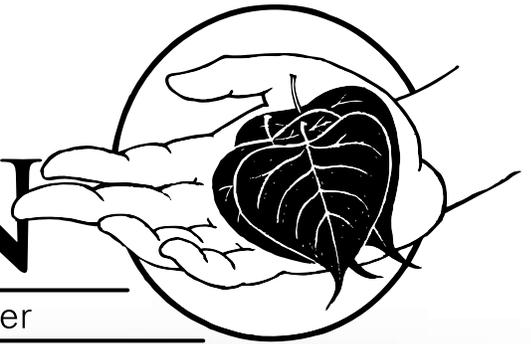


# FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

The Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery Newsletter



Fall 2009 • 2552

Volume 14, Number 3

## The Right Angle

### Everyone Benefits, Nobody Loses Out

By Luang Por Liam, translated by Ajahn Siripaṇṇo

The entire world and everyone in it needs the Dhamma as a protection. We all survive and find comfort in life with the support of the knowledge and skills, mindfulness and wisdom, of countless others. Without their help we would all perish as soon as we leave our mother's womb. We'd have no food to eat, clothes to wear or house to live in. Our parents, whose faces we have never even seen before, give us life and all the things we need to make us healthy and strong. For our clothes and living places, and all the various skills we learn, we are entirely indebted to others. From the first moments in our mothers womb, all of us have a debt of gratitude owed to innumerable other people – no need to mention our parents and all our teachers, to whom the sense of gratitude we should feel is incalculable.

Even people of one nation have much to be grateful for to those living in another. This is something which, if you think about it, is not too hard to see. Knowing and acknowledging with gratitude the debt we have to others, and placing them above ourselves, is called *kataññutā*. The effort to

repay the debt is called *kataveditā*.

The ones who know what has been done for them are called *katañṇu*. And those who return the favor gratefully are called *katavedi*.

*Katañṇu-kataveditā*: acknowledging the debt we owe to others and paying it back with acts of gratitude are spiritual qualities which protect the world from harm, help society to function, and lead to peace and happiness. People, however, are less and less able to see that we all have this mutual debt of gratitude which must be repaid, and failing to understand this is the reason for the increase in heated fighting and quarrelling. So, taking an interest in the qualities of *katañṇu-katavedi* is something which is of vital importance to us all.

All the beautiful customs and traditions of old have in part been grounded in the principles of *katañṇu-katavedi*. These qualities were firmly established, nurtured over time and deeply understood by all societies. Anyone who fails to accept that our lives are inextricably linked with one another, and who does not see our mutual indebtedness, will surely live a life of selfish ingratitude.

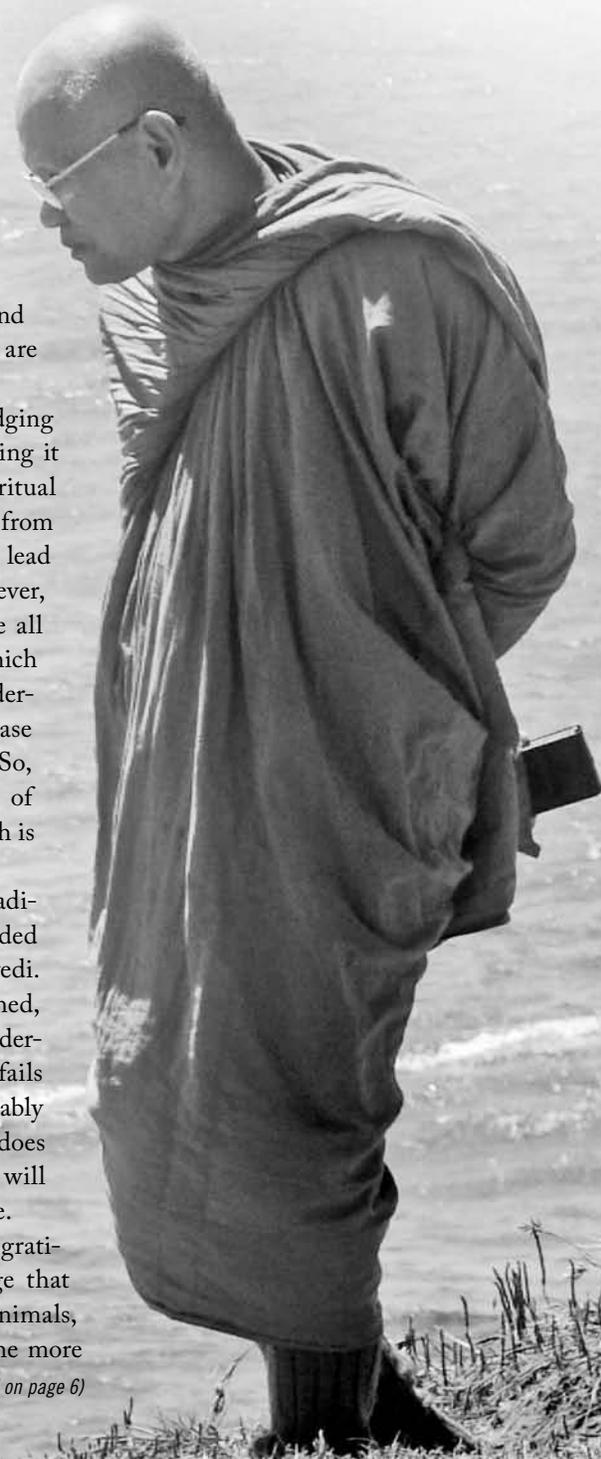
The people who manifest most gratitude are the ones who acknowledge that even cows and buffaloes, and other animals, have helped us along the way, all the more

(Continued on page 6)

#### INSIDE:

From the Monastery	Pg 2
Open Hands	Pg 4
Calendar	Pg 8 & 9
Yoga Mendocino Benefit	Pg 13
From Māra's Desk	Pg 14

Contributors: The Sangha, Luang Por Liam, Paul Breiter and Mettika.



# From the Monastery

## The Deluge Between the Rains and 'The Rains'



The last edition of Fearless Mountain brought its readers up to date on the monastic happenings during and just following the community's three-month 'Winter Retreat,' – a period given to more formal meditation practice which cloisters us through the course of the Mendocino rainy season. On July 8th, the monastic Sangha here at Abhayagiri entered into the three-month 'Rains Retreat' or Vassa (the monsoon season in Asia), which is a time of stability – enjoined by the Buddha – during which community members abstain from unnecessary travel, study the monastic protocols and take time for shorter periods of communal and individual retreat. During the interval between these two, the monastery has seen much activity, comings and goings, beginnings and endings.

### Visiting Elders

In these last several months, Abhayagiri Monastery has quietly played a supportive role in Buddhism's journey to America as it joyfully acted as host to several pre-eminent Buddhist luminaries.

From May 12th through June 8th, Abhayagiri had the good fortune to receive and accommodate two elder Thai disciples of Ajahn Chah, namely Ajahn Liam Thitadhammo, the abbot of Wat Nong Pah Pong for the last 25 years, and Ajahn Anek Yasadinno, abbot of Wat Pah Sai Ngam. These venerables were accompanied by Ajahn Siripaño and Ajahn Kevali, abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, who acted as translators. During their visit the local and extended communities affiliated with the monastery were blessed with a variety of teachings. In addition to giving several publicized teachings here at the monastery, for the weekly Saturday night and observance night talks, the Ajahns gave numerous impromptu Dhamma-reflections, with seemingly boundless energy, to different

crowds as situations arose. These teachings occurred on weekends, after meals, to Thai, Lao, American and Sri Lankan laity who came to offer food; at tea time to local monastery 'regulars'; to the members of the Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers (CALM) gathered for their annual recommitment (May 22nd–25th); and even in their own personal dwellings to informal groups of monastics who came to soak in the deep pools of wisdom and kindness.

In addition to their teachings within the monastery, the visiting elders were also able to give of their time to several affiliated institutions. Portland Friends of the Dhamma took the opportunity to invite the ajahns, along with a large attendant contingent of resident Abhayagiri monastics, for a four-day road trip up to the Portland area. Here, Ajahn Liam and Ajahn Anek shared their experiences on the theme of 'Community.' Shortly after returning from Portland, Ajahn Liam gave a lengthy exhortation, translated from Thai into English and then from English into Chinese, to the large assembly gathered in the main hall at The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in Ukiah. And during a whirlwind weekend trip into the San Francisco Bay Area, Ajahns Liam and Anek gave several talks at an assortment of Buddhist venues, particularly of note being those at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin County, at Wat Buddhansorn – the Thai temple in Fremont – and at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

This was Ajahn Liam's third and Ajahn Anek's first visit to the USA. It is greatly hoped by many that it will not be their last.

As if such auspicious guests did not bring enough of a deluge of blessings, shortly following the departure of these four visiting theras, Abhayagiri was able



Ajahns Anek, Pasanno & Amaro in the redwoods

to host Ajahn Jayasāro, a highly respected Western monk of nearly 30 years standing and fellow student of Ajahn Chah's, for a ten-day stay – perhaps the longest time he has spent at a single place outside of his forest hermitage in Thailand in the last decade. In addition to his many informal teachings, on June 21st, Ajahn Jayasāro helped facilitate the annual Upasika Renewal Day. Here the ajahn shared some practical reflections on the topic of Buddhist education, drawing from his experience of encouraging and advising school teachers in Thailand.

Several talks given by Ajahn Liam as well as Ajahn Jayasāro's talk on education have already been posted on the Abhayagiri website, as well as being included in this Newsletter. There will be more audio recordings and talk transcriptions to come.

### Resident Community

Like all conditioned phenomena, the monastic community here at Abhayagiri continues to change in form and to fluctuate in its overall appearance.

Ajahns Sudanto and Karunadhammo are spending this year's Rains Retreat at Birken Forest Monastery in British Columbia, looking after affairs there while Ajahn Sona, the monastery's founder and abbot, helps out at the Bhavana Society in West Virginia while

Bhante Gunaratana, *that* monastery's founder and abbot, takes a one-year sabbatical.

As is the custom, 'Abhayagiri-born' Tan Thitabho and Tan Kassapo are spending their third year as monastics at affiliated branch monasteries. Both have chosen and have been given permission to train in Thailand for this time. They have begun their year away by entering the Rains Retreat at the International Forest Monastery, Wat Pah Nanachat, in Ubon, Thailand.

As these venerables leave, so the monastery welcomes Tan Gunavuddho – an American monk who has spent the last ten plus years training in Thailand – into its fold.

Since the last Newsletter, there have been three separate ordination procedures, metamorphosing the forms of six monastic aspirants. On June 13th, former Sāmanera Thitapañño took bhikkhu ordination at a ceremony attended by four generations of his family members. Ajahn Jayasāro, who had just arrived the day before, graciously offered some reflections on the benefits of monasticism to those gathered. On July 22nd, Anagārikas Ian, Louis, and Carl were given the sāmanera 'going-forth.' At this time, the new sāmaneras were given Pali names by Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Pasanno: Anagārika Ian becoming Sāmanera Kovilo ('One who is firm and steady as the earth'), Anagārika Louis becoming Sāmanera Nānamedhi ('One



Monastic visit to the Bay Area

who is a sage through knowledge') and Anagārika Carl becoming Sāmanera Pamutto ('One who is well-liberated'). To wrap up this string of ceremonies, just four days later, residents Sean Fargo and Scott Spencer took anagārika ordination, committing themselves to a one-year training in white robes, practicing with the Eight Precepts, and acclimatising themselves to life in the monastery.

The monastery was also very happy, during this auspicious period, to house Ploen Petchkue, long-time student of Ajahn Pasanno and supporter of Abhayagiri. She spent these months serving and inspiring the local community with impressive vigor and an apparently insatiable appetite for doing good, preparing food-offerings every single day of her stay and preparing elaborate flower arrangements almost bigger than she was. The community also extends its best wishes to Jim Jaber who

was living at and helping out around the monastery since January of this year. May they fare well in their respective journeys.

### Local Teachings

On July 18th, Ajahn Pasanno co-led a day-long yoga-meditation retreat with Cator Shachoy in San Francisco. The dana event, the fourth which Ajahn Pasanno has helped facilitate, acted as a benefit for Youth Yoga Dharma, a Bay Area non-profit organization.

Likewise, Ajahn Amaro has kept up his schedule of teachings outside the monastery throughout the spring and early summer. For four consecutive Wednesday evenings in May, the venerable ajahn offered well-attended lectures on the Four Noble Truths at Yoga Mendocino in Ukiah. Also, Portland Friends of the Dhamma welcomed Ajahn Amaro for a week-end of Dhamma discourses and meditation instruction during the last week of May; this was followed by a week-long retreat that he led at Great Vow Zen Monastery – at the invitation of and in combination with Roshi Chozen and Hogen Bays, in Clatskanie, Oregon – on the theme of self and selflessness, death and Deathlessness and what it is (if anything) that remains when all the questions come to an end. Upon returning to California, Ajahn Amaro led two day-long retreats: On June 20th speaking on the theme of 'High Summer' – addressing "the painful shadows of getting what we like" – at Spirit Rock Meditation Center; and on July 25th exploring the oft-neglected 'divine abiding' of upekkhā, or equanimity, again at Yoga Mendocino.

Both abbots offered teachings at The

*(Continued on page 15)*



Monastic travellers with the Portland Friends of the Dhamma

# Open Hands - Reflections on Thailand's Culture of Generosity

By Paul Breiter, formerly *Varapañño Bhikkhu*

Robert Aitken Roshi said he is often asked why he teaches so much about generosity. His answer is that all other positive qualities, all the spiritual perfections, grow out of it.

Generosity, *dāna*, is explained as having several facets or levels: giving material support, giving freedom from fear, and giving the gift of Dhamma, for example. For Westerners who aspire to the Buddha's way, the first of these often means parceling out donations to a teacher, a Sangha, or a worthy project. These days many people are living on tight budgets and struggling just to pay bills without getting submerged in debt or losing their homes, so it seems like every material offering has to be scrutinized for its affordability and worthiness – especially as it often comes in addition to hefty fees charged for teachings and retreats.

Those who have studied and lived in Asian Buddhist societies have witnessed a remarkable culture of giving that supports the Dhamma and the Sangha. Still, there can be a dismissive attitude toward such practice: Asians do it because, they want to get better rebirths; because as laypeople, they avoid the hard work of meditation and renunciation, they try to buy their way out of doing any real spiritual practice by making offerings; they are just following cultural norms; and so on. Yet who could fail to notice the easygoing nature of so many people in Asian Buddhist countries, the selfless helping and hospitality that are practically a reflex, the way that meditation seems to come so easily to those who do practice it – this compared with the difficulty in practice and the tense, uneasy character of many of us long-time Western meditators, who find it so hard to take our focus off of “How am I feeling?” and “What do I need?” I am probably not the only person who has had the notion that I would have to practice for a long time just to get to the ‘level’ of so many Asian Buddhists who rarely, if ever, sit down to meditate.

Patrul Rinpoche said, “A spark of

merit is worth more than a mountain of effort.” *Dāna* is taught as a way to reduce self-centeredness and possessiveness, which seems like an excellent route to the avowed goal of all Buddhists, recognizing that all aspects of the mind, the body and the world are not self. And obviously, if there's no self to protect, there is no basis for fear. In the various presentations of the Buddha's way, *dāna* is often the first factor. For example there is the progression of the ten *pāramitās*; then the summary of the path into *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*; and the ‘graduated teaching,’ beginning with generosity leading to celestial results, then the shortcomings of the heavenly states of sensual pleasure, then the blessings of renunciation and finally the insight into the Four Noble Truths.

When I was in robes, it didn't take me long to get accustomed to having my entire existence subsidized by people who didn't know me, though occasionally an act of generosity would be so noteworthy that it couldn't fail to startle even me out of complacency and indifference. But mostly I grumbled about the difficulty of my living situation, the sometimes meager food, lack of the things I was accustomed to and desired. What's the big deal about providing things that people like, I would ask myself, certain that if it were me in pants and shirt, showing up at the wat in an automobile, I would outdo everyone with lavish offerings. Yet when I disrobed and was scraping out a subsistence-level, no-frills life (by American standards), there seemed little left over to support worthy causes and people. I managed to occasionally donate to Oxfam and send coffee or tea to Wat Nanachat, but it was far from being a way of life or an ongoing part of my life; it was more like paying the IRS when the time came due, though of course there was more joy in thinking about the monks drinking brewed coffee on my dime than Uncle Sam using those tax dollars for whatever purpose. But I digress...

Anyone who has been ordained in Thailand will have many stories of the generosity of the laity there. One person's recollections may be a drop in the ocean but, as the years go by, what I experienced there seems more and more extraordinary. So please indulge me while I take a break from my usual stream of negativity to type a few words in praise of virtue and generosity, and to recall old friends.

It began with my arrival in Bangkok in 1970. On my second morning there I found myself sitting in the office of the manager of Suksit Siam, the bookstore of Sulak Sivarak. Khun Sutchai had all the time in the world to explain Buddhism and monastic life to me. (In fact, he made me uneasy with his assumption that I was ready to sign my life away when I thought that all I wanted to do was learn to meditate). He steered me to Tan Dhammaramo in Wat Boworn, where I quickly took up residence and began learning Buddhist theory and meditation. After a couple of weeks of that, I decided to ordain, and that was when the donors really started coming out of the woodwork.

An American fellow, a former soldier named Jim who occasionally came around to see Dhammaramo, offered to be my ordination sponsor, providing the robes and whatever else was required. Dhammaramo alerted his patrons that there were two new novices, Mike Shameklis (Jotamano) and I, and we got some extra offerings on *pindapat*, our daily alms-round, most notably from the ‘Bread Man,’ a retired doctor who came out every morning without fail to offer some flavorless toast because, as he said, “*Farang* (foreigners) can't eat rice.”

One thing led to another and I was on my way to Wat Pah Pong, Ajahn Chah's monastery, after a few months. The Warin train station is a good six kilometers from the monastery – a long hike for a pampered city monk, though not undoable for sure. But, in those days, as soon as an occidental in robes appeared there, some unknown person would pay

a pickup truck driver to take us to Wat Pah Pong.

After that test run to Wat Pah Pong, I decided to return once I had got my visa renewed. When I went back some two months later, Ajahn Sumedho was at Tum Saeng Pet monastery, so Dhammagutto and I were sent there. To my delight, Ajahn Sumedho informed us that a local Chinese man, the indomitable Saengchai, brought delicious food every day. And a wealthy patroness, Khun Ying Dtun, was building a grand meditation hall on top of the hill.

Up to that point in my life I'd never had to support myself. Any jobs I'd had were to get extra spending money or to help pay for travel. I was used to others footing the bill without having to consider what it was costing them, so I guess it seemed logical to me now, as a monk, that someone would be providing food and a place for me to stay. When I began to study Tibetan Buddhism later on, my teacher urged his students to do long retreats. He told us how in Tibet, whenever people learned of someone practicing in a cave or mountain site they would start bringing provisions. Here in the US, however, "No one is going to give you even a crust of bread," he said, so it was necessary for those of us who weren't well-heeled to work and save up money for our purposes.

He also did suggest that those who were comparatively wealthy help support the poverty-stricken aspirants who seriously wanted to do retreat, and I thought it quite extraordinary to see some people respond to that, though of course it would be commonplace in Asia.

Anyhow, in spite of the high living at Tam Saeng Pet, I fell on hard times spiritually and tried to make a run for it. First, though, I had to go back to Wat Pah Pong. On the way, the nameless sponsor who was driving me there – without fail, such a person always appeared when the need arose – stopped in Ubon city to take me to see a doctor, as I had lost a lot of weight and was pretty weak. It was the clinic of Dr. Utai, a kindly Chinese man.

I think it was late Sunday afternoon. He examined me and prescribed some vitamins, and then as I got up from the examining table my glasses slipped off my skinny head and shattered on the floor. It felt like yet another big wave rolling in from the ocean of misery, further crushing my spirits, but barely three seconds passed before Dr. Utai jumped up and said, "I will offer a new pair." The layman who was escorting me took me down the street to an optician's shop, and the next day I was brought back to pick up my new pair of glasses.

I was so amazed, and comforted, by the gentleness and kindness of Dr. Utai that I kept him in mind for a long time. When my sister came to visit and fell ill, my first thought was for her to see him. When I started having a problem with a knee, I went to see him in the hospital. Luang Por Chah started calling me "*luksit Mor Utai*," Dr Utai's disciple. I didn't study

---

*"Hang in there and tough it out," or literally as "Endure, Varapañño: endure a lot." I think my experience in those days gets at some of the essence of monastic life: there's a great support system, but in the end it's up to you to face the music and take bold baby steps.*

---

with him, but I never forgot that incident. After Ajahn Sumedho and I visited the US several years later, I had a photo of us enlarged and copies made, and I delivered one to Dr. Utai when I was in town one afternoon. He was relaxing in his home behind the clinic, but he snapped to when he saw a bhikkhu arrive. It was a little odd to see my former savior looking tired, like an ordinary human, but he lit up when I gave him the photo and said, "I will keep it for *pūjā*."

When I returned to Wat Pah Pong for the long haul, after a most difficult Rains Retreat in Bangkok, Luang Por got hold of me and put me to work as his attendant. I hung out with the novices who served him and learned the ropes from them. There

seemed no limits to their patience with my bumbling, freaked-out ways as well as my limited command of the Thai language (and hardly any understanding of the *Isaan* dialect). If there was a 'what's in it for me?' attitude on the part of any of them, I sure didn't see it. I also got to know several of the monks, and they were all most encouraging. Still, there were hard realities to face, and the conversation that stands out most in memory is with Ajahn Kam, one of the senior bhikkhus, who had about ten Rains at that time. We were sitting with Luang Por one cold windy night at his kuti, drinking tea and talking about a lot of things, but especially the trials of practice and monastic life. Before we adjourned, Ajahn Kam turned to me and said, "*Ot ton, Varapañño. Ot ton mahk mahk*," which translates roughly as, "Hang in there and tough it out," or literally as "Endure, Varapañño: endure a lot." I think my experience in those days gets at some

of the essence of monastic life: there's a great support system, but in the end it's up to you to face the music and take bold baby steps.

There were several laymen who seemed to have nothing more important to do than come to the monastery, hang out with Luang Por, and run errands. A few of them earned nicknames (not all of them flattering) in my Cast of Characters. My tolerance for some of them wore thin pretty fast, such as they guy I called The Loudmouthed Layman but, even for an irritable sort like me, most of them registered on the positive side. An always-smiling, gaunt old man, who lived near Wat Pah Pong and used to come most mornings, became The Joker, after the figure in the Batman comics. I saw him shuffling back and forth between the kitchen and the eating hall and going home after the meal, but I never spoke with him. One observance day, however, I was sitting under one of the kutis near the sala and he came by to chat. He asked me a little about myself and then he said that we foreign monks were guests, *kaek*

*(Continued on page 10)*

**The Right Angle** (continued from page 1)

so our parents and our teachers. If more people could develop gratitude to the cows and buffaloes of our world, then society would always be happy and peaceful on account of such a broad vision and lofty thoughts. Feeling grateful even to the animals, how could we harm our fellow human beings to whom we owe so much more?

Any society prospers and flourishes when its members cultivate spiritual qualities; having fully developed the human potential, the capacity for profound thoughts, people will be diligent and skilled in earning their livelihood without intending even the slightest harm to one another. If we wish to so prosper, again, it goes without saying how much we have to be grateful for to our parents and teachers, since these are the true *devas* illuminating our lives, the *pūjaniya-puggalā*: the people worthy to be held up, high above our own little heads and truly venerated.

Anyone who develops a more refined sense of gratitude in life will gradually feel a deep appreciation to the forests, fields, streams, rivers and swamps, the paths and roads and everything in the world, the flowers and the unknown birds flying here and there all around us. Not knowing the value of forests there are those who have destroyed them with their selfishness, so our children and grandchildren will have no wood for their houses. In addition the streams and marshes dry up because the forests, where the water reserves naturally gather, have all gone. Without the forests and the flowing streams, the clouds can no longer form and build up to release their abundant rains. Fruit trees are cut down whole, so their entire worth is reduced to what can be harvested that one time.

If people simply had gratitude in their hearts, then these things couldn't happen. The things which gladden the mind would be plentiful all over the

earth and everywhere we would live in ease; being grateful for all the things our planet provides us with, we would cherish, nurture and foster its welfare.

On a deeper and more subtle level still, we can also acknowledge even the debt we owe to our enemies, and feel grateful for life's obstacles. Viewed from this angle, such opponents help us to grow in wisdom, patient endurance, and a spirit of sacrifice. People who are envious and jealous only serve to strengthen our own hearts and bring out the best of our *mettā* and *karunā*, which we might ordinarily lack.

All the difficulties we face allow us to see the world in its true nature. And through learning how to overcome life's challenges, we find the way to a life of ease. All our illnesses and problems can thus give rise to insight in us. We are forced to let go until we really see the truth of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* and eventually realize the path and fruit of Nibbana. People without *kataññu* do not know the value of these adversities, and they heap disaster and peril onto their lives while digging their own graves with anger and negativity. Their minds know no ease and their lack of self-control, with the frustration it brings, means that they are filled with fear and trembling as life seems to go ever more wrong. They are on a fixed course for self-destruction.

However, those who appreciate life's challenges, who gratefully rise up to meet them, bring an immeasurable coolness and beauty to the world. The most demonic of people, the world's *māras*, they venerate as if they were virtuous monks. The *yakkha* types, those who are insatiably greedy or angry, they view as truly worthy human beings. They see the generous side of stingy people and, even in others' jealousy, they manage to find a degree of warmth.

If all people felt this way, how could our world fail to become a heavenly realm?

We should all be grateful to our enemies, for they are the ones who give us life's highest teachings, lessons which are to be found nowhere else. We should therefore give thanks to them and honor such teachers with our own efforts to embody goodness, sharing the blessings of our life with them. There is so much

to be grateful to our enemies for – people with *kataññu* are very aware of this. With no enemies or obstacles in life, the world would be empty of truly capable people.

Knowing the value of adversity, nothing in life is perceived as bothersome or difficult. With lofty thoughts such as these, as people develop this most subtle sense of gratitude, this very capacity to appreciate those who oppose us and those things which obstruct us, the heat from the frictions of the world becomes cool.

Considering this, how even our enemies have been of so much help to us, try then to imagine the value of our mothers and fathers, and the highest of all objects of veneration, the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

Not a single one of us was conceived in a hollow tree stump. We all arose in the little space of our mother's womb, with the help of our father too. Having been born into the wide world, we survived through to maturity thanks to the daily sacrifices of our parents and all the countless others who played a role in our lives. The Buddha and all wise people point to the role of our parents, honoring them as our primary caregivers who, having brought us forth, provided us with all the support we needed to flourish. They are the ones who equipped us with the skills for living, taught us how to be good and gave us many other things that have brought blessings into our lives.

Anyone who lacks integrity, who is incapable of feeling appreciation for his or her parents, will surely never know the debt they owe their enemies. Deeply absorbing one's parents' qualities is a clear sign of *kataññu*, wherever in the world a person is from, and one who lacks gratitude to his or her parents will never fully be trusted.

Spiritual teachers undertake the task of training their disciples' minds, picking up from where their parents left off and taking them to yet even higher levels. For this purpose teachers have to develop extraordinary patient endurance, and painstakingly put their hearts into their work, if they are to plant and cultivate deeper and deeper levels of spiritual awareness in their disciples' minds. This

is the sign of true mettā in a teacher – they must constantly study and train themselves to a very high level, thereby having the wherewithal to instill the truth in their disciples' hearts. This is the sign of true wisdom in a teacher.

Teachers must be constantly selfless and, in this way, remain the reliable objects of their disciples' deep veneration – not just spiritual workers to be hired and fired. Any disciples, having cultivated a wholesome mind and knowing what is proper, will feel much kataññu towards their teachers, those who bring coolness to the world with their enduring patience and wisdom.

Acknowledging the debt we have to our parents and teachers simply makes one want to give in return; this is achieved by doing only that which will be of benefit to future generations. Disciples will do anything to honor the good name of their spiritual home and they constantly share the merits of their wholesome actions with their mother, father and teachers.

The Lord Buddha once said that when we reflect correctly on the qualities of someone who has died, then only one path lies open to us – that of developing goodness in ourselves. In the broadest sense this means to honor that person and share the blessings of our life with them. So anyone who loves their mother, father or spiritual guide, and who knows the debt owed to them, should turn their hearts and minds to that which is beneficial for the world.

The Blessed One, the Buddha, is known as the supreme teacher for the ability he had to deepen people's awareness to a point where they no longer experienced any suffering at all, to a state of nobility, a realization of enlightenment.

The Dhamma taught by him is a pathway to improve the mind and go beyond the oceans of suffering. The Sangha, men and women whose lives are dedicated to following his teachings, have handed down these truths over the years until they have reached us here today.

This chance we have to receive these highest gifts is as wonderful as if the Blessed One himself were offering them directly to us. The Noble Disciples

endured all manner of hardships in order to faithfully maintain the Buddha's dispensation, all of this having been done with a heart of deep devotion and gratitude to the Teacher.

We can be encouraged, then, that the teachings are nothing other than our true rightful inheritance, passed down through the kataññu of the Noble Ones of former times, who were determined to live their lives in line with the Blessed One's intentions. This kataññu of the enlightened disciples has allowed the Dhamma to span the millennia and, still to this day, the world can find respite in the cool refuge and under the shade of these teachings of awakening. All this is because of the constant hardships endured, and the sacrifices made, based on the spirit of kataññu flowing strong in the hearts of the liberated ones.

The world is protected by the Dhamma because from the time of the Buddha onwards members of the assembly of his disciples have not wandered away from his instructions, their lives always following his guidelines, thus they have honored and kept alive his spiritual qualities. Gratitude is what protects the world and, in turn, is something that we should all protect.

In truth, all good Buddhist traditions and customs have arisen based on the principle of kataññu-katavedi. They were born out of gratitude and were designed to further instill this sense deeply into the hearts of the next generation. All our various rites and rituals, starting with the cremation of our parents and teachers, should be grounded in a spirit of kataññu-katavedi, this needs to be firmly established in everyone's mind more than any other thought. So we carry out these ceremonies with true



dedication – with no sense that there might be too much fuss and bother or that the expenses are in anyway wasted – because we see how important it is for our lives to be suffused with a feeling of kataññu-katavedi and how, in turn, this makes the world a cool and pleasant place.

The traditions and religions of every nation, of every tongue, all have these principles at heart and in our Buddhist teachings we must take great care that, however we repay our debt of gratitude, our efforts are not wasted but are genuinely beneficial for society. In this way the feelings of gratitude which should be felt by all Buddhists bring cool shade to the world and lift up peoples' hearts.

If all of us could realize this highest truth – the fact that each of us human beings has a debt of gratitude to everyone without exception, even, again, those who perceive each other as mutual enemies – then people would vie with one another to carry out acts of goodness and virtue in order to fully pay off the debts we owe.

If the hearts of everyone on earth were truly filled with kataññu-katavedi, then doubtless our world would be more beautiful and alluring than a heavenly realm, safer and more praiseworthy than a heavenly realm, more desirable than any heavenly realm. If we consider this well, we will be able to maintain restraint towards one another, not acting impulsively or out of anger. When we think of people who have helped us in the past, parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, then we won't act in mean or selfish ways. And even if we do at times, unthinkingly, we will be quick to ask and to give forgiveness. Thinking of parents and teachers who have passed away brings up thoughts of respect in us, and so we care for, and behave compassionately towards, our fellow human beings.

Kataññu, the spirit of gratitude, has the power to change a yakkha into a true human being. The spirit of gratitude will benefit the world so much, and keep it cool forever.

Thus we should cherish this highest of qualities, striving and sacrificing to keep it alive in our hearts, as the safest shelter for us all. 🙏

Also visit our online calendar at [www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/days](http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/days) for the most up-to-date information.

**LUNAR OBSERVANCE DAYS**

2552	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
	FRI <b>4</b>	SUN <b>4<sup>1</sup></b>	MON <b>2</b>	WED <b>2</b>	
	SAT <b>12</b>	MON <b>12</b>	TUE <b>10</b>	THU <b>10</b>	FRI <b>8</b>
	SAT <b>19</b>	SUN <b>18</b>	TUE <b>17</b>	WED <b>16</b>	FRI <b>15</b>
	SUN <b>27</b>	MON <b>26</b>	WED <b>25</b>	THU <b>24</b>	SAT <b>23</b>
				THU <b>31</b>	SAT <b>30</b>

1. Pavāranā Day

**DIRECTIONS TO ABHAYAGIRI**

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

**Abhayagiri Monastery**  
16201 Tomki Road

**REDWOOD VALLEY**

**CALPELLA**

**UKIAH**

**CALIFORNIA**

**Sept**

- 1 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
- 9 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA – “Meditation & the Creative Process”
- 13 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri
- 17 Dhamma talk at Lake County Yoga Group – *Info: Sue Stiles (707) 263-9400*
- 26-27 Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage from Spirit Rock to Abhayagiri – [www.dharmawheels.org](http://www.dharmawheels.org)
- 27 Daylong at Spirit Rock – “Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness meditations on the body, aging and illness” with Ajahn Amaro

**Oct**

- 4 Pavāranā Day full moon – the ending of the Rains Retreat
- 5-9 Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering at The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Buddhist-Western-Monastic-Gathering/>
- 6 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
- 10 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri – (NB this is on a Saturday this month to coincide with preparations for the Kathina)
- 11 Kathina Festival at Abhayagiri
- 14 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA
- 15 Dhamma talk at Lake County Yoga Group – *Info: Sue Stiles (707) 263-9400*
- 17 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri – “Jump-starting Your Meditation Practice”
- 19 Dhamma talk at “The Monday-night Sangha” – Three Jewels Dharma Hall, Fort Bragg, CA *Contact: Mettika Hoffman (707) 964-4606*
- 31 Daylong at Sati Center – “The Safety of the Island: Exploring the Nature of Nibbāna” with Ajahn Amaro. *Info: www.sati.org*

**Nov**

- 1 Benefit for Yoga Mendocino, “Center of Stillness – Heart of Action:~ Finding stability in turbulent times” with Sylvia Boorstein & Ajahn Amaro. *For information see www.yogamendocino.org*
- 3 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
- 7-8 Non-residential week-end retreat at Yoga Mendocino, with Ajahn Amaro. *For information see www.yogamendocino.org*
- 8 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri
- 11 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA
- 19 Dhamma talk at Lake County Yoga Group – *Info: Sue Stiles (707) 263-9400*
- 26 Ajahn Pasanno sets off on travels to Australia & Thailand
- 20-29 Thanksgiving Retreat “Fullness of Being” taught by Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Ānandabodhi & Ajahn Mettā. [www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/article/1820/](http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/article/1820/)
- 29 Ajahn Amaro sets off on travels to New Zealand, Australia & Thailand

**Dec**

- 1 Monthly gathering at Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
- 6 Upasika Day at Abhayagiri – “Dependent Origination: focusing on how this foundational teaching can be applied to our lives”
- 8-10 Ajahn Pasanno & Ajahn Amaro at the ‘World Abbots’ Meeting’ at Bodhinyana Monastery, Western Australia
- 9 Monthly gathering at Yoga Mendocino, Ukiah, CA
- 13 Community Work Day at Abhayagiri
- 17 Dhamma talk at Lake County Yoga Group – *Info: Sue Stiles (707) 263-9400*
- 27 Daylong at Spirit Rock – “In the Deep Midwinter: a day of reflection on inner listening and the practice of nada yoga” led by Ajahn Ānandabodhi

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR EVENTS**

**NORTH AMERICA**

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

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

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

**Portland Friends of the Dhamma**  
1422 SE Tacoma St., 2nd Floor  
Portland, OR 97202  
[sakula@notjustus.com](mailto:sakula@notjustus.com)

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

**Yoga Mendocino**  
206 Mason St.  
Ukiah, CA 95482Tel.  
(707) 462 2580  
[www.yogamendocino.org](http://www.yogamendocino.org)

**UNITED KINGDOM**

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

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

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

**THAILAND**

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

**NEW ZEALAND**

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

**Vimutti Monastery**  
PO Box 7  
Bombay, 2343  
Tel. +64 (0) 9 236 6816  
[www.vimutti.org.nz](http://www.vimutti.org.nz)

**AUSTRALIA**

**Bodhinyana Monastery**  
216 Kingsbury Drive,  
Serpentine, WA 6125.  
Tel. +61 (0) 8 9525 2420  
Fax. +61 (0) 8 9525 3420  
[www.bswa.org](http://www.bswa.org)

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

For a comprehensive directory of branch monasteries please visit [www.forestsangha.org](http://www.forestsangha.org)

**ABHAYAGIRI BUDDHIST MONASTERY COMMUNITY LIST**

Vassa (Rains Retreats/years as a monk) *Updated April 8, 2009*

Pasanno Bhikkhu	35	Kaccāna Bhikkhu	0
Amaro Bhikkhu	30	Thitapañño Bhikkhu	0
Yatiko Bhikkhu	16	Sāmanera Kovilo	0
Gunavuddho Bhikkhu	9	Sāmanera Nānamedhī	0
Cāgānando Bhikkhu	4	Sāmanera Pamutto	0
Cunda Bhikkhu	1	Anagārika Sean Fargo	1
		Anagārika Scott Spencer	1

**SPENDING VASSA AT BIRKEN MONASTERY, BC**

Sudanto Bhikkhu	14
Karunadhammo Bhikkhu	11

**LONGTERM LAY RESIDENT**

Debbie Stamp

**Open Hands** (continued from page 5)

in Thai. The Buddha, he noted, was similarly a *kaek* (which also means a person of Indian ethnicity), so he felt that we were deserving of the kind of hospitality that would be extended to the Buddha.

The northeast of Thailand is certainly not a wealthy area, and in the 1970s the people had even less than they do now. But the habit of giving is strong among rich and poor and those in-between. From

first monks who came by. Then there were those offering food for special occasions such as a birthday, (that itself was a revelation – the idea of giving rather than expecting gifts on one’s birthday), who would get dressed in their finest, set up a table in a well-trafficked spot, and scoop rice out of their best tureen and offer colorful curries in little bags and dainty treats wrapped in banana leaves. Yet none

considered that statement many times and, especially as a layperson struggling to survive, I felt he meant that ordained people should be aware that lay life is not something easy or idyllic. Walking through villages in the Northeast in those days certainly showed me that life was rough in many ways and that the people who fed me were not at all wealthy. And yet those poor, humble folk exhibited more happiness and graciousness than I was capable of, and more than I usually found among the middle and upper classes in the US as well as in the more materially developed Asian societies like Japan and Taiwan.

One layman who will no doubt come to mind for anyone who was around Ajahn Chah in the 1970s was Pansak. He was *Jah* Pansak when I first saw him coming to Wat Pah Pong, a low-ranking Air Force officer. He spoke some English and knew Ajahn Sumedho, but we suspected him of wanting to con us into giving him English lessons, something we tried to avoid. But as months and years went by, I noticed him showing up at the most fortuitous moments, usually with a jar of instant coffee and a box of sugar cubes.

He left the Air Force under circumstances rumored to be less than favorable and, after that, was always busy with some grand scheme to make money. One morning when he came to Wat Nanachat, as we were sitting in the assembly hall waiting for the meal to begin, Ven. Santacitto compared Pansak to Sergeant Bilko, the central figure of an old TV sitcom who always had some money-making scheme brewing. He’d done well with nightclubs in Ubon city, but Luang Por told him it wasn’t good livelihood so he turned them over to his brother. So he started a restaurant that had been doing a roaring trade but then his brother opened one across the street and ran him out of business. Next was dogs: he got the idea to raise Afghan hounds, thinking he could corner the market in Thailand. They couldn’t take the heat, however, and he ended up spending a fortune on steak dinners and vitamin injections for the dogs and soon gave that one up. After that came bean sprouts and who knows



Ajahn Pasanno and other senior Western monks, receiving offerings from local lay supporters, Wat Pah Nanachat, 2006.

one branch monastery to another over the years the story was pretty much the same – people at all levels of society lending a hand to sustain the existence of those in robes, with the foreign monks, or *phra farang*, usually getting a little extra attention. There maybe a lot of cultural overlay, with many people not even sure what the purpose of meditation and monastic life is, but I don’t think we can overestimate the power of supporting and respecting those who renounce the world and seek enlightenment, as well as the blessings that come from revering the symbols of that way of life, such as the ochre robes.

It begins with pindapat, the daily almsround. Throughout the Kingdom, people are up before dawn, preparing food for the bhikkhus and samaneras who will be coming to seek their daily sustenance. In Bangkok there were a few regular donors whose houses I would always visit on my round, along with some people who were out every morning and who gave their offerings for the day to the

of this to me compares with the way it’s done in the Isaan, where large numbers of the inhabitants of every village are out every single morning. Often they give only sticky rice, but several will go to the monastery afterwards and bring or prepare more food. These are some of the poorest people in Thailand – the Northeast is periodically afflicted with drought and poor crop yields – yet somehow there is always enough to feed the Sangha. Among other things, it’s a great example of what can be done and how resources can be found when priorities are in order, regardless of seeming hardship.

A few of us were sitting with Luang Por Chah at his kuti one afternoon when seemingly out of the blue, he said, “Santacitto! There’s not much to the practice here. The Buddha wanted us to go pindapat every day. He wanted us to walk through the villages, see the houses, see the people, see the chickens, and contemplate.” He didn’t elaborate on it any further, but over the years I

what else. Pansak later told me that in desperation he went to Bangkok with his oldest son and was riding around town on a motorcycle to cut people's grass for twenty *baht* a house. Yet through it all he came to the monasteries regularly to offer food, and was available to run errands on the way home, with, of course, repeated offers to supply the *phra farang* with anything they needed.

Pansak finally moved his family to Bangkok, where he had his ups and downs for a good while. When I returned in 1984 and went to visit him, his wife told me he was in Samrong Hospital with hepatitis. I took a bus out there one evening. Soon after I arrived an Indian man came in, handed him a wad of five-hundred baht notes and asked after his health, and departed. Pansak lifted up his pillow and added the wad to a big stash he had there. "Everyone is bringing me money," he said. "When I get out I'll give it back." Then he said something I'd heard from other Asian lay Buddhists: "I've made offerings, I've helped others when I could, so I'm sure I will be taken care of." But he also said that this was the second time he'd had hepatitis, and the doctor told him that if it happened again he'd be a goner. Sadly, that did come to pass fifteen years later.

With his wife and five children he lived in a rented shop-house near New Road. She sold rice and curry downstairs in the daytime, and he got a regular job as personnel manager in a factory in Samutprakan, well outside of town, which meant a few hours a day commuting by motorcycle, often in the rain.

It was pretty tight quarters but, whenever I visited, there was always a feeling of spaciousness and family harmony, and of course the usual hospitality. His children were just plain good kids, though each with a distinct personality.

One time he told me that one of his wealthy friends had taken him to the lunch buffet at the Royal Orchid Sheraton. He couldn't get over the lavish spread and the beautiful surroundings, all for some ten dollars. "Just to see the ice sculptures is worth the price," he said. And he offered to 'sponsor' me for lunch there on Sunday, merely requesting that I first spend a little

time to help his older daughter with her English homework.

So we went, and it certainly was quite a production. Still I felt a little funny being hosted by someone who lived hand to mouth. Several years later when I was teaching English in Japan, one of my students, a well-to-do physician, was planning a trip to Bangkok with his wife, and I suggested he look up Pansak to guide him around town. Unlike most Japanese, Dr. Funahashi didn't travel with tour groups, and I thought he might appreciate getting a look at Bangkok different from the usual offerings. I wrote to Pansak, and sure enough, he and his wife took a taxi to the doctor's hotel, and took him out to dinner as well. He later told me, "That's how it is. Poor people are supposed to treat rich people." But he had a grand time, saying, "The Japanese doctor is a really good man." Having experienced Dr. Funahashi's free spending when he took me out on the town in Shizuoka, I supposed he probably treated Pansak and family to a night out too.

Pansak finally did get on his feet financially with his job at the factory, along with occasional second jobs like managing a friend's restaurant at night. He confided in me that he didn't tell his wife how much he was earning, so he managed to squirrel away enough money to buy a new town house on Soi 81 after several years. Then he started selling real estate during the boom of the late 1980s and his ship came in, though he was aware that the party wasn't going to last forever. Jokingly, I said to him, "If you get rich enough, maybe I'll come ask for one of your daughters." Without hesitation, he asked, "Which one?" Then he called to his wife in the kitchen, "Hey, would you like a *farang* son-in-law?"

With my endless comings and goings in those days, I always had some extra baggage and stored some of it with him. I would drop in to get something, or sometimes stop by to stay hello after visiting whatever *bhikkhus* might be staying nearby in Bangkok. He was always curious about my studies in other schools of Buddhism and even talked about going to Tibet and Nepal with me, though when

the time came he was always too busy to get away. When I returned all aglow from seeing Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche in Nepal and described that great being to him, Pansak seemed genuinely enthusiastic and said, "Sure, I'll be disciple of Luang Por Khyentse!" On one of my trips to Tibet he asked me to bring back a rosary for him, and I got Lama Gonpo to bless it to be used with Avalokiteshvara's mantra into the bargain. Being from a Chinese family he was perhaps more open to Mahayana traditions than most Thais would be. But even taking that into account, Pansak was uniquely broad-minded and free of cultural inhibitions (though certainly not in any immoral way).

Through the years the trips to restaurants continued, and my offers to take him out sometime were never accepted. His family all called me 'Ajahn' and my ex-monkhood probably put me on a special footing with them, but he was quite open with me about most things, and we usually spoke as good buddies. He often voiced regret about not having the opportunity to practice and taste the truth of the Buddha's teachings. "You're lucky you never married. What a burden it is having children," he would say. He wasn't the only Thai layperson I heard this from. Later on he got some land in a remote spot in Hua Hin, on the Gulf of Thailand, and used to go there to retreat. I was happy to know about that, though I had little contact with him after the early 1990s.

Almost everything was free when you were ordained as a monk in Thailand: local buses, medical care, food and lodging. When something did require payment, a cheery donor would usually appear soon enough. When Ajahn Sumedho and I were planning our trip to the US in 1976, we went to Bangkok with Pansak to get plane tickets.

That was when Nai Akom and his Air Force group made their first visit to Wat Nanachat. We went to Bangkok with them on the overnight train. They put Ajahn Sumedho and me in first-class sleepers and hosted us when we arrived. Someone steered us to Air Siam, a new international airline, for our first inquiry. We were

*(Continued on page 12)*

shown into the office of the director, one Captain Tawee. He had never seen farang monks and was so moved that he immediately offered us his own tickets that the airline gave him once a year.

Mae Bau, the wife of an Air Marshal, and her circle of Air Force families became legendary for their lavish support of the monasteries and of monks visiting Bangkok. Later on, Mrs. Kesree started hosting bhikkhus from Wat Pah Pong and Wat Nanachat at a gorgeous 'kuti' on her property, also at Soi 81, off Sukhumvit Road. I became a frequent visitor to monks staying there when I was in town in the 1980s, and also became friends with Kesree – stopping by to see her in later years. Thailand is a class-stratified society and, in my attire and financial situation, I was maybe just a rung above Kesree's servants, but I always felt I was treated with extraordinary consideration and respect there, probably because of my resumé of proximity to the Sangha and to Buddhist practice generally.

When I arrived in Bangkok in late 1981 Luang Por Chah was staying at Khun Kesree's kuti, after his brain surgery. I had brought some humble gifts for old teachers and companions, one of which was a can of ground coffee, quite the luxury item in those days. I presented it to Ajahn Pabhakaro, who was attending on Luang Por. A couple of days later I noticed an electric coffee maker in the kuti and, when the can was empty, more was provided. For a forest bhikkhu that's heaven-realm treatment, but it also points out the sensitivity and awareness of people with truly meritorious minds, always looking out for what they can do in service to the Sangha.

A few months later I was back at Kesree's after a stint in the forest. Ajahn Jagaro and Puriso were there, just before leaving for Australia. When I learned that the latter's birthday was coming, I mentioned it to one of the ladies, and immediately the wheels were set in motion for a lavish meal offering, with specially ordered birthday cake.

In the early days of that friendship with Kesree, when Luang Por was newly recuperating there, one morning I and some others were washing the almsbowls, when

Mr. Manun, whom I barely knew, put 200 baht in my shirt pocket. I looked at him with puzzlement and simply said, "Why?"

"Disciples of Luang Por need to help each other," he answered. In months to come he befriended me. He was a poker-faced Chinese whose expression never revealed any emotion, but he truly had a heart of gold. I received mail at his place for a few years, and whenever I went to

---

*We experience fear because  
we are afraid of harm  
coming to ourselves.  
If there were no sense of  
self, no self-cherishing,  
how could there be fear?*

---

pick it up, he insisted I join them for dinner. It was quite a production every time; five or six children, his sister and mother who lived there, he and his wife, with the servants and the ladies of the household constantly cooking and bringing out one dish after another. "This one's really tasty," he would say with each new platter put on the revolving table.

I started going mid-afternoon, fearing I was imposing on them. But when I showed up outside of meal times, whoever was there would insist I wait while they sent out for food. So I went back to visiting at dinner time and made sure I brought an empty stomach so as not to disappoint them. Occasionally I would bring some dessert, which the kids liked, but Manun or his wife would admonish me that I didn't need to do that.

He pressed money on me occasionally. Finally I became aware of when he was reaching for his wallet and was able to stop him sometimes. Once I brought a friend who had been at Wat Nanachat and was thinking about staying in Bangkok to teach English, and as soon as I introduced him, Manun asked me with concern, "Does he need money?" and almost had his billfold out before I assured him my friend was fine.

The way I was treated as a layperson in Thailand came as quite a surprise. Of course it was due mainly to the deep and widespread reverence for the yellow robe I had once worn, not because of my personal charm or virtue. As with the tradition of giving, this may be something that Westerners think of as not really having much to do with the essence of Buddhism, yet it shouldn't be too hard to connect some dots and see how it creates a harmonious social structure that supports the continuation of the Buddha's teaching and also helps nurture people who are nice to be around.

It didn't really sink in until I got back to Wat Nanachat for my first visit as a layman. The villagers showed me so much respect, always calling me 'Ajahn,' that it got to be embarrassing. Vitit the trainman, a longtime disciple of Ajahn Chah, asked me to go on his train when I went back to Bangkok and stay over at his house. He saw me eating fried rice on the train, so when we arrived at his place in Korat, he had his family go out to the market and prepare fried rice for my dinner. I was taking an early bus to Bangkok the next morning, and of course someone was there at the crack of dawn to take me to the bus stop.

Once, when I discovered a hole in a wisdom tooth, thinking a filling must have fallen out, I went to the Thai Army clinic that was walking distance from Wat Boworn. I'd been there as a monk and found the dentist competent, though stingy with anesthetic. On this occasion the dentist – the same guy, I think, though he didn't recognize me – asked me how I had found the place, as it was unlikely any Western laypeople were going to walk in off the street, much less know of its existence. I told him I'd been there when I was in robes several years before.

He examined me and told me that the hole was from decay and that the tooth should be pulled. He gave me a shot of novocaine this time and yanked it. The fee was a whole forty baht (a dollar and a half, which could easily buy three square meals at that time), but he absolutely refused to let me pay.

"You were a monk," he insisted.

"But I'm not a monk now," I replied.

"It doesn't matter. You were ordained."

These stories have been mostly about material generosity, but giving Dhamma (*Dhamma-dana*) and giving freedom from fear (*abhaya-dana*) are also intertwined with giving provisions. In Thailand it is considered that the ordained Sangha follows the highest calling, renunciation of the world and the quest for enlightenment, and its part in the interaction with lay supporters is to offer teachings. Selfless action on any level is a form of teaching; when I see a Buddhist helping others without self-concern, I feel it speaks volumes about what that person has learned and put into practice. The laypeople practice it in their offering of requisites and financial support to the Sangha, and the ordained ones practice it in a life based on selflessness, restraint, sharing, and helping each other, as well as always being available to provide spiritual guidance to anyone who shows up at the monastery. Furthermore, the Dhamma is always given free of charge in Thailand. No one could ever conceive of charging a fee for teachings or for staying in a monastery. There is also the fine tradition of printing Dhamma books for free distribution, often with great and small donations from large numbers of patrons.

Dhamma itself points out the way to reducing and eliminating fear in our lives. Taking it a step or two further, anyone who has been around a teacher like Ajahn Chah has a very tangible idea of what Refuge means and knows how the presence of an enlightened being can dispel anxiety and fear. 'Safe' was the word that most often came to mind when I first found myself under Luang Por's wing, and it was pretty obvious the way people flocked to him that he instilled that feeling of safety in them; and the kindness of legions of lay donors also gives a feeling of safety, not simply through being fed and housed, but because one becomes aware of being part of something meaningful and of the fact that there are others who care about one's existence.

While Luang Por's reasonable words and wise counsel were always illuminating, it was his being more than anything else that gave comfort. That in turn vali-

dated the worth and effectiveness of the Dhamma he was teaching. And a big part of all that was his complete generosity: he offered his whole life, first to incredibly diligent practice and a willingness to undergo any hardship for the sake of enlightenment, and later to guide people and make himself available without conditions or time constraints, even to the detriment of his own health.

Finally, a word on the ultimate joke: We experience fear because we are afraid of harm coming to ourselves. If there were no sense of self, no self-cherishing, how could there be fear? And what better and easier way to begin turning the tide of me-focused living, and undoing the painful knots of self-concern, than to cultivate the habit of giving rather than holding and grasping?

For Westerners, it seems the approach we usually follow is to carefully construct a fortress to protect ourselves, making

sure we have provisions, comfort, money, freedom from irritating factors, and so on, so that we can undertake spiritual practice. But at some point I think we need to let go and trust the Dhamma, trust 'the way things are,' enough to stop worrying about what might happen in the future. As I mentioned in a previous article, the best wealth empowerment I ever received in the Tibetan tradition was the simple reminder of the Buddha's promise that none of his followers would ever starve to death. Luang Por Chah said similar things to monks, nuns, and laypeople. And during the first Rains at Wat Nanachat, back in 1975, Ajahn Sumedho said that real vipassanā meditation means to be able to face any conditions, observe your mind, and let go, and that trying to create a perfect environment, so as to make every meditation session just right, is 'cheating.' 🙏

## Center of Stillness - Heart of Action Finding Stability in Turbulent Times

*A day of meditation, reflection and mindful yoga with  
Sylvia Boorstein & Ajahn Amaro  
along with optional supportive yoga sessions  
led by Mary Paffard & Maggie Norton*



**Sunday Nov. 1st 9:30am-4:30pm,  
Weibel Vineyards, 13300 Buckman Dr.,  
Hopland, CA (only 2 hrs north of the Bay Area)**

Fee: \$85-\$200 sliding scale; all amounts over \$100 are considered donations and are tax deductible.  
Early registration strongly recommended.  
Please bring your own lunch.

When life gets difficult - as it has become for so many in the US at present - the shock of that easily throws us into agitation; then, when things ease up for a while, we can find ourselves drifting into a trance of complacency. Rather than simply being caught in this 'shock to trance' cycle, we can find serenity within the difficulties and, equally, rouse motivation within the quietude.

This will be a day of Dharma teachings and meditation instruction offered by Sylvia Boorstein & Ajahn Amaro on these themes, along with supportive hatha yoga sessions led by Mary Paffard & Maggie Norton, co-founders of Yoga Mendocino.

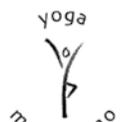
Yoga Mendocino is small institution but one that is immensely valued in the community as a fertile oasis in these spiritually arid times. It is also the venue where Ajahn Amaro and other monastics of his community teach on a regular basis.

*A benefit for Yoga Mendocino*

### Further Information:

(707) 462-2580  
www.yogamendocino.org  
yomo@pacific.net

Yoga Mendocino is a non-profit organization.  
Tax exempted ID #68-0479334



# From Mara's Desk

## THE DEVIL MAY CARE – ELECTRONIC CONNECTIONS –

By Cindy Mettika Hoffman

Recently I whirled in from stirring up the worldly winds on the earth realm for the past kalpa. That was inspiring – whipping up tumult and suffering in so many lives for so many eons. I am Māra, Master of Suffering, King of Deceit, Deception, Fear, Pride, Ego, Vanity, Shame, and Delusion. Now I am home, kicked back, lying on the sofa watching my 200 inch, color, life-size, plasma TV. Bigger is better.

The Plasma is connected to Blogs-Syrious-Twitter-Facebook-land, to cell phones, MySpace-Skype-YouTube-Black Berry-Satellite dishes-DSL, and all other electronic wizardry of this age. Through the use of a special remote control I can enter virtual reality through the use of holography and be connected instantly to other hell realms and to their respective deities around the world. With just a click of the button there is an instant connection between the Prince of Darkness (moi), and Lucifer, Satan, the Devil, (you know – the red one with the long tail, horns and big ears), Samael, Namuci, Sekhmet, Hecate, Beelzebub, snakes, goat-man, Yetzer Harah (the evil inclination), The Furies, Lord Yama, evil nagas, crushing hells, hot hells, freezing hells, Gehenna, Mania, fallen angels, dybbuks, ghouls, hungry ghosts and necromancers, to name a few. I can even tune into those hells that only last for a day, and to their (temporary) rulers. Buddhists, Catholics, fundamentalists and those faithful to most religions in the world are quite accomplished at listing, defining, describing, and giving audio-visual elucidation in minute detail to all the hell realms that they know of. They keep me entertained for lifetimes on end.

As I sat here and watched, a scene flickered on the screen. For a moment it was full of static and barely audible, then it slowly came into clear focus. I was receiving audio and images from a place called Chelm (the 'ch' is properly pronounced as if you were clearing your throat). Chelm is an actual place in Poland that the Jewish people

jokingly refer to as the Land of Fools, those beings who are slow, ignorant and/or stupid. It is not exactly a hell realm but it is close enough to make little difference. The streets are unpaved and muddy, the houses falling down, people dress raggedly and shopkeepers have nothing to sell. There is not enough clean water or food to eat. The diet of the people of Chelm consists of boiled cabbage, a few carrots, potatoes, onions, beets, coarse black bread and sometimes a skinny herring. The house of prayer is dilapidated. Some of the personality types that populate Chelm are the kvetchers (complainers), the farblunget (the lost), schlemiels and schmendriks (the schmendrik sticks his feet out in the aisle, the schlemiel trips over them and spills his hot tea, causing a schlamazel), goniffs (thieves), schnooks (fools and suckers), luftmensch (airheads), schmegegges (disoriented ones), farbrent (the ones who are burning with anger), yentas (busybodies) and schnorrers (those looking for something for nothing, a free ride).

Chelm, I realised, is representative of so many of those places, all around the world, that are completely under my control. Like vast numbers of human communities, it is filled with procrastinators, feeble ironies, a little humor, sadness and mostly misery. In general the people from these 'Chelm-Realms' usually get it wrong, whether they are telling a story, standing in the wrong line, having tools that don't work, painting a building or giving instructions.

They are not mean spirited, just magificently inept – they usher themselves into my power with quite a touching (although unconscious) eagerness.

As I watched their lives unfolding in this global village soap opera, I knew that my armies had been busy there – adding more to qualities of lust, discomfort, hunger and thirst, desire, sloth and drowsiness, cowardice, doubt, hypocrisy, stupor, gain, fame, honor, exultation of self and the despising of others. As I was reflecting on

this wretchedness with great satisfaction, it occurred to me that it might be time to meet again at a virtual conference with the deities of the all other Hell Realms to exchange information and insight into the ever-more efficient and creative continuation of misery and suffering on earth as well as in the after-worlds. Our latest project was the topic of conversation and, after consulting with other notable demonic deities through the wonders of personal communication, Their Satanic Majesties and I produced a comprehensive list of online workshops and intensives for the coming season. Even though I say so myself, I am rather proud (if that's not too much of a sin ;-)) of the imaginative scope that my diabolical partners and I have displayed in creating the perfect course of extended studies to further our demonic education:

WHERE: Channel 666666

WHEN: Midnight–6:00 AM – six weeks

PRICE: Pay in USD \$\$\$\$\$\$ more than you can comfortably afford – \*Not included\*: Meals–linens–plates–glassware–tea–cups–mugs–silverware–bowls–napkins–room–board–use of electronic equipment–use of toilets–soap–water

**SCHOLARSHIPS:** Available for inter-linear translations into different languages, sects, and cults. Prior knowledge of Psycho-Babble a requirement.

### TITLES:

- Latest Strategies in Bartering For Souls
- Comparative Religions – Demonology and Netherworlds
- How to Kill Someone's Faith
- Relative Worth of Souls – as Listed on eBay's Daily Auction Countdown
- The Devil – A Christian Array of Forms
- Shaitan – A Muslim Perspective
- Gehenna – A Jewish Overview – With Endless Commentaries
- Shape Shifting – Basic Principles
- How to Invoke Kiboshes, Hexes, Casting the Evil Eye and Aspersions
- Devil-Satan-Lucifer-Grim Reaper-

**From Mara's Desk** (continued from page 14)

- Mara-Yama:—Differences & Similarities
- Mara's Armies and Their Daily Applications
  - How to Encourage Worldlings to Give Up Human Rebirth (Making Deals)
  - Tricks to Encourage Bad Karma
  - Creating Obstructions to the Path to Liberation
  - Strategies and Distractions to Impede Meditation
  - Introduction to Media Channels that Numb Mind and Body
  - The Creation of Endless Desires
  - Paving the road to Hell – free bumper stickers for first 50 attendees: "Where Are We Going? And what is this thing called a handbasket?"
  - Art Appreciation – A Pictorial Overview of All Hell Realms, 500 BCE–2009 AD
  - Decision Making – Considerations as to Which Hell Realm People Are Condemned to, and When & Why
  - Chelm-Realm – Guiding and Dumping Type 'A' Personalities & Multi-Taskers in this Post-Birth Location
  - Becoming a Devil's Advocate – Nuts & Bolts, and the Nitty-Gritty
  - The Enduring Delusive Power of Certainty

Wrapping Up – staying in touch by: exchange of e-mail-Skype-Twitter-Facebook-MySpace-cell phones-land phones-street addresses-business addresses-nicknames-user names-passwords-family names-Christian Names-Buddhist names-next of kin-secret handshakes-clubs-affiliations-antisocial security... For any questions e-mail: [mara@dukkhville.org](mailto:mara@dukkhville.org)

PRESENTERS – World Renowned Authorities of Their Own Views and Opinions

CREDIT – More status and credibility on the earthly/worldly plane

*Yours Demonically,*

*From your Ego's Best Friend, Mara 🙏*

---

### **Fearless Mountain Production Team**



*We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to **Jebbie Lavoie** for design and layout, along with editorial assistance by **Kristy Arbon** and **Elizabeth Matovinovic**.*

**From The Monastery** (continued from page 3)

City of Ten Thousand Buddhas' 30th Anniversary celebrations on July 5th. Ajahn Pasanno's reflections were upon The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas as being an outstanding 'field of goodness' in the world, while Ajahn Amaro's recollections of his personal connections with Master Hua, and the Northern Buddhist tradition, were much appreciated by many present.



Ajahn Pasanno & his mother Rhoda, at his birthday celebrations



Almsround at Ajahn Pasanno's birthday celebrations

### **Monastery Events**

The late spring and early summer is a time of many particular Buddhist celebrations. On May 8th, 'Visākha Pūjā,' the monastic residents and the extended lay community gathered to commemorate the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and Parinibbāna with Dhamma talks, circumambulation of the Buddha image, and a meditation vigil. June 17th marked the anniversary of Ajahn Chah's birth. A shrine was assembled, reflections were offered, and due reverence observed. On July 7th, the community celebrated Āsālā Pūjā, in honor of the Buddha's first offering of Dhamma. Again, devotion was paid through listening to the Teachings, candlelit circumambulation, and a meditation vigil.

In celebration of Ajahn Pasanno's 60th birthday and 36th year as a monk an Almsgiving Ceremony, organised by Joe Kulkhajornpant, was held on July 28th. The donations that were offered to the monastery were designated for helping construction of the Monks' Utility Building. Anumodana! – both for the venerable ajahn's life and commitment to the Buddhist path, and for the abundant generosity shown that day.

### **Work Projects**

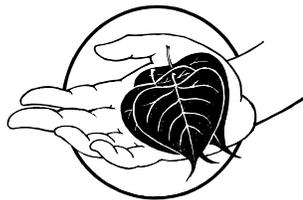
Currently, the major work project at the monastery is the construction of the Monks' Utility Building (MUB) and the adjacent bathroom block. The bathroom block will provide a much needed convenience for guests coming to the monastery to participate in summer services and ordinations held at the upper meditation platform and, in the future, at the Uposatha Hall planned for that area. The work crews have made significant progress since the end of the Winter Retreat. The foundation has been laid, the floor's I-beams have been set, and the walls have started to go up. Construction will continue through the end of the calendar year. Anyone wishing to view the progress of construction can see a photo gallery on the web, at: <http://zen.abhayagiri.org>. 🙏

Sanghapala Foundation  
**ABHAYAGIRI**  
BUDDHIST MONASTERY  
16201 Tomki Road,  
Redwood Valley, CA 95470

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**  
AUTOZIP

## FEARLESS MOUNTAIN



Return Service Requested

# 2009 Thanksgiving Retreat “FULLNESS OF BEING”

Led by:  
Ajahn Amaro  
Ajahn Ānandabodhī and  
Ajahn Mettā

Nov. 20, Fri – Nov. 29, Sun, 2009,  
Angela Center in Santa Rosa, California.

*The retreat will be offered solely on dana (freewill donations); there is no set fee. A refundable registration deposit of \$100 is now required to register for this retreat due increasing late cancellations. Out of respect for others, please register only when you can make a clear and wholehearted commitment to attend. Space at the Angela Center is limited to 70 retreatants.*

To get more information about the retreat:

**Anna Moore**

PHONE: 541-997-5123

EMAIL: [Retreat09@hotmail.com](mailto:Retreat09@hotmail.com)

WEB: [www.abhayagiri.org](http://www.abhayagiri.org)

MAIL: 84326 Alder Drive, Florence, OR 97439

Abhayagiri Monastery in Redwood Valley, California and the Sanghapala Foundation invite you to join us for a 10-day retreat over the Thanksgiving holiday. The theme of this year's retreat is Fullness of Being. 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, a work period, and daily Dhamma talks and teachings.