, Muslims or Hindus, etc.; and churches, mosques and temples are not allowed. There is a strange feeling of the presence of a kindly yet authoritarian hand.

If you want positive self-esteem and contentment, you live by sila or virtue. That’s the basic Buddhist form of psychotherapy. Keep the precepts and practice generosity. The people in Bhutan emanated a glowing quality. They seemed primed to be happy. Perhaps in 100 years time, Bhutan will be considered a leader to the rest of the world in introducing “Gross National Happiness” as a real measure of the economy, rather than the movement of economic units.



Ajahns Nyanarato, Sumedho, and Amaro visit “The Tiger’s Nest” Monastery, perched 3,000 feet above the end of the road, north of Paro.

Photo by Richard Smith

Here and Now *(continued from page 1)*

because we have all the confidence in history. But what is history? It's memory. If we read different histories about the same period, they sound very different. I studied British colonial history in India. An account written by a British historian is very different than one written by an Indian historian. Is one of them lying? No, they're probably honorable scholars, both of them, but they each see and remember in different ways. Memory's like that.

So when you explore memory, just observe that memories come and go; and when they're gone consciousness is what remains. Consciousness is now. This the path, here and now, the way it is. Use what is happening now as the path rather than going along with the idea that you are somebody from the past who needs to practice to get rid of all your defilements in order to become enlightened in the future. That is just a self you create and believe in.

We suffer a lot, feeling guilty about memories of the past. We remember things we've said or done, or shouldn't have done, and feel terrible. Or we hope everything will go well in the future and then worry about whether everything will go wrong. Well, things could go all wrong, or they could go all right. Or partially right and partially wrong. Anything can happen in the future. That's why we worry, isn't it? We like to go to fortune tellers because we think the future may be very frightening for us, not knowing. What will be the result of our decisions? Have I made the right choice?

The only thing that's certain about the future—the death of the body—is something we try to ignore. Just thinking about the word *death* stops the mind, doesn't it? It

Saying "like this" is just a way of reminding oneself to see this moment as it is.

dies. We have various theories—like reincarnation or being rewarded by a better rebirth or being punished by a worse birth. Some people speculate that once you've attained human birth, you may still be reborn as a lower creature. And then there's the school that says no, once you've taken birth in the human form, then you cannot be reborn as a lower creature. Or the belief in oblivion—once you're dead, you're dead. That's it. Nothing left. Finito. The truth of the matter is that nobody really knows. So we often just ignore it or suppress it.

does for me. It's not particularly polite or politically correct to speak of death in casual conversation. What is death? What will happen when I die? Not knowing upsets us. But it is unknown, isn't it? We don't know what will happen when the body

But this is all happening in the now. We're thinking of the concept of death in the present. The way the word *death* affects consciousness is like this. This is knowing *not knowing* in the now. It's not trying to prove any theory. It's knowing; the breath is like this; the body like this; the moods and mental states are like this. This is developing the path. Saying "like this" is just a way of reminding oneself to see this moment as it is rather than to be caught in some idea that we've got to do something or find something or control something or get rid of something.

Developing the path, cultivating *bhavana* is not only formal meditation that we can only do at a certain place, under certain conditions, with certain teachers. That's just another view we're creating in the present. Observe how you practice in daily life—at home, with your family, on the job. The word *bhavana* means being aware of the mind wherever you are in the present moment. I can give you advice about developing sitting meditation—so many minutes every morning and every evening—which is certainly to be considered. It's useful to develop discipline, to take some time in your daily life to stop your activities, the momentum of duties, the responsibilities and habits. But what I've found to really help me the most has been to reflect and pay attention to the here and now.

It's so easy to be planning the future or remembering the past especially when nothing really important is happening right now: "I'm going to be teaching a meditation retreat in the future," or "My trip to Bhutan was a really special visit to an exotic country in the Himalayas." But so much of life is not special; it's like this. And even going to marvelous places in the Himalayas is what it is—trees, sky, consciousness; it's not all that different. It's just the hype we give it. I also hear people suffering a lot about things they've done or things they shouldn't have done—mistakes, crimes, terrible things they said in the past. They can become obsessed because once they start remembering the mistakes of the past it creates a whole mood. All the guilty moments of the past can come flooding back in and destroy one's life in the present. Many people end up stuck in a very miserable hell realm that they've created for themselves.

But this is all happening in the present, which is why this present moment is the door to liberation. It's the gate to the Deathless. Awakening to this is not suppressing, deny-

Even going to marvelous places is not all that different. It's just the hype we give it.

ing, dismissing, defending, justifying, or blaming; it is what it is, attending to a memory. “This is a memory” is an honest statement. It’s not a dismissal of the thought, but it’s no longer regarding it with such personal attachment. Memories, when seen clearly, have no essence. They dissolve into thin air.

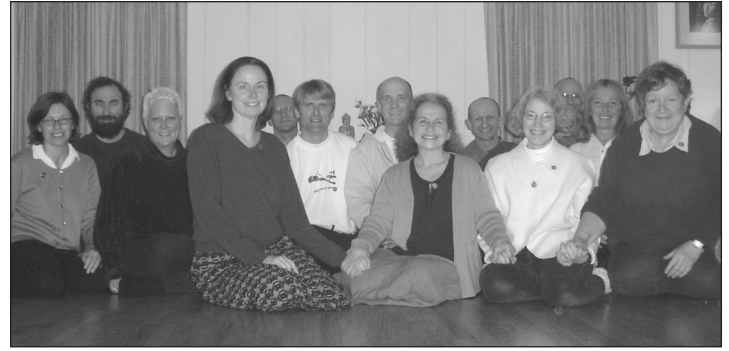
Try taking a guilty memory and deliberately sustaining it. Think of some terrible thing you’ve done in the past, then determine to keep it in your consciousness for five minutes. By trying to keep thinking about it, you will find how difficult it is to sustain. But when that same memory arises and you resist it or wallow in it or believe in it, then it can hang around the whole day. A whole lifetime can be filled with guilt and remorse.

So just by awakening, seeing it the way it is, is a refuge. Every time you’re aware of what you’re thinking—not critical, even if you’re thinking something really ugly and nasty—you’re getting to be an expert. This is what you can trust. As you develop this, have more confidence in it. Your awareness will become a stronger force than your emotions, your defilements, your fears and desires. At first it may seem like emotions and desires are much stronger, that it’s impossible to simply be aware.

You may have only a few brief moments of awareness and then back into the raging storm. It may seem hopeless, but it’s not. The more you test it out, investigate and trust this awareness, then more stable it becomes. The seemingly invincible power of the emotional qualities, obsessions, and habits will lose that sense of being the stronger force. You will find that your real strength is in awareness, not in controlling the ocean and waves and cyclones and tsunamis and all the rest that you can’t possibly ever control anyway. It’s only in trusting in this one point—here and now—that you realize liberation. ♥

Luang Por Sumedho was born in Seattle, Washington. In 1966, he went to Thailand to practice meditation and not long afterwards, he went forth as a monk. He took dependence from Luang Por Chah and remained under his close guidance for ten years. In 1977, he accompanied Luang Por Chah to England, helping to establish Chithurst Monastery and later Amaravati, where he is currently abbot.

Every time you’re
aware of what
you’re thinking,
you’re getting to
be an expert.



CALM Group to Visit Thailand

In January, the Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers (CALM) group will be led by Ajahns Pasanno and Amaro on a pilgrimage to visit various Thai forest monasteries and senior monastics in Thailand. The purpose of the trip is to allow this group of Abhayagiri lay leaders to connect with the roots of the Thai forest tradition and to serve as emissaries for Abhayagiri. Their itinerary will take them to the monasteries of Maichee Sansanee, Ajahns Dtun, Piak, Jundee, Thun, and Gavesako, among others. They will attend a Buddharupa pouring ceremony on the outskirts of Bangkok before heading to Northeast Thailand, where they will visit Wat Pah Nanachat, the International forest monastery; Wat Poo Jom Gom, founded by Ajahn Pasanno near the Lao border; and Wat Pah Pong, Ajahn Chah’s main monastery.

As representatives of the Abhayagiri lay community, they will spend several days as part of the annual memorial activities for Ajahn Chah at Wat Pah Pong from January 13–16. Abhayagiri annually sponsors an outdoor kitchen during this days-long event to help feed the thousands of pilgrims who take part. The CALM group will join in the effort, helping to cook and serve the many visitors and serve as a symbol of Abhayagiri’s place in the larger community of monasteries in Ajahn Chah’s lineage. They hope that their physical presence will help to strengthen ties with Abhayagiri’s many friends and supporters in Thailand.

Anyone travelling in Thailand during January is encouraged to attend the memorial events at Wat Pah Pong and to stop by the Abhayagiri “kitchen” there. And for those unable to attend, your support of the annual Abhayagiri kitchen is most welcome. For more information on the event, please visit www.abhayagiri.org or contact the monastery. ♥



Monastery photo

Ajahn Panyasaro and Luang Por enjoy their June visit.

(continued from page 3)

has done much for the community in his ten months here, and his friendly presence will be missed. Since his departure he has been a frequent visitor to the monastery and anticipates coming to visit on a regular basis. Anagarika Lee has also returned to lay life. Lee's goodness and sincerity have been a gift to the community, and we wish him all the best for the future.

Samanera Sampajano arrived from Chithurst Monastery in June and has been settling in well. Soon afterwards Venerable Satimanto arrived from Bodhinyana monastery in Perth to stay with us for an indefinite period. Despite some difficulties with health, he is in good spirits and has been enjoying his time here. It is good to have two new *kalyana mitta* (spiritual friends) in our midst. In a similar vein, good friend of the monastery Jo Kulkajornpan came to stay with us for a week, having taken a temporary ordination at Wat Buddhanusorn in July. Jo has been going through many difficulties with his health, yet is recovering very well after having had a kidney transplant last year. He was named Dhammarato (One who loves the Dhamma), an appropriate name for Jo, whose faith and support has touched the community over the last few years. Despite the challenges of being in robes with his health condition, he determined to stay a bhikkhu until Ajahn Pasanno's birthday in late July—which he did.

TEACHINGS

On Saturday, April 23, Ajahn Maha Prasert, abbot of Wat Buddhanusorn in Fremont, and Ajahn Pasanno were joined by seven other bhikkhus both from temples and monasteries around the Bay Area and from Abhayagiri, to lead a daylong workshop at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. The theme of this event was "Thai Buddhism in Art, Spirit, and Community." The day began in the main hall of the museum with *Paritta* (blessing) chanting, followed by a traditional almsround, which took place through the United Nations Plaza. It was remarked what a poignant scene it was to see the bhikkhus walking mindfully against the inner city backdrop. The afternoon began with presentations from Ajahn Maha Prasert and Ajahn Pasanno, during which two films on the monastery and the Ajahn Chah tradition were shown. During the afternoon, participants were given the chance to experience short periods of meditation and ask questions arising from the various talks, and the day ended with Ajahn Maha Prasert and Ajahn Pasanno leading the assembly of monks in a closing chant.

On May 30, Ajahn Pasanno and a group of monks and lay practitioners went down to Spirit Rock Center to pay respects to the well-known and revered Thai Forest master Ajahn Jumnien. Upon arrival Ajahn Jumnien received us with warmth and remarked that he had seen most of us before on different occasions. He then began a lively and humorous Dhamma teaching beginning with a few stories and leading up to an outline of the various levels of being and the main purpose of Buddhist practice. "I feel compassion for all those beings who suffer just because of their mental formations," he said, and went on to give teachings based upon the themes of liberation and emptiness. Ajahn Pasanno was asked to translate for the weekly Monday night talk, in which Ajahn Jumnien used the night of the Buddha's enlightenment as the theme—using a variety of rich images and similes to shed light upon the internal processes involved in the Buddha's mind. It was great to be an audience for Ajahn Jumnien's energetic and compassionate presence once again, and to support Spirit Rock in their efforts to bring his teachings to Western practitioners.

Several members of the community attended the Ajahn Jumnien retreat at the Angela Center in Santa Rosa in June. Having just left his role as anagarika, Darren Noy was asked to help with the retreat and also to look after Ajahn Jumnien's needs during this time. Former bhikkhu and disciple of Luang Por Chah, Joseph Kappel offered his translation skills once again, as did Am Wongthongsri, who had also been translating at Spirit Rock for over a week beforehand. Lay practitioner Ginger Vathanasombat also offered to help out with trans-

lating the teachings, and although it was her first time, it was reported that she did so with clarity and skill.

The West Coast was blessed this year with a retreat held by Luang Por Sumedho at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. The ten-day monastic retreat was held from June 24 to July 3. Luang Por led the retreat with the help of Ajahn Amaro. The daily schedule began with morning chanting and meditation at 5:30. Next was breakfast followed by sitting and walking meditation until the last meal of the day at 10:30 am. The afternoon was alternating sitting and walking meditation until tea at 5:30. At 7:30 there was evening chanting and meditation followed by a Dhamma talk by either Luang Por Sumedho or Ajahn Amaro to finish the day. Luang Por used the Four Noble Truths and applying them to the present moment as the main theme of the retreat.

From July 27 to 31 Spirit Rock held their annual Family Retreat. Ajahn Amaro, one of four teachers on the retreat (joined by Betsy Rose, Heather Sundberg, and Julie Wester), returned to this event for the first time in three years, accompanied by Tan Ahimsako. Thirty-five families attended the retreat, totaling more than one hundred people. Add to this some twenty volunteers, another ten counselors, and a team of cooks, and it was a full house! The atmosphere was joyous, and with this year's theme being the Four Brahma Viharas—*Metta, Karuna, Mudita, and Upekkha* (Loving Kindness, Compassion, Gladness, and Equanimity)—there was an inspiring sense of goodwill. The retreat was incredibly well organized with activities for people of all ages in attendance, from silent meditation to Dhamma games, music-making, and a trip to the beach. The final evening saw the traditional last-night campfire, with Rev. Heng Sure of Berkeley Buddhist Monastery joining in with his guitar with Dhamma songs in both English and Chinese, and Ajahn Amaro telling stories that were both amusing and inspiring. The retreat ended with a blessing ceremony before everyone dispersed back to their homes far and near.

DEVELOPMENT

This year the monastery began its long-awaited construction of new buildings belonging to Phase One of a four-phase building plan. A fair amount of the funds needed for these buildings has already been provided, and we are hoping to be in a situation to finish the buildings this year to complete Phase One of the building plan.

The first of the buildings to go up was the Cloister Duplex. There was a great deal of work put into moving earth and preparing the foundation, but it has paid off and the building is now nearly complete. There were many monks and lay supporters who gave their time and effort to make the construction of this building go smoothly.

We have also begun construction of two new buildings that will form the part of the new cloister—the cloister restrooms and the monks' office building. The latter contains offices for the two co-abbots, the junior monks, and Sanghapala Foundation. The restroom building also has a disabled-access bedroom. These buildings, as of this writing, are framed and looking in outline most beautiful and impressive. Construction is slated for completion in early January.

Kathy Lewis, with the help of the community and several lay people, is in the process of building the first of a few wonderful meditation platforms for day use in the forest at Casa Serena. The community is also working on a new water-conditioning shed so that eventually we will be able to soften the water here at the monastery.

Last, but not least, the community is in the beginning phase of designing three new elders' cabins. Two of these cabins will be built for our two abbots, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro. The third will be built for visiting elder monks. We have designated the sites for these cabins and have begun preparing the locations so that we will hopefully be able to begin construction next year.

—*The Sangha*



New restroom building (left) and office building (right) under construction

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

Financial Reports

From time to time, the Sanghapala Foundation reports on the finances of the monastery, as members of the lay community are often interested in such things. As steward of the monastery, the Sanghapala Foundation, is a nonprofit organization that oversees the monastery's financial affairs. Presented here are a statement of revenues and expenses, balance sheet, and donation history from recent fiscal periods.

Supporting the Sangha

During the past 2,500 years support for the monastic life has been entirely provided from the lay community through daily acts of generosity. In this spirit, support in the form of work, money, foodstuffs, building materials or other help is both appreciated and needed.

There is no large institutional body that supports Abhayagiri Monastery. Donations come from individuals across the United States and in many foreign countries, including Thailand.

All donations are tax-deductible as allowed by law and go exclusively towards the building, maintenance, programs, publications and support of Abhayagiri Monastery. Your generosity allows the spiritual community to survive and to flourish. The monastery belongs to all of us!

Revenues & Expenses

	2004	2003	\$ Change	% Change
Revenue				
Donations	577,665	402,869	174,796	43%
Thanksgiving Retreat	27,879	30,855	-2,976	-10%
Interest	4,686	1,339	3,347	250%
<u>Total Revenue</u>	<u>610,230</u>	<u>435,063</u>	<u>175,167</u>	<u>40%</u>
Expense				
Thanksgiving Retreat	25,318	30,150	-4,832	-16%
Facilities Expenses	32,468	14,149	18,319	129%
Office Expenses	5,525	6,107	-581	-10%
Publications/Duplication	18,045	16,254	1,791	11%
Monks'/Nuns' Expenses	32,561	20,306	12,255	60%
Taxes & Fees	2,576	2,688	-112	-4%
Communicatiions & Utilities	13,632	11,781	1,851	16%
Travel Expenses	20,370	12,370	8,000	65%
Vehicle Expenses	7,614	7,819	-205	-3%
General Expenses	11,879	13,313	-1,434	-11%
Depreciation	19,934	19,934	0	0%
<u>Total Expense</u>	<u>189,922</u>	<u>154,871</u>	<u>35,051</u>	<u>23%</u>
<u>Net Income</u>	<u>420,308</u>	<u>280,192</u>	<u>140,116</u>	<u>50%</u>

Balance Sheet

	Dec 31, 04	Dec 31, 03	\$ Change	% Change
Assets				
Cash/CD/Money Market	832,719	443,929	388,790	88%
Land & Building	656,302	656,302	0	0%
Furniture & Equipmet	24,331	44,265	(19,934)	-45%
Construction in Progress	1,038,004	986,553	51,451	5%
<u>Total Assets</u>	<u>2,551,356</u>	<u>2,131,049</u>	<u>420,307</u>	<u>20%</u>
Liabilities & Equity				
Retained Earnings	2,131,048	1,850,856	280,192	15%
Net Income	420,308	280,192	140,116	50%
<u>Total Liabilities & Equity</u>	<u>2,551,356</u>	<u>2,131,048</u>	<u>420,308</u>	<u>20%</u>

Donation History

Quarter	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
1st Qtr	167,000	23,000	31,000	107,000	60,000	50,000	49,000	81,000	44,000
2nd Qtr	122,000	65,000	79,000	105,000	62,000	206,000	128,000	287,000	37,000
3rd Qtr	23,000	31,000	76,000	60,000	58,000	64,000	48,000	69,000	--
4th Qtr	43,000	47,000	163,000	155,000	205,000	242,000	178,000	145,000	--
<u>Total</u>	<u>355,000</u>	<u>166,000</u>	<u>349,000</u>	<u>427,000</u>	<u>385,000</u>	<u>562,000</u>	<u>403,000</u>	<u>582,000</u>	<u>81,000</u>
Average Donation					822	624	490	590	--
Median Donation					100	100	97	100	--

Thanksgiving Retreat

with Ajahn Amaro & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia

Friday, November 18 – Sunday, November 27, 2005

Angela Center, Santa Rosa, California

Abhayagiri Monastery and the Sanghapala Foundation invite you to join Ajahn Amaro, Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia, and other monastics and laypersons for a 10-day retreat over the Thanksgiving holiday. We will create a monastery environment during our time together, and we offer you this opportunity to explore the Dhamma in a setting that differs somewhat from a typical meditation retreat. We will all live the monastery life, following the Eight Precepts, taking only what is offered, and attempting to reflect on our every activity as part of our practice. This will include noble silence, morning and evening chanting, sitting and walking meditation, and daily Dhamma talks and teachings.

The retreat will be held from Friday afternoon, November 18, through midday Sunday, November 27, 2005, at the Angela Center in Santa Rosa, California. Because of the length of this retreat and the adherence to the Eight Precepts, you must previously have sat at least one five-day meditation retreat. Retreatants are required to attend the entire retreat, from the opening taking of the Precepts on Friday evening to the closing ceremony on the final Sunday.

Accommodation is double- and triple-occupancy dormitory-style rooms, and the facility is wheelchair accessible. We are unable to accommodate any special dietary or environmental needs. We will eat a light breakfast and, in keeping with this monastic tradition, the daily meal (vegetarian) is eaten before noon; there is no evening meal. Incense and candles are used at the morning and evening chanting periods. Space is limited to 75 retreatants.

The retreat will be offered solely on dana (freewill donations); there is no set fee. Due to the difficulties caused by the increasing number of late cancellations in recent years, however, a new deposit policy has been instituted. **A refundable registration deposit of \$100 is now required to register for this retreat.** For those who attend the retreat or who cancel at least 30 days in advance, the deposit can be refunded upon request or it can be offered as a freewill donation to Abhayagiri Monastery. *The deposit cannot be refunded to those who cancel after October 19.* Out of respect for others, please register only when you can make a clear and wholehearted commitment to attend.

For more information, visit the Abhayagiri website at www.abhayagiri.org. Or contact Paul Friedlander at retreat05@juno.com or at 722 Prospect Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610.

To register, please complete this form and mail it in with your deposit:

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Gender _____

Email address _____

(please include e-mail if you have one, as this will be the primary means to send you retreat information)

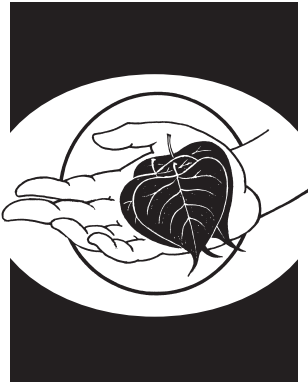
Have you previously attended a five-day or longer retreat? ____yes ____no Please list the teacher and date:

Mail your form and \$100 deposit to: Paul Friedlander, 722 Prospect Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610. Checks should be made out to "Sanghapala Foundation." For more information, contact Paul or visit www.abhayagiri.org

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

ABHAYAGIRI MONASTERY

16201 TOMKI ROAD
REDWOOD VALLEY CA 95470



FALL 2005

FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

NEWSLETTER

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Return Service Requested

October 23
Kathina Ceremony
(see below for details)

2005

KATHINA FESTIVAL

AT ABHAYAGIRI

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23

11:00 AM MEAL OFFERING (BRING A DISH TO SHARE)

1:00 PM KATHINA CEREMONY

Each year since the time of the Buddha, at the end of the traditional three-month rains retreat, the lay community surrounding every Buddhist monastery has gathered to celebrate the completion of the retreat and to offer gifts of cloth for robes and other supplies that will be useful for the coming year.

If you'd like to make an offering, please contact the monastery or visit www.abhayagiri.org for more details.

Please join us for this year's festival!

Space Still Available

Thanksgiving Retreat

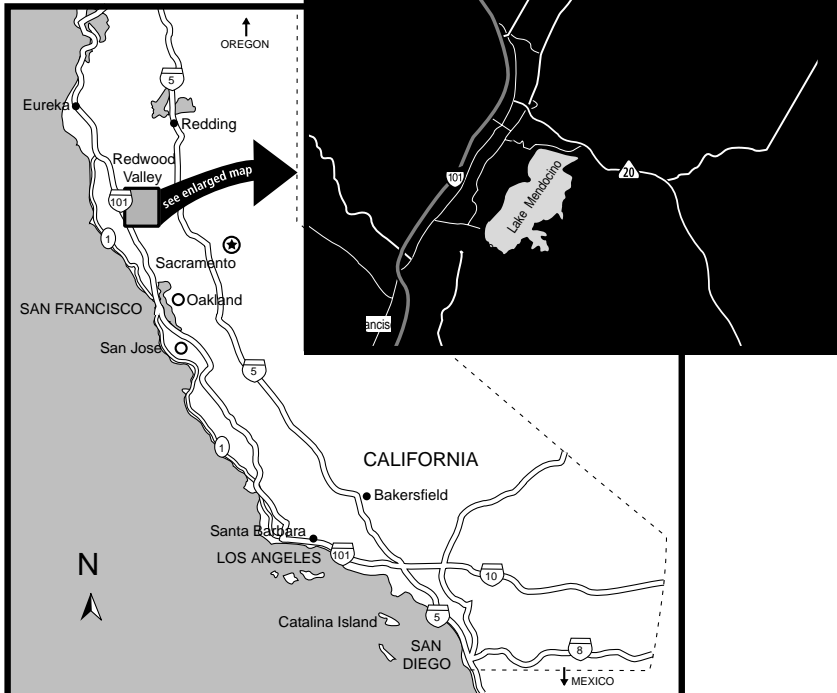
with **Ajahn Amaro**
and **Taraniya**

November 18–27, 2005

Angela Center, Santa Rosa, California

More information, see page 15
or visit www.abhayagiri.org.

Abhayagiri Sangha Calendar



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

- ▶ 4-10 Ajahn Pasanno and Tan Karunadhammo visit Bhavana Society, High View, WV.
 - 12 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Ukiah, (See below).
 - 23 Kathina (Almsgiving) Ceremony at Abhayagiri.
 - 27 Ajahn Amaro to attend Sangha meetings in the UK.
 - ▶ 1 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Berkeley (See below).
 - 8-10 Ajahn Amaro participates in Mind and Life Conference in Washington, DC Contact: www.investigatingthemind.org
 - 9 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Pasanno in Ukiah, (See below).
 - 18-27 Thanksgiving Retreat with Ajahn Amaro and Taraniya at the Angela Center, Santa Rosa, CA See page 15 for details.
 - ▶ 4 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri.
 - 4 Daylong Retreat at Yoga Mendocino (YOMO), Ukiah, CA. Contact: Yoga Mendocino, (707) 462-2580, www.yogamendocino.org.
 - 6 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Amaro in Berkeley, (See below).
 - 10 Yoga & Meditation Daylong Retreat with Ajahn Pasanno and Cator Shachoy, 8am-5pm at Cultural Integration Fellowship in SF, CA. Contact: Cator Shachoy, (415) 235-9380, catorshachoy@earthlink.net
 - 14 Monthly gathering with Ajahn Amaro in Ukiah, (See below).
 - 18 ÓEntering the SilenceÓ Daylong Retreat with Ajahn Amaro at Spirit Rock, Woodacre, CA Contact: www.spiritrock.org, (415) 488-0164.
 - 19 Ajahn Amaro at Insight Meditation Center, Redwood City, CA, 7:30-9:30 pm, meditation and Dhamma-reflections. Contact: www.insightmeditationcenter.org, (650) 599-3456
 - 23 Ajahn Pasanno begins a period of sabbatical until May 2007.
 - 27 Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Sudanto travel to Thailand.
 - ▶ 2 AbhayagiriÓs annual three-month Winter Retreat begins.*
 - 3 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley (See below).
 - 11 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Ukiah, (See below).
 - 12-16 Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Amaro, and Ajahn Sudanto, attend Sangha meetings at Wat Pah Pong, Thailand.
 - 28 Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Sudanto return from Thailand.
 - ▶ 7 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley (See below).
 - 15 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Ukiah, (See below).
 - ▶ 7 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Berkeley (See below).
 - 15 Monthly gathering with guest teacher in Ukiah, (See below).
- * Winter Retreat may begin and end one month later this year. Check website for details and information on day visits during this time.

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

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

Second Sunday at Abhayagiri
Community Work Day, 8:00 am- 4:00 pm, or any portion thereof.
(Contact the guest monk for Saturday evening accommodations.)

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

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

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

Every Tuesday in Portland, OR
7:00-9:00 am at the Friends of the Dhamma Resource Center, 1701 NW Thurman, Ste. 202. Meditation and Dhamma discussion with lay practitioners. Mary (Sakula) Reinard, sakula@notjustus.com.

Every Wednesday in Chapel Hill, NC
6:30-8:00 pm at Chapel Hill Dhamma, 811 Old Pittsboro Road.
Meditation, pre-recorded talk by a Buddhist monk or nun, and chanting.
Noel Brewer, (919) 932-9195, ntb1@unc.edu