

FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

Inside:

From the Monastery
the
PAGE: 2

Breaking the Circle
of Samsara
PAGE: 4

Me & Mara on
the Loop Trail
PAGE: 7

Calendar
PAGE: 8

A Monastic
Road Trip
PAGE: 12

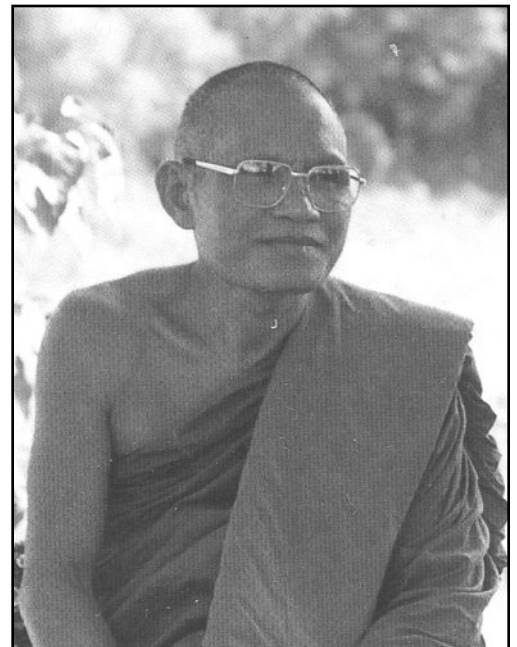
Creating a Refuge on Every Occasion

by Ajahn Liam Thitadhammo

(This article is adapted from a talk given on June 26 on the occasion of the installation of the new Buddha image at Abhayagiri.)

We've gathered together tonight in this place of solitude and nature to establish an understanding in the Buddha's teachings. These teachings are based on the natural order of things. While we sit here in this natural place, we may not find it completely convenient or comfortable. We may find some things coarse and some things refined, some things agreeable, others disagreeable. By studying our reactions to nature, we can understand how to live in a way that leads to happiness and freedom.

In order to establish a sense of peace and independence, we first look at the body. We step back and acknowledge that the body is a part of nature. In seeing the body like this, we are able to disentangle ourselves from the feeling of *this is me, this is who I am, this is myself, and this is others*. When we're able to step back like this, we see in accordance with Truth and in accor-



dance with the characteristics common to nature: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. We see how all things arise in the beginning, are established in the middle, and dissolve in the end. We see the Dhamma of the dhammas, or the natural way of things. Seeing in this way helps us to step back from the moods, impressions and feelings that lead to that which is unskillful and unwholesome and that which creates a sense of suffering in the heart.

While material things are the coarser qualities of life, the mental qualities are the more refined aspects of our being. The mental qualities don't have any characteristics like white or black, dark or light; they're immaterial. But even though they
(continued on page 10)

FROM THE MONASTERY

COMMUNITY

The last few months have been characterized by many noble people coming together—a number of elder ajahns visited, bhikkhus returned from travels, and the lay community congregated for work and religious events.

Tan Sudanto and Tan Karunadhammo returned from their travels in late April. Tan Sudanto spent the winter at Birken Monastery in British Columbia. He deeply appreciated the silence of the snowy atmosphere, the practical setup of the main house area, and the solitude that a new and remote monastery offers.

Tan Karunadhammo spent ten days with Ajahn Amaro at a retreat at the Insight Meditation Society before returning to Abhayagiri. Tan Karunadhammo's travels included stays at Bodhinyanarama Monastery in New Zealand, Ajahn Kalyano's new monastery in Melbourne, Australia, and Bhavana Society in West Virginia.

The community said goodbye to Tan Dhammaso, who is in residence at Birken Monastery until November.

Four Spirit Rock teachers came to spend May 18–19 at the monastery as a part of Jack Kornfield's teacher training program. Leigh Brasington, Noah Levine, Diana Winston and Trudy Goodman studied more about the schedule and the styles of monastic practice. Trudy, who had never been to the monastery, was surprised and impressed with the kutis deep in the forest, which provide physical seclusion and paths for walking meditation.

Ajahn Sundara visited us briefly in May and, unfortunately, soon after, she had a minor heart attack and had to cancel several teaching events. The Abhayagiri community and the lay community abroad sent many good wishes to her, and she was well cared for by friend Ronna Kabatznick. Ajahn Sundara is now back in England taking it easy and recovering.

Near the end of May the level of activity stepped up a few notches. The new Buddha image arrived at the monastery, and simultaneously work began on a substantial expansion to the water system. On the positive side, these projects helped to develop camaraderie and giving.

Ajahn Jumnie, after giving teachings at Spirit Rock (see below), came to Abhayagiri for a few days and blessed the community with some very bright energy and talk on Dhamma. Something unusual about Ajahn Jumnie is that he wears huge amounts of weight on him in order to contemplate unpleasant feeling (66 pounds at present, reduced from the 150 pounds he wore until the age of 60). To accomplish this, he wears three monk's upper garmets, each covered with pockets stuffed full of amulets, tools and other heavy items.

Luang Por Liam, Ajahn Jundee, Ajahn Nanadhammo and Ajahn Utain arrived from Thailand on June 22 to spend time



Monastery photo

(L to R) Ajahn Jundee, Luang Por Liam, Ajahn Pasanno, and Ajahn Nanadhammo

at Abhayagiri and to help lead the ceremonies surrounding the new Buddha image on the weekend of June 26–27. Ajahn Punnadhammo also arrived a couple of days later, and Tan Chao Khun Maha Prasert came from Wat Buddhanusorn in nearby Fremont to participate in the ceremony. Luang Por Liam has been ordained for 43 years and is the abbot of Wat Nong Pah Pong. Luang Por is the spiritual head of over 200 Ajahn Chah branch monasteries in Thailand. Ajahn Jundee runs a monastery outside of Bangkok and has been ordained for 28 years. Ajahn Nanadhammo is the abbot of Wat Nanachat, the international forest monastery in Thailand, and has been ordained for 24 years.

About 200 people arrived on June 26 to participate in the commemoration of the new Buddha image. The ceremonies began at 7:30 p.m. with chanting and meditation on the eight-sided ordination platform up in the forest. Later in the evening Luang Por Liam gave a teaching on the naturalness of the Dhamma (see article on page 1), with Ajahn Pasanno translating into English. Everyone then had the chance to sit until midnight in the chilly mountain wind, and visitors camped all over the monastery.

The next morning everyone gathered again at the platform for the installation of relics into the back of the Buddha. For those who don't know, relics are crystallized remains of the cremated body of either the Buddha or fully enlightened disciples who came afterwards. The coming together of many relics into one Buddha image is very auspicious. Everyone then gathered for the meal offering, and the final ceremonies included a formal offering of robe cloth to Luang Por Liam. The Abhayagiri monastic community would like to express tremendous gratitude to everyone who attended the ceremonies and helped out!

On July 2, the visiting elders and a group from the monastery left for a road trip and headed up towards Canada, with many stops along the way (see article on page 12).



Installing the relics in the new Buddhārūpa

In early July, Ajahn Pasanno left for ten days to attend the ceremonies surrounding the 25th anniversary of Cittaviveka Monastery in Chithurst, England. Ajahn met up with many familiar faces from the Sangha abroad, including Ajahn Sucitto, who just returned from a successful pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash in Tibet.

Darren Noy arrived on July 19 and has taken anagarika vows for 10 months. Darren is a doctoral student at the U.C. Berkeley department of sociology, and has decided to take one year off to practice at the monastery.

Adam Kane has left the anagarika training in order to go back into the world and explore some other avenues of practice. Adam has selflessly served the community for a year and a half and will be dearly missed.

Ajahn Amaro's pilgrimage in India is well underway. He is spending the Vassa near Jetavana Grove, where the Buddha lived and taught for over 20 rains retreats. The only word we've had from Ajahn Amaro is a small, dusty postcard wishing everyone well.

DEVELOPMENT

The new Buddha image arrived from Thailand on May 25, along with 9,000 pounds of books and gifts. The large semi-truck was unable to make it up the last hill before the Dhamma Hall clearing, but fortunately another truck was able to help pull the semi-truck up the hill. The rest of the day was spent unloading the truck and getting the Buddha image into place. The Buddha image was lifted onto the shrine housing using a forklift with a retractable arm.

As the summer has progressed, bhikkhus and laypeople have had a chance to practice a rare kind of giving—that of building the monastery and helping to establish a beautiful

and practical place for the Sangha to dwell. In late May, work began on a water system expansion project. In brief, the new water system included installing a solar-powered pump into a well on the ridge-top; installing fire hydrants in two locations; and installing a water tank above some high-elevation kutis. Local people were hired to do trenching and labor. Tan Ñaniko managed the project and helped with the plumbing. The project took three weeks to complete.

Plans are currently being reviewed for the new duplex building located close to the women's bathhouse. Construction is due to start sometime soon.

There are plans to build four small meditation platforms on the Casa Serena land, but due to time constraints and a lack of human resources, it is unsure whether they will come to completion this year.

The building committee is in the process of doing studies and plans for the future cloister building. Once the cloister building and the new duplex are built, phase one of the building process will be complete. It is unsure whether the cloister building will be built next year.

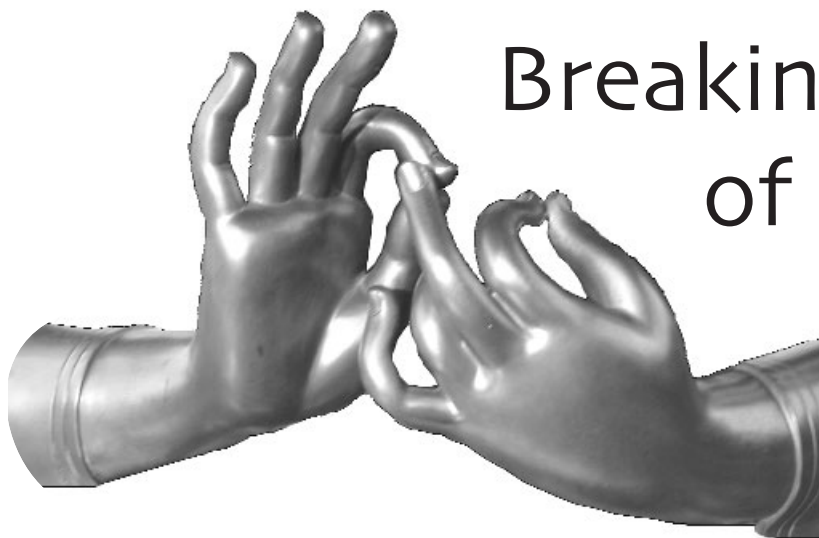
TEACHINGS

Ajahn Pasanno and a group of monastics headed to Spirit Rock on June 8 to attend the Ajahn Jumnien retreat. Ajahn Pasanno translated teachings for a few days, along with Joseph Kappel (formerly Ajahn Pabhakaro). Ajahn Prateep and Tan Hasapañño attended the first half of the retreat, while Samanera Ahimsako and Anagarika Adam stayed on for the full nine days.

(continued on page 15)



New Buddhārūpa being lifted onto the pavilion



Breaking the Circle of Samsara

by Ajahn Ñānadhammo

Adapted from a Dhamma talk given at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery on June 27, 2004.

There is only one way to release from that circle of craving, that circle of suffering, that circle of life and death.

It is a great pleasure and honor to visit Abhayagiri Monastery after having lived with Ajahn Pasanno as a very young monk in Thailand many years ago. He kindly invited me to take part in this Buddhārūpa dedication ceremony. When we were chanting a moment ago, I noticed that the fan with the logo of Abhayagiri shows the Buddha's hand holding bodhi leaves. This image comes from the "Handful of Leaves Sutta" that the Buddha gave when he was living in a forest. He picked up a handful of leaves and then gave a discourse, saying to the bhikkhus, "What are greater, the leaves in this forest or the leaves in my hand?" The monks replied, "The leaves in the forest are great and numerous. The leaves in your hand, venerable sir, are few." The Buddha said that like the leaves in the forest, those things he had realized and understood on the night of his enlightenment were incalculable and innumerable. Yet what he taught beings in the world was limited—like the leaves in the hand—to that which can obtain release from suffering. He taught the Four Noble Truths: unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering, grief and pain; their cause; the result of this release from suffering, nibbana; and the pathway to the ending of suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path.

That handful of leaves, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, is the symbol of Abhayagiri. And the Buddha image we are installing this weekend at Abhayagiri represents the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, in which the Buddha actually first taught those Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

Many people ask me how the form of this image came about and the meaning of the hand mudra. It's a complex mudra posture. The Buddha has the thumb and forefinger of one hand formed in a circle, with the middle and small fingers pointed out. He holds the other hand with his thumb and forefinger in another circle. I don't know if this is the meaning the artist implied, but here is how I've interpreted it: the circle of the left hand symbolizes the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths. The First Truth is suffering and it has a cause: craving. When there's suffering produced by craving, that reinforces suffering, which creates birth, old age, sickness and death. That forms a circle, doesn't it, a circle of samsara? There is only one way to release from that circle of craving, that circle of suffering, that circle of life and death. That is nibbana, or enlightenment. Enlightenment is sustained and maintained by another circle, the Dhammacakka, the Wheel of Dhamma, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path. This is represented by the right hand. When we maintain the Eightfold Path in a continuous circle, it will lead to nibbana and break the circle of old age, sickness and death—the circle of samsara.

When we see a Buddha image, it's something for all of us to reflect on and consider. This image is based on an ancient image found in Sarnath, India. Its old Indian style from the Gupta Period doesn't belong to any of today's ethnic traditions; it brings us back to our

roots, the source of Buddhism in India. We see that Dhamma does not belong to any community, group or tradition. It's just there. The Dhamma is a part of the world for us to know. And it is only through practice that it will be known. Wherever we practice, there we can realize Dhamma.

An image depicting the Buddha teaching the Four Noble Truths is an important symbol in a country where Buddhism is very new, like America. In the West we are looking for a teaching that can be put to the test, something that isn't just taken on faith but which can actually be applied to our minds and known: Is this true? Does this work for me? Is this a reality that I can know?

One of the most profound things that struck me in my early days as a Buddhist was that I often heard other spiritual teachers talking about ultimate reality, ultimate truth, but never systematically describing how to get there. They were asking their students to take a leap into some surreal world or some state which is to be realized, but they didn't give a step-by-step process of how to apply their teachings and test for oneself to see whether they were true. Whereas in the Buddha's teachings I found a precise explanation of the steps and stages for release. One can apply these teachings in one's life and experience and ask: Does this work for me?

In this very monastery, it's the *cittas*—the minds and hearts of each individual sitting in this hall—that have the potential to realize the goal of the teachings. It's the minds and hearts of the people here who experience suffering and realize it is not a state that is desirable for evermore. That there must be something higher than this, that there must be some release from this. It's the earnest desire to find release from our painful experience—the suffering, the disappointments and ups and downs of life—that sends us on the quest for something to bring about peace, freedom and release. The Buddha's teachings are like the handful of leaves in their simplicity, clarity, precision and directness.

A moment ago you all took the precepts. This is part of the experiment. Ask yourself, Does this end up simplifying my life, giving clarity to my life? Is this path of the precepts a virtue, something that gives me security and psychological well-being? Does it lead to freeing myself of complexities, difficulties and pain, and does it release others from pain? In one of the very beautiful suttas the Buddha said, "Keeping the Five Precepts is an act of compassion because one gives oneself and all other beings freedom from fear that one will cause suffering to oneself or others." So by taking on the precepts, we are not only developing stability of mind by the lack of remorse and guilt and self-reproach, but we are giving other beings the freedom from the fear that we will cause them pain, sorrow or injury through body or speech. By transforming ourselves with this way of training, we can see the direct results of living a life of virtue and we can know that the precepts increase our sense of goodness in the world.

One of the sayings I find useful for myself is an old Chinese proverb, probably influenced by Buddhism and Taoism: "Instead of complaining about the darkness of the world, light a candle." I find this saying powerful because often, as Westerners, we tend to get caught up in judgments, cynicism and finding fault with the world, ourselves and others. Instead of complaining about the darkness, we can do something by lighting a candle. Instead of changing the darkness of the world, we can change ourselves.

We can apply these teachings and see how they affect our lives. For example, with the teachings of virtue, samadhi and wisdom, we see that each is an aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path. Samadhi is that tranquility and calm when there's a sense of inner trust and inner security, when the mind becomes one with a meditation object. When we sustain our attention on an object continuously for a long period of time with mindful awareness, there's a sense of contentment to stay with the object. There's a sense of inner peace, inner well-being and inner interest to know only that object and to draw the attention away from the sense impressions of the outside world. We find that a sense of tranquility starts to arise, a sense of lightness of body, a sense of ease. Then an inner joy arises.

(continued on page 6)

The Dhamma is a part of the world for us to know. And it is only through practice that it will be known. Wherever we practice, there we can realize Dhamma.



Breaking the Circle of Samsara *(continued from page 5)*

These are qualities based on wholesome meditation objects that the Buddha encouraged. The thought of lovingkindness sustained for a long period of time brings tranquility, inner happiness and inner joy. That's a wholesome happiness because it's not based on the five strands of sense pleasure. It's a happiness that will take the mind to samadhi, to a deep state of peace and stillness, of unity and inner security. Purity of mind is found in samadhi, and when the mind draws into that state it becomes rested, peaceful and very, very happy.

It's by seeing the mundane things of life in contrast to a state of composure, of peace, of samadhi that one can truly understand and see them clearly.

Then, when one withdraws from this state of samadhi, one begins to see the world in a different way. It's by seeing the mundane things of life in contrast to a state of composure, of peace, of samadhi that one can truly understand and see them clearly. When the mind is clarified and purified, then it sees things in a different way. One will see the nature of change, the busyness of *sankharas* and all conditioned phenomena, which are constantly in a state of flux. Before, one didn't notice because one was immersed in it. It's like someone who lives in the hustle and bustle of downtown San Francisco. They get used to it, conditioned to it; it's familiar to them, and they take it as a normal existence. But if they spend a month meditating at Abhayagiri and then go back into that hustle and bustle, they'll see its intensity more clearly because now they know the contrast.

When we go into states of peace and calm, we start to see the nature of change. We see that change is unsatisfactory and is a cause for suffering. We see that change cannot be controlled; there's no owner, there's no controller. This is a very important insight. The teaching of nonself is understood by seeing that we're not in control—it's not me, it's not mine, I can't control it, or hold it or force it. That's very important in meditation, because if you're trying to control and force the mind to do exactly what you want, you'll get tense and stressed. When you see that there is no controller there, you can let go and stay in that clear awareness of knowing. That leads to great understanding and the arising of the wisdom faculty. The wisdom faculty is nothing more than letting go of suffering, putting things down. In Buddhism wisdom means knowing suffering and abandoning it. Ajahn Chah would say frequently to us, "If you let go a little, you'll have a little peace; if you let go a lot, you'll have a lot of peace; if you let go completely, you'll have complete peace."

Ajahn Chah also taught that suffering has two qualities. It has its unpleasant aspect, and it has its wisdom aspect. Without suffering we wouldn't seek a way out of suffering; we wouldn't seek a way out to liberation and peace. I remember that as a young man I hitchhiked through this area in search of something. I was on my way up the West Coast of the U.S. toward Canada. My goal was to find a log cabin up in the Yukon. I thought that if I lived secluded in a cabin through the winter, I would find some inner peace, the secret to life. I knew that peace had to be found somewhere in nature and that being in solitude was a way of being able to see myself more clearly. I never found it on that trip, but through that desire to search for a path to release from suffering, I eventually came across the Buddha's teachings and recognized them as the truth.

On this path, we realize that we are looking for something. We are looking for the ending of suffering. We come to see that the ending of suffering is not to be found outside, not in a log cabin up in the Yukon. It's to be found in the mind, and this monastery is a place that facilitates this exploration. It's an exploration into the mind: into virtue, into peace and into wisdom. It's when the mind turns inward that liberation can be found. It's when we look after ourselves that we look after others as well. Be peaceful and calm and wise and skillful, and those qualities will reflect out into the world and radiate out into others. That's the best way of spreading the Buddha's teachings. 🍀



Ajahn Nānadharmo is the abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat in Ubolrachatani. Originally from Australia, he ordained as a monk under Ajahn Chah in 1979.

At 9 a.m. the temperature is a cool 70 degrees. Since it's the day after the all-night observance of the new moon day, there is no morning work period. So I wander down to the beginning of the loop trail, which skirts in and around, up and down the monastery's 300 acres of forested land. Once before I had endeavored to hike on parts of the trail when it was still unfinished, and I had gotten stuck in several places. Since the trail was completed, I have avoided ever going on it again, finding many excuses: it's too hard, it's too steep, it's too dangerous, it's too hot, it's too cold, it's too rainy, it's too early, it's too late, I'm too stuffed, I'm too hungry, I'm too out-of-shape, I'd rather go and visit friends in Ukiah.

But today I skip past all my excuses and begin the hike. Soon after, I am confronted by Mara, the Buddhist tempter figure. In Buddhist cosmology, history and mythology, this character is often called the "Evil One." He is the opponent of liberation. He appears in the texts as a deity and as a personification of evil and the passions of worldly existence. Mara is also the metaphor for death. According to tradition, when the Buddha sat under the bodhi tree, Mara tried in vain to obstruct his attainment of enlightenment, first by trying to induce fear through his host of demons and then by attempting to allure the Buddha with pleasures.

Mara slips into our own minds with great ease when our guard is down. In my story, Mara appears by whispering variations of all my favorite fear mantras when I'm alone in the woods. His voice is that of an oily cad, like George Sanders in the movie *All About Eve*. Here's what happens:

Mettika: Whew!!! This trail is too hard. It's too steep. I should turn around and go back down.

Mara: Yes. Look how steep the trail is—going down-down-down and up-up-up. What are you doing in the woods, anyway? You know you aren't comfortable in wooded areas. You've gotten yourself in a fine pickle now. Too bad you're stuck! Can't go up. Can't go down. Look at those old worn-out, slick-bottomed, skimpy Teva sandals. They won't support you no matter which way you go.

Mettika: Oh, d*&#! I'm caught between a rock and a hard place. I can't stay stuck here. But wait, this is a well-worn path. Many others have traveled it. Just trust, breathe and continue forward up the trail.



Me and Mara on the Loop Trail

by *Mettika*

s*&%, the trail is getting really narrow. Don't freeze. It's okay. Oh look, there's a little wooden bridge that was built to get over a tricky area. Thank you to whomever built this support. My gratitude to all the efforts involved to make the loop trail safe. Just keep walking . . . breathe . . . put one foot in front of the other. Ahh, the trail is less steep and is getting wider. What's that? It's a very long cigar-shaped scat in the middle of the path. Oh my god: it's not bear, it's not fox, it's not raccoon. I wonder if it's mountain lion. At least it's not today's poop . . . but it could have been yesterday's.

Mara: That's right, it is mountain lion scat. Suppose you see a mountain lion and the worst happens?

Mettika: Then I see a mountain lion and the worst happens. Just keep walking, one step and then another. Breathe. Dammit—more slippery areas up ahead, more little nasty places.

Mara: Look, Mettika. There's the waterfall. Do you remember a few years ago when you got stuck on the teeny-tiny narrow little path over the falls and you had to hug the boulder. You were frozen, unable to go forward or backward. Ha-ha. I loved it when you were so scared, holding on for dear life.

Mettika: Well, whaddya know? That is the waterfall. It now has a sturdy foot bridge across the scary place and a dangly stretched-out rope for a railing. Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you to the monks who dragged and schlepped timbers to make the trail safe.

(continued on page 15)

Mara: Hey, look down that cliff. See how far down it is to the bottom? This is where Ajahn Sumedho slipped. What if you fell down this cliff? No one at the monastery would ever think to look for you on the loop trail.

Mettika: Just put one foot in front of the other and . . . breathe. Don't look down there.

Mara: You're in trouble now. The path is really narrow and slippery, and you have yet in all these years to figure out your body's center of gravity.

Mettika: There's a sturdy stick I can use; I'll be more sure-footed with it. Just breathe and put one foot in front of the other. Arggh—just landed on my butt.

Mara: Not too agile, are you?

Mettika: I didn't really fall—just a little slip. Breathe and step. Oh

Creating a Refuge *(continued from page 1)*

don't have a material base, mental qualities are still powerful because they can create that which is painful and disadvantageous to us. On the other hand, they also have the power to create happiness. We need to look after and care for the mind. We need to establish a sense of awareness and attentiveness to the wholesome and unwholesome qualities of the mind.

The disadvantageous feelings in the mind are the lower dhammas. Those are the dhammas of the ordinary, run-of-the-mill suffering being. We think the world is impinging on us, but this is just a feeling in the mind. We get caught in the moods of liking; we get caught in the moods of disliking. The moods of liking can have a painful result; the moods of disliking can also have a painful result. When we're entangled in these moods of liking and disliking, then we create and become a slave to suffering.

We have to recognize that a mind overwhelmed with suffering, agitation or a sense of incompleteness is a mind not yet fully developed. When we recognize a feeling of incompleteness, then we need to meet it with the desire to train ourselves in the practice of the Buddha's teaching. We need to bring up the quality of mindfulness, or *sati*. *Sati* is something that gives tremendous benefit and support for the wholesome conditions in the mind. When we establish mindfulness we can have a clear awareness of the moods of the mind as well as a clear awareness of the world around us.

With mindfulness as the foundation, we can see the movements of the mind. When we see the mind moving towards liking, it doesn't have a painful result. When we have awareness and mindfulness, we can see the mood or feeling of disliking arising in the mind. It can be seen as only a mood, and it doesn't necessarily have to grow into something that is painful or problematic. We recognize that a pleasant feeling is just a visitor to the mind. Unpleasant feelings are also just guests. When we have mindfulness and see that a friendly guest is arriving, then we can be at our ease a bit. But when we recognize that a guest to our home is an enemy, then we have to be very, very cautious and attentive.

In relating to the moods of the mind with awareness, we begin to see their true nature and in particular the nature of their dissolving and ending. When something is continually dissolving and ending, we can't really call that "me" or "mine" or "myself." We don't create a sense of self in those moods. We see them as an aspect of nature that arises and ceases. Mindfulness undermines attachment and clinging. We step back from our feelings of gladness, of sadness, of delight or depression. This gives us a place of firmness and stability, a place of independence.

When we see clearly like this then the attachment or the influence of the worldly dhammas dissipates in the same way

that shining a light into a darkened room immediately dissolves the darkness. When we are established in this awareness and clarity, in the quality of what we call "Buddha," then the unwholesome, negative aspects of the worldly dhammas dissolve. Relying on mindfulness and clear comprehension, we can be one who is "awakened," one who has a sense of happiness and peace.

Mindfulness and right understanding—*sati* and *samma-ditthi*—are intertwined with each other. We establish mindfulness at the arising of things at the sense doors. The sense doors, of course, are where our whole world comes into being: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. These internal sense doors come into contact with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental objects. When, as an example, the eye sees a desirable form, there can arise feelings of desire, attraction or lust. We do not allow the feelings of liking and disliking to overwhelm the mind. Instead, we recognize and maintain recognition of the things that we contact through the senses.

We see that these are things that are impermanent, changing, unstable and therefore not self. And we also recognize that when we forget and get drawn into the assumption and illusion of self, then it brings up a quality, a feeling of suffering, or dissatisfaction.

The feeling of liking or disliking something tends to cover over the true nature of things. That leaves us in a place of dependence or feeling a lack of freedom. We hem ourselves in with attachment and clinging. One very strong form of clinging is the assumption of self. With sense contact, a feeling of "me" arises. Whether it's me being happy or me being unhappy, it's always a feeling of me and my ownership of things. This is burdensome. When we assume ownership over anything, be it pleasant or unpleasant, we don't recognize that this is just a feeling that arises, establishes itself and passes away.

In the worldly dhammas, one of the things we experience as confining or a threat to self is praise and blame. But for one who is established in knowing, watching, awareness and wisdom, a different feeling arises—a sense of evenness. One who has wisdom recognizes that the person who is criticizing us is just following the duty or responsibility of one who has the duty to criticize, the inclination to criticize. We don't have to make a big fuss over it. It's just a worldly dhamma being displayed for us to see. We can recognize that somebody who feels it is necessary to criticize and blame comes from a place of suffering. When we look on somebody who is suffering, we can see them as not well. Just as a nurse or doctor would look at a sick person with compassion, we can see the suffering of this person who has lost their freedom and independence. A doctor or nurse would not feel obliged to react to the moods of the patient. There would be a feeling of evenness. So too in responding to praise or blame, there needs to be this evenness.

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We need to see the non-self aspect in praise and blame so that we can establish an unshakable quality of stability.

Establishing ourselves in mindfulness and clear comprehension is the basic foundation of Right View—seeing in accordance with Truth, or the way things really are. As we establish ourselves in this quality of Right View, then there is a sense of being the one who knows, the one who sees clearly and thus is established in the quality of happiness and brightness. The quality of wrong view is a way of seeing that hinders the feeling of independence and freedom.

How do views come into being? When the senses come in contact with objects, we may have the feeling of “me” and “myself” being impinged upon by something external. When we view things in this way, we tend to have agitation in the mind. We have a feeling of not wanting to be in contact with certain things. The feeling of being in contact with that view diminishes our experience of freedom. It is an obstruction to a sense of well-being, and we experience suffering. There are many gradations of suffering: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. These feelings arise from desire, or *tanha*, a thirst that inevitably leads to suffering. So we need to establish awareness as the mind moves towards desire or the craving mind. We need to question these feelings, really bring up a question in the mind, and ask, “Who do these feelings belong to? Who is this that is feeling these things? Why is it moving in this direction?” The Buddha asks us to question the assumptions behind our desires and to be attentive to the body.

Normally we assume we are the body. But we need to question how valid that assumption is. Am I the hair of the head? Is the skin me? The teeth, is that me? These are classic meditation objects. When we investigate, we start to recognize there isn't something solid that we can call “ourselves.” There are just various conditions that come together and dissolve. We see that the assumptions we make aren't so valid. When we step back from the assumption of selfhood and see things in their true nature, there's a feeling of dispassion or disentangling, and this is a cause for a sense of real happiness and lightness in the heart.

The foundation of Right View is to pay attention to suffering, the conditions of suffering, the experience of suffering, so that we can understand clearly its causes. It is something that is coming to teach us, and it is incumbent on us to be willing to learn from suffering. We come to see that our suffering is just something that we are experiencing, something that arises and passes away without any solidity to it. It's something that is always changing in the same way the world around us changes from daytime into nighttime. Daytime is light, and nighttime is dark. That's just how nature functions.

We pay attention to suffering so that we're not under the power of suffering. When we're not under the power of suf-

fering, we can establish ourselves in awareness and clarity. When we see things clearly, we recognize that nothing has the sense of selfhood within it. When we step back from the different aspects of desire, we have a sense of peace or contentment. Desire has the function to not feel full or complete in the same way that a fire has the duty to consume whatever fuels it until it burns out. If we continue to feed desire with our wrong views, then it's going to continue to produce suffering. When we see desire clearly, then it ceases to have any power over us. It's just a phenomenon of nature.

This is why it is so important to be established in clear mindfulness and clear knowing. We need to recognize that the different kinds of desire pull us into liking and disliking, wanting and not wanting. The Buddha elucidated the different types of desire: desire for being (*bhava-tanha*) and desire for non-being (*vibhava-tanha*)—that pushing and pulling of the heart that is agitating and destructive. As we see clearly, then we are not held in its sway. The heart establishes itself in dispassion or disenchantment and turns to Truth, turns to the

true nature of things, what the Buddha called *sacca-dhamma*, the Truth of the dhamma.

One who sees clearly does not see any enemies. One does not see anybody who is a danger to us. When we live in truth, we live with a sense of compassion and friendliness towards the world, and this is a basis for our well-being and happiness. We live in the world without fear or suspicion. This is a complete, fulfilled way of living. The Buddha encouraged us to cultivate this: dwelling in the dhamma of liberation, the dhamma of freedom, *mokkhadhamma*. When we establish ourselves in these qualities, then we are

one who is content, peaceful and happy wherever we go, whether we're on our own or living within society.

As we establish ourselves in these qualities, then we are able to view the world as something which is not a problem for us. We look at the world and see other people as our friends and relatives. We're not separated from people through feeling any sense of adversity. So this is a happiness that arises from seeing clearly, seeing correctly. This quality of being a complete and fulfilled human being arises from practice and training in the ways that the Buddha laid down for us. We look on the world—and our life—as an opportunity to cultivate these qualities of peace, well-being, completeness and maturity. The Buddha encourages us to learn from our attachments and use every occasion as an opportunity to create a sense of safety, refuge and comfort. 🍀

Ajahn Liam was born in Northeast Thailand in 1941 and ordained at age 20. He began training under Ajahn Chah in 1969. When Ajahn Chah became ill in 1982, Ajahn Liam was asked to look after Wat Bah Pong and has since become abbot.

Our suffering is something that is always changing in the same way the world around us changes from daytime into nighttime.

On a Monastic Road Trip

by *Debbie Stamp and
Robert Hohn
with Catherine Direen*

With the Thai forest tradition of Buddhism still new in the West, each chance we have to host visiting Thai monks and observe how they behave and interact with each other, with Western monks and nuns, and with lay supporters is a chance to learn more about the deep roots from which this tradition grew and now is sustained. Even the most seasoned among us—and in the West, that doesn't amount to many years in this tradition at all—can feel a bit unsure and awkward, especially given the mutual language challenges. The following story of a recent roadtrip of Thai and Western monks and lay supporters shows just how unpredictable, and yet ultimately precious, such interactions can be. The lay supporters found that, just like at Abhayagiri, a good dose of willingness, mixed with respect and humility, can help us all surmount even the most daunting conditions.

—Catherine Direen



Monastery photo

Early in the morning of July 2, two vans—loaded with seven monks, five laypeople, bowls, books and sleeping bags—headed north from Abhayagiri. Five of the monks were from Thailand: Luang Por Liam (abbot of Wat Pah Pong), Ajahn Jundee (abbot of Wat Pah Ampawan), Ajahn Ñanadhammo (the Australian abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat), Ajahn Utain (Luang Por Liam's secretary), and Ajahn Prateep (who is currently staying at Abhayagiri). The Thai monks had come to Abhayagiri for the installation ceremony of the new Buddharupa, and it seemed like a good chance to show them some of the West Coast and visit Birken, an affiliated monastery in British Columbia. Tan Hasapañño and Tan Ñaniko filled out the monastic contingent. Ploen Petkue, Debbie Stamp, Tina Tunyong, Jan Orbom (Tan Ñyaniko's father) and Robert Hohn made up the lay contingent.

We sat for a light breakfast and a few last details after packing the vans before our planned 7 a.m. departure. The three monks from Abhayagiri and several of the five laypeople paid their respects to Ajahn Pasanno at 20 minutes before the hour, but as we exited the Dhamma Hall, it was clear that the “*kruba ajahns*” (teaching monks) were already ready to leave. “Isn't it early?” one of us queried. “Apparently not” was the gist of Ajahn Pasanno's reply, a grin on his face. The meaning of the phrase “penciled in” was becoming clear.

While it was up to us laypeople as the drivers to keep track of directions, schedules and location and timing for the meal, there was also the necessity to stay attuned to the appropriate respect for the *kruba ajahns*. We would have to sort that out, situation by situation; attentiveness mixed with a sprinkling of learning through trial and error.

Our first stop was the Avenue of the Giants, where we paid respects to our other elders, the ancient redwood trees. It was here that the first of many group photos was taken, necessitating mini-training sessions on the intricacies of half a dozen cameras.

Lovely weather and clear blue skies over Eureka soon found us searching for someplace to eat. We needed to provide the meal for the monastics before 12 noon. Tina and Ploen discovered a Chinese restaurant that was just opening. At a brief meeting with Ajahn Pasanno the night before, we'd asked Ajahn Ñanadhammo if he'd pick things off the menu for the Thai monks. His reply was that we should decide for all of them as we were offering the meal. “But I'm a Libra!” Debbie exclaimed, somewhat dismayed. “At least we know it'll be a balanced meal” was the response.

Compared to our more Westernized manner of attending to monastics, the Thai style seemed so formal, awkward and slightly intimidating. But out of gratitude for the lovely teachings and the inspiring example of the kruba ajahns, we felt blessed to be along and wanted to attend as respectfully and appropriately as possible, albeit a bit clumsy next to the grace of the Thais.

In a country where one is born and raised with the notion of dana and of offering food to monks, dining in a restaurant is a very uncommon experience for the monks; while traveling in Thailand the monks simply take their bowls and walk alms round and will inevitably receive some offering. “What should we order? How much should we get? We must order quickly so that they have sufficient time to eat.” Then we had to be certain that each dish was properly offered—all done with some semblance of calm!

When the monks were finished, they shared their food with us and calmly waited until we were finished. Throughout the trip there was an acute awareness that we were also being looked after, in a very subtle way. And so, despite our somewhat fumbling manners, we managed to get the meal offered and eaten before the noon hour.

We drove by lovely sections of the Trinity River, dotted here and there with colorful rafts and kayaks. We passed by a few snowy peaks of the Trinity Alps, which was the first viewing of snow for Ajahn Utain. Along the way the question arose as to whether we should stop to offer something cold to drink. We knew that the kruba ajahns would leave something like that up to us. It was a long drive and we still had a couple of hours of driving left, so we made the decision to stop. Hmm. Juice or sodas? Fortunately, the little store was limited, so option paralysis couldn't stir too many doubts up for us.

Late in the afternoon we arrived at Shasta Abbey, our destination for the first night. After settling in we took a tour of the grounds and had a cup of tea with the abbot, Rev. Master Eko, and a few other monks. Luang Por was invited to give a talk, which he readily agreed to. The whole community, including lay guests, was invited. The talk took place in the beautiful Ceremony Hall, and, as Luang Por climbed up into the tall and imposing Dhamma seat, he said that it was obviously made for Westerners, which drew a laugh and put everyone at ease. Ajahn Nanadhammo skillfully translated Luang Por's talk, in which he drew connections between the different traditions, acknowledging the sincerity of the community and the common aspiration they shared. It was clear that all were gratefully moved by Luang Por's sincerity, simplicity and humility.

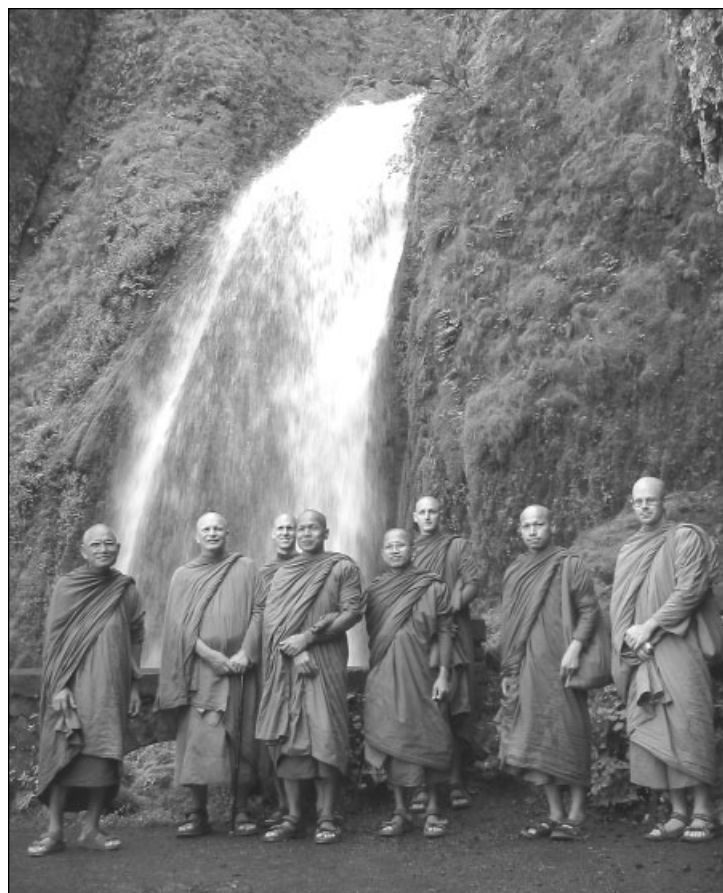
In the morning we participated in the morning service, which was a first for all of the forest monks. Over a cup of tea, the monks from both traditions shared their common experiences of and ideas for sustaining a sense of community among branch monasteries scattered worldwide. After a round of group photos, we headed north on Interstate 5. On a tip from

somebody staying at Shasta Abbey, we stopped in Grants Pass (the most logical place for the meal), looking for a restaurant that had “the best cinnamon buns in the world.” Alas, the sign never appeared, and we found ourselves instead at a truck stop—style diner. No cinnamon buns here!

With no time to waste in order to finish the meal by noon, we ordered seven veggie omelettes, two orders of pancakes and two orders of french toast. “I don't even have a grill! I only have two hotplates,” the cook exclaimed, with a worried look on her face. We offered to go elsewhere, but as the monks were already seated, she consented. “It'll be slow; one or two omelettes at a time.” With food from the shelves of the little “store,” a variety of items Ploen had brought along, and a little trip to a neighboring gas station “store,” we managed to complete the meal before noon.

While we fretted a bit about getting a somewhat balanced meal together for the monastics and the haphazardness of the offering, the monastics were at ease. They were grateful to have a meal, and again, they made sure that we were taken care of. What had initially seemed like a blunder on our part resulted in a great sense of joy in making do with what the situation offered and the reminder that there never was a problem in the first place, beyond what we created in ourselves. In the end the cook, the woman behind the cash register, and all of us were laughing and saying our good-byes.

(continued on page 14)



Monastery photo



Monastery photo

Road Trip *(continued from page 13)*

Later that afternoon we arrived at Barbara Backstrand's home in Portland. A few of us went ahead into the house, but the kruba ajahns waited down by the car, only coming up to the house when they were formally invited. After tea and a bit of a rest, we headed over to Robert Beatty's Portland Insight Meditation Center for a talk by Luang Por. Following another inspiring teaching urging practitioners to apply energy and commitment to their practice, there was a chance for questions and informal chatting with the monks. After many more photo-ops and a cup of tea, Luang Por crossed the room and out the front door, Birkenstocks in hand—our cue that it was time to go. Our rather unweildy group split up and spent the night at several different houses.

The next morning we all met at Friends of the Dhamma Center for the meal. The monks chanted a blessing chant for the center, and, after a few more photos, we headed off for a little sightseeing in the Columbia Gorge. We walked up a path to a lovely waterfall and took another excursion to Larch Mountain, where one can see five volcanoes and a sweeping view of the Columbia Gorge. It was a perfect afternoon, and, judging by the number of photos taken, inspirational to all.

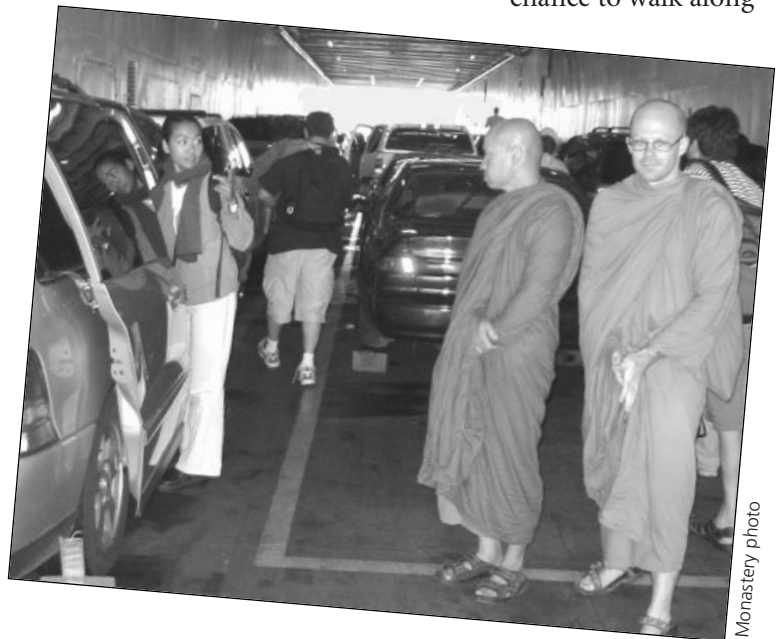
Leaving our Portland friends behind we travelled north to Seattle, arriving at Ladawan and Hiran Kong-karat's home in time for tea and a well-deserved rest. It was lovely to see Ladawan come out of the house, smile on her face and hands in *anjali*, to welcome all and invite us into her home. Another mental note was made. The next morning we drove over to Wat Atammayataram for the meal. The community of several monks and many laypeople had done a beautiful job setting up an outdoor eating platform for the monks. At least 50 people showed up, bringing loads of food, flowers, film and devotion. With each new situation we found endless opportunities to simply observe and follow and were even beginning to ease into that sense of uncertainty.

After the meal Luang Por gave a talk in Thai while Ajahn Nanadhammo gave a talk and answered questions for the English-speaking crowd. There was a lovely atmosphere of community, gratitude and goodwill permeating the space. It was truly heartening to meet so many sincere Dhamma practitioners, all of whom were so gracious and welcoming. That evening there was a special blessing and Dhamma talk at Ladawan's home with a small group of friends. Although Luang Por's talk went untranslated, a message of peace and tranquility was clearly conveyed.

The following morning, loaded up with piles of food offered by a number of generous Thai supporters, we drove up to Anacortes through rain showers and boarded the ferry to Vancouver Island. The ferry ride was spectacular—the rain clouds lifted, leaving bright blue sky, sparkling water, intriguing inlets and wooded islands. Luang Por had a big smile on his face as he strolled around on the deck, clicking off another roll of film. After a sumptuous picnic in a park we drove to Butchart Gardens and took in the magnificent sights of thousands of blooming flowers and exquisitely designed gardens. The only drawback was that it was very crowded, making it difficult for the monks to avoid being jostled around.

Another ferry ride took us to the mainland and a short drive to the home of Lili Kitaphanich in Vancouver. Again, it was lovely to observe how all were welcomed and invited in by Lili, a smile on her face and hands in *anjali*. As with all the places we visited, we were greeted with kindness, generosity and gracious hospitality.

The next day, after a beautiful meal offering by Lili and others, we were taken out for some sightseeing. First stop was Stanley Park and the Aquarium. Here we saw many fabulous creatures, with the Beluga whales and their ghostly, eerie smiles being the highlight. The next stop was the Capilano Suspension Bridge, which is several hundred feet long and just as many feet above a coastal stream. We also had a chance to walk along



Monastery photo



suspension bridges built 30 to 40 feet above the ground between large conifers. It was quite a sight to see a group of forest monks strolling through the treetops in the soft afternoon arboreal light.

The following morning we loaded the vans and took a short walk in Queen Elizabeth Park before an early “before hours” meal at the restaurant of a lay supporter. Then we headed off for our final destination: Birken. We arrived in the late afternoon in time for a tour of the main house/hall and the nearby grounds. It felt great to be there and see all the work that had been done. The community there seemed full of energy and vision, and the results of their labors were impressive indeed. An added treat was to be able to see Tan Dhammaso, who has been “on loan” from Abhayagiri for the past few months. In the evening the monks did some *paritta* chanting, which filled their beautiful hall with resonant sounds. Luang Por gave a Dhamma talk, once again skillfully translated by Ajahn Ñanadhammo, in which he urged the community to learn to sustain a continuous state of practice.

The next morning it was time for the Abhayagiri contingent to pay our respects and take leave of the Thai monks, who would be flying back home from Vancouver in a few days. It seemed that there was more than a bit of clinging on our part, wishing to postpone the inevitable separation. There was also a sense of deep gratitude for the opportunity to spend so many days in close proximity with such kind, warm-hearted monks who offer a model of a life well lived. Even though we often felt clumsy and awkward in looking after the monks, their adaptability, kindness and compassion assured us of their gratitude for our heart-felt offerings. We all felt so blessed for the opportunity to experience the harmony and peace radiating from these beings who act in accordance with Dhamma. ♥

From the Monastery (continued from page 3)

Ajahn Pasanno returned to Spirit Rock on July 28 to assist with the Family Retreat, where parents and children have the opportunity to receive teachings and practice Dhamma. Ajahn Pasanno reflected afterwards that he experienced great joy at the receptivity of the children and the deep sincerity of the families in general.

The annual Spirit Rock Teen Weekend took place over the Labor Day holiday. Led by Heather Sundberg, a group of teens visited the monastery and participated in two days of activities, including a work period, meditation practice with the monastic community, receiving teachings, and a question-and-answer session with Ajahn Pasanno. A week later the monastery hosted a two-day work weekend. There was a very positive response and a good turnout, with people helping to make paths and clear sites for the meditation platforms in the forest near Casa Serena. Both these kinds of gatherings are an integral part of life at the monastery and underscore the mutual interdependence between the monastic and lay communities.

The monthly gatherings at Yoga Mendocino have continued on the second Wednesday of every month. With Ajahn Amaro away, Tan Sudanto, Tan Karunadhammo, and Tan Jotipalo have helped to facilitate the evening groups there. Tan Sudanto has also helped more with teachings at the monastery, giving morning and evening Dhamma reflections to the community every so often.

—Venerable Ñaniko Bhikkhu, for the Sangha

Me and Mara (continued from page 7)

Mara: Guess what—you’re lost. The sign at the beginning of the trail said it would take you only 1-1/2 hours. But you’ve already been hiking for two hours.

Mettika: They probably meant 1-1/2 hours for 22-year-old monks, not me.

Mara: Well, don’t forget that Khamla is coming today to offer the meal with all that delicious Thai food. Too bad you’ll miss it at your pace.

Mettika: If I’m lost, I’ll miss the meal. No big deal. Just keep walking, breathe, put one foot in front of the other. Hey, what’s that? It’s a sign with an arrow and a set of steps terraced into the hillside. Well, well, well. There’s the golden Buddha at the end of the trail, and here I am back at the monastery with 15 minutes to spare before lunch!

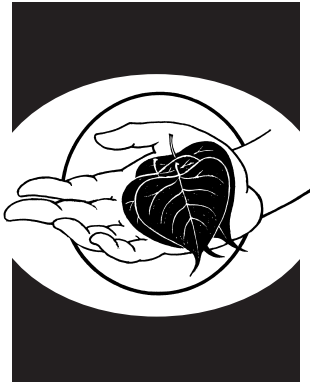
Mara: Rats! Foiled again.

Mettika (Cindy Hoffman) is a graduate of the Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers (CALM) training program and lives in Fort Bragg, California. In all her 62 years, she is only now learning to enjoy a walk in the woods. ♥

SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

ABHAYAGIRI MONASTERY

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FALL 2004

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October 31
Kathina Festival
(see back cover)

2004

KATHINA FESTIVAL

AT ABHAYAGIRI

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 31

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 Mettika (Cindy Hoffman) at 707-964-4604, cindyho@mcn.org or Dee Cope at 707-824-1773 for more details.

Please join us for this year's festival!

A few spaces still available

Thanksgiving Retreat

with **Ajahn Pasanno**
and **Taraniya**

November 19–28, 2004

Angela Center, Santa Rosa, California

For more information, visit the Abhayagiri website at www.abhayagiri.org. Or contact Paul Friedlander at retreat04@juno.com.