



FOREST SANGHA

newsletter

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Number 81



Ordination of the first four siladhara

Twenty-five vassas

A look back, within and
ahead

Evocation

You know how it starts out.
You take yourself out into the late sun burning stands of
winter birch. You clear a small damp circle of earth and
put fire to the pages you have with you – Dhamma notes,
a sheaf of musings. And they do not burn.

Then it's a few parchment chestnut leaves, twigs of birch. And,
somehow, you find yourself sitting down, wrapped in your
grandmother's blanket, by a small vibrant fire in an in-pressing dark,
where even the stars are unwilling. Sitting there – the person who once
sent you marshmallows dead – with the flickering uncertainty of twigs.

And there it is. One small thing having flared into a happening.
Life growing moment-to-moment, warming, sheltering: the
pungent-sweet smoke of elderberry burning, the familiar
front-hot/back-cold, and the loveliness of keeping company
with the Night herself.

She sings to me, and the fire sings to be fed – a call and response,
a counter-point, an evocation of release.

Yes, what happens when the pile you'd collected is burnt
and everything around you is burnt? The fire goes out.
Embers glow and cool. Night reveals her full resplendence.

Nothing added, burning ceases: take heart.

Thaniya



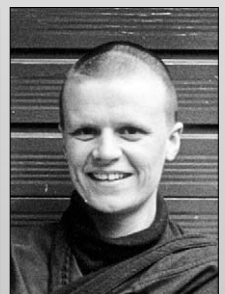
Sister Rocana



Sister Sundara



Sister Candasiri



Sister Thanissara

Ajahn Sundara ❖ Ajahn Candasiri ❖ Thanissara ❖ Ajahn Thaniya ❖ Ajahn Upekkha

Ajahn Thanasanti ❖ Ajahn Kovida ❖ Sister Cintamani

Ajahn Sumedho ❖ Ajahn Sucitto

Newsletter

*Emptiness here, Emptiness there
but the infinite universe stands
always before your eyes.*

This verse from Sengtsan seems to capture the paradoxical nature of the teaching that the Buddha used in myriad forms to point to that which is beyond description. Luang Por Chah would echo this again and again, compassionately leading, guiding, and prodding his disciples towards awakening.

By some mysterious coming together of circumstances our nuns' community has come into being and has become part of that current. This year sees the completion of the 25th *vassa* since the establishment of the Siladhara Order. There will be a celebration of the occasion at Cittaviveka on November 3rd (see the Grapevine for details). This issue is dedicated to the anniversary. The nuns' community coordinated the material in a collaborative effort with Sr Cintamani compiling and editing it.

The origins of our nuns' order lie in Pat Stoll's request to Ajahn Chah that she be able to live as an eight-precept nun. In 1979 Ajahn Sumedho gave the Eight Precepts to Pat Stoll, Françoise Reynaud, Katie Cockburn and Mary Peacock at Cittaviveka, naming them, respectively, Sr Rocana, Sr Sundara, Sr Candasiri and Sr Thanissara. After a few years of practising in that form they sought to live more fully as alms mendicants. In 1983 at Ajahn Sumedho's initiative and with permission from the Thai Sangha they received the Going Forth (entering the second *vassa* that year). In 1987 Sr Rocana died while on pilgrimage in India. In 1991 Thanissara disrobed and along with Kittisaro established Dharmagiri Buddhist Hermitage in South Africa. These are some of the bare facts. The story – or better, stories – of the evolution of the Siladhara Order are as varied as those who recount them.

Many people have been, and continue to be, involved in and affected by the evolution of this community. The whole is larger than the sum of the parts. We feel gratitude and respect for Luang Por Sumedho. As well as being our preceptor, he saw to it that we had requisites in abundance and his repeated encouragement to wake up has been invaluable. We thank our *bhikkhu* brothers – notably Ajahn Sucitto, abbot of Cittaviveka for the past 16 years, who formulated our training structures and has been committed to the support and evolution of the double community of monks and nuns. Each of the sisters has, in her own way, helped to shape and breathe life into the form that we see today. We reserve special appreciation for Ajahn Sundara and Ajahn Candasiri on the occasion of

their 25th *vassa* and for being here from the beginning of this community. Many others have encouraged us over the years with countless gestures of support: material, practical and above all, with their faith in this Way from which we can all benefit so much.

We asked the first nuns – Aj. Sundara, Aj. Candasiri, and Thanissara – to reflect on their years in the Order. Some common themes and shared experiences emerge in their reflections, as well as divergences. These present no singular history but histories born of reflection, recollection; subjectively felt and often publicly lived. Ajahn Sucitto offered an account of some of his experiences in helping to establish the nuns' system of training, and he describes the complexities of the context in which it evolved.

We asked other senior nuns to contribute their perspective. Ajahn Upekkha speaks with her distinctive voice on realizing the Truth, and on fearlessness, from her many wholehearted years living in the community. Ajahn Thaniya after eight years as the senior nun of Chithurst writes of the evolution of the nuns' community within the mixed community and of the beginnings of Rocana Vihara. She describes the rich territory that opens up for exploration. Ajahn Kovida writes of her journeys to Thailand and Burma, the practices she engaged in and how they support ongoing inquiry. The report on the *Hamburg Congress on Buddhist Women* illuminates international concern about the role of women in Buddhism. And the poetry by several of the senior nuns speaks perhaps more directly from the heart of experience.

It is inevitable that some of the struggles of the integration of a new community within an ancient tradition form part of the picture of the nuns' experience. Clearly the situation has presented challenges for everyone: monks, nuns as well as the laity, as each delicately navigates the interface of different cultures and conditioning. It is a slow, continuing evolution where the hard work of all contributes to the consolidation of the nuns' community and to the planting of this tradition into Western soil.

The style of presentation in this issue may be different than is customary. This is a tapestry woven out of many threads. Luang Por Sumedho repeatedly encourages us to open to whatever arises. So within the territory of what it takes to wake up, it is important that all of this has its place.

Ajahn Thanasanti

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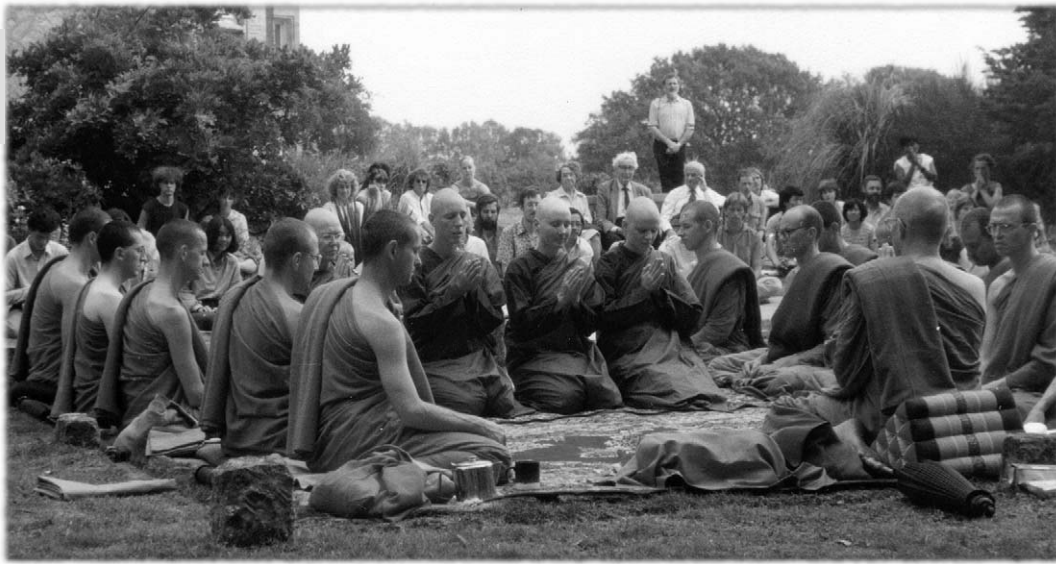
Glossary – see page 21

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The first four siladhara at their ordination with Ajahn Sumedho, Chithurst, August 14th 1983.

The richest surprise

Luang Por Sumedho looks back at the haphazard glory – the emergence of a nuns' order

I remember as a young monk living with Ajahn Chah in Thailand, having what felt like a fairly clear idea of how my life as a bhikkhu would evolve. Looking back, I can only say how astonished I am. I could never have imagined the way things have developed and are developing still.

Of all the many surprises, none perhaps is greater or richer than to have witnessed and participated in the inception, growth and maturation of the Order of Siladhara, the Nuns' Sangha. It might appear as if the nuns' community emerged as part of some grand and sober plan for the Western Sangha, but that is not the way things have really been, in all their haphazard glory.

Having had no previous experience of leading groups of people, I must have inherited aspects of my own 'leadership style' from Luang Por Chah. He would always point out how senseless it is to try to control events according to one's designs, since in fact things just take their natural course in accordance with causes and conditions. Our job is to respond suitably to conditions but, as much as possible, to stay 'out of the way'.

Except for the short space of time when we (the first monks) lived in London, the story of the Western Sangha is really about both the monks and the nuns. I remember not having been in residence in Chithurst Monastery for very long before the first women, the women who would be the pioneers – the 'founding mothers', if you like – of the nuns' order also arrived. It was Sister Rocana and Sr Candasiri who were the very first, soon joined by Sr Sundara and Sr Thanissara.

It is a tribute to the resilience and the faith of these first few that the order of nuns survived even its earliest step. Conditions at Chithurst were basic, and practice was really little more than just surviving day to day. I never had the slightest doubt as to the sincerity of these women but I never, for one moment, imagined that an order of nuns was

what was coming into being. I was very happy to be in a position to provide them with a place to live and some basic instruction in the *samana* life, but beyond that I had no real idea what was transpiring – I don't think any of us did.

There we were, ourselves relatively new transplants from Thailand, trying to see whether it was possible to live the mendicant life at all in the West. Our heritage was itself extremely conservative and it offered no precedent or guidance in the matter of a training for women in the Holy Life. These, and my own native caution might well have added up to a sort of fatal inertia. However, I finally saw that a much more definite form, a clearer training, was needed in order for these *anagarikas* to really make sense of and derive full benefit from living the monastic life. It was this that led, in August of 1983, to the ordination of the first four nuns – to the formation of the Order of Siladhara.

What was needed was a more formal structure for training and this was where – much to his surprise, I imagine, but also to his eternal credit – Ajahn Sucitto stepped in. For myself I remember often having no real idea of what I could or should do to support the nuns' community, and I remember also some strong feelings of resentment at the sense of uncertainty that accompanied this slow, often agonizing evolution of a unified and organized Order of Nuns.

Although there are some painful memories of this time of evolution, it is quite clear to me now that the result is good. It is also clear to me that everything that the nuns now have in terms of status, recognition and respect has, in a very real sense, been earned and hard earned at that.

Over the past years, the community of nuns has become increasingly stable and self-reliant. The presence of elder nuns – home-grown as it were – has been instrumental in this process. It is a great joy to me to witness this continuing unfolding and to see the fruits – an ever-increasing autonomy and enjoyment in living the Holy Life. ☸



Having been with the Sangha since its beginnings in Britain, Ajahn Sundara and Ajahn Candasiri are the two most senior siladhara...



Ajahn Sundara

Ajahn Sundara

What initially drew you to this tradition, and later to ordain within it? My life was comfortable and interesting by conventional standards. I was happily married and enjoyed dance as a profession. But, something essential was missing: my heart was sad. Wishing to understand this suffering and learn to be more at peace, I began searching for a spiritual path. My reference texts at the time were writings of Thomas Merton, Krishnamurti, letters of Brother Lawrence, Mother Theresa, mystics, poets, philosophers, but no traditional Buddhism. No one particular thing drew me to this tradition. I spent time in Christian monasteries where I had glimpses of the experience of the heart. Its qualities of silent listening presence and peaceful knowing were beginning to awaken within me.

Later, when I first heard Ajahn Sumedho talk about his life as a monk in Thailand and the teaching, it resonated deeply within me. Though, as yet, there was no sense that I would alter my lifestyle. Gradually my interest in Dhamma grew and I attended a ten-day retreat with Ajahn Sumedho. The rhythm of the retreat appealed to me: we rose early, ate one meal a day, received teachings and meditated all day in silence. However, my interest lay in the practice of meditation and the wish to understand my mind, not in joining a religious community with monastic rules and regulations.

I had also developed a strong sense of the uncertainty of life and that death can come at any time. A feeling of urgency and a deep appreciation of the preciousness of life arose. I discovered later that this

contemplation of death is an integral part of this tradition.

As my practice deepened I decided to ordain as a novice. I saw my move to Chithurst as an adventurous journey into the unknown. It offered qualities close to my heart: the simple rhythm of meditation and work, good teachings, guidance and nourishment for the heart, also the opportunity to give generously of oneself. But as a westerner culturally conditioned to individualism, idealism and critical thought, I had not yet realized how difficult living in community would be within a complex traditional, hierarchical Eastern form.

By that time, my husband and I had amicably divorced. My father, who was an intelligent free thinker disillusioned with religion, was initially quite shocked at my decision to ordain. Once, a woman called him because she wanted me to teach a dance course. He plaintively said, "Oh Madame, my daughter has gone into a monastery!" and she replied, "Oh dear, she was such a lovely woman!" Later my father became not only reconciled to my choice, but quite proud of me. My mother and my sisters were always very supportive.

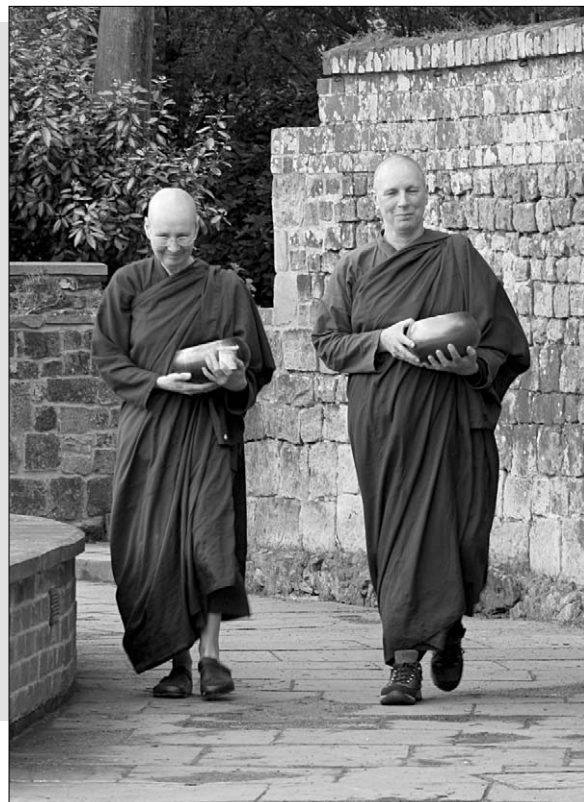
What is it, all these years later, that sustains your momentum for this life? My interest in the Dhamma is like my interest was for dance: passionate! I have found Buddhist practice amazing in its clarity and simplicity, while also appealing to my rational mind. There is no dogma and the benefits can be experienced directly. The treasure of Dhamma has continually sustained and liberated me.

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Ajahn Candasiri



...we asked them to reflect on their lives as they near the completion of their 25th vassa...



Ajahn Candasiri

What have you found brings you alive in the monastic life? The sense that what I'm doing contributes in some way to the welfare of humanity. Of course that happens in many ways. Sometimes it's obvious, sometimes not. On a personal level, I find that I am now able to respond more effectively to difficult situations without becoming so embroiled or upset by them. This has been particularly noticeable with my family where I have been able to make a much fuller offering of support; I had not expected this.

It is extraordinary to witness the transformation of difficulties that can happen when the sense of inner refuge is strong. These experiences give confidence in directing others in negotiating the trickier situations they encounter.

Also, although it can be very painful, it is fascinating to see how community living can bring deeply held views or prejudices to the surface, into conscious awareness. The joy and lightness that arises when these are relinquished are more than adequate recompense for the painful struggle.

Teaching too brings joy, whether in the context of speaking with a group or in a retreat it is very heartening to see how people – particularly younger people – are able to benefit and find meaning in their lives through the Buddha's guidance.

I have also enjoyed the challenge of negotiating the transition to a balance of responsibility, authority and sharing status between the monks and nuns that more accurately reflects the culture and nobler aspiration of the 21st century – realizing that this is at least as

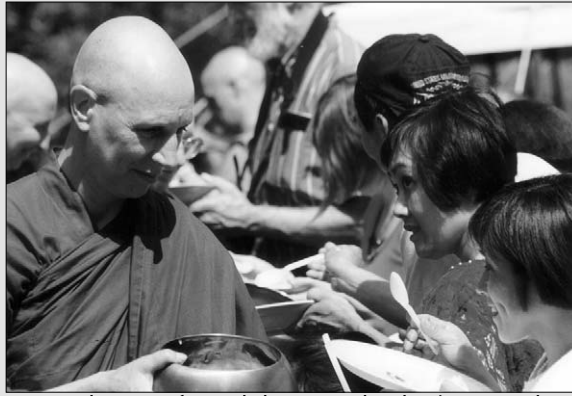
much an inner process as it is an outer engagement and dialogue with others. As such, it is a fascinating aspect of the journey towards liberation.

After 28 years in the monastic community you have now spent almost a year out within a household situation taking care of your father. Looking at where you find yourself now, how do you experience your life as a siladhara? Basically I feel that my life as a siladhara has continued seamlessly over the past year. Since we are essentially a peripatetic order, traditionally having more a wandering type of practice, taking time to support my parents as they approached the end of life has felt most natural and appropriate. Having said that, I still find it surprising how much I seem to belong in the monastery – and also how natural it feels for me to be in Edinburgh supporting my father. Perhaps that is to be expected, since it seems fundamental that 'practice' is not tied to any particular situation or circumstance. Clearly the formal training and structures of monastic life are quite wonderful as supports, and I am always glad that I can return and spend time in the monastery, but to survive as a nun it seems useful to have times when one can engage in practice outside the formal routines and relationships of our monastic communities. I am interested that the training for monks under Ajahn Chah involved times of *tudong* (wandering away from the monastery) and also dramatic changes in the routines, when all day and much of the night the monks would be involved helping with hard physical work for several weeks at a time. He was careful not to allow the monks to become institutionalized.

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Mealtime contemplation:
Sr Santacitta at Amaravati



Aj. Sundara at a festival day in England (above) and at the sea with Sr Sumedha (right)



Ajahn Sundara *(Continued from page 4)*

When I began living in the monastery, I was struck by the amount of joy I experienced in spite of many difficulties. My heart was rejoicing at having finally found a place to express itself. This joy is with me still. I am fortunate that I always find peace and release in the refuge of the mind that knows things as they are. This quality of awareness, of presence, has been a constant friend and a source of energy, clarity and patience. It has enabled me to face difficult times without losing sight of their potential to transform the heart.

Ajahn Sumedho's Dhamma reflections uncompromisingly point to ultimate reality, 'the way things are'. The power of his teaching sinks deeply into my heart, and I have profound gratitude for this. This Dhamma keeps my perspective on the challenges of community life and practice, when situations arise that seem to have little to do with my ideals, my liking, or what I find inspiring. These inevitable challenges are balanced by knowing that community life is a priceless treasure of shared aspirations in the Dhamma, a polished reflective mirror for transformation.

You helped establish the Siladhara Order, and participated in its growth; could you describe its evolution? When we started, we were four women living together in a small cottage near Chithurst House. We were ordained as eight-precept novices and practised with much determination, within a fairly tough routine of work and meditation. The monks welcomed us into the community. They seemed impressed at our resilience and our wholehearted commitment and support. These early years were characterized by the general chaos of a new and evolving monastery.

A major transition occurred when the first of us took ten-precepts ordination at Chithurst in 1983, thereby becoming alms mendicants. We were offered alms-bowls and robes and began to go regularly on almsround. Ajahn Sumedho had to obtain approval from the Thai Elders for this new order of Theravadan

nuns, the Siladhara Order. We had more status and structural support than nuns in Thailand (*maechee*) who are treated as laypersons committed to eight precepts. After all these years it is difficult to describe how revolutionary our position was. We were establishing a monastic form in the West, where it had not been before, and a new role for ordained women within that form. In retrospect the task was daunting, and if we had foreseen the difficulties we may not have tried!

The year following the establishment of our Order we moved to the significantly larger Amaravati monastery enabling us to form a true monastic women's community. Over the next few years a more extensive set of monastic rules was established to enable us to live in harmony and to have common standards in all areas of our life: precepts, wearing the robes, deportment, relationship with each other, with the monks and laypeople.

These early years were groundbreaking, challenging, but also filled with love and laughter. I especially recall our hilarity over the idiosyncrasies that manifested in the kitchen. How could these English not understand the way to make a proper French salad dressing? And we did indulge in occasional subversive laughter about the formal 'dance', imported from the Asian teachers and culture, between men and women Sangha members.

After seven years of guidance from Ajahn Sucitto, Ajahn Candasiri and I undertook the responsibility and challenge of running the nuns' communities at Amaravati and Chithurst. Over time, the nuns' community has matured, becoming more independent, autonomous, and confident. At some point we were invited to teach, an experience that I found quite joyful as I discovered that sharing the Dhamma provided a source of mutual inquiry that enriched my own practice. Today, while still evolving, it is vibrant and strong, with seasoned Dhamma practitioners who are invited to teach internationally.

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The nuns' community gathered at Rocana Vihara, 2006

Ajahn Candasiri (Continued from page 5)

Many years of monastic life and contemplation, together with the experience of accompanying senior monks on journeys away from the monastery (as an anagarika I often had opportunities to drive Luang Por and others to visit laypeople or to teach) are what have given me the confidence to spend such an extended time away from a monastic context. For someone with less experience I would hesitate to suggest such a way of practice unless they have good support ... and in fact, I too have been greatly helped through regular email and phone contact with other nuns and monks, and occasional visits.

I was interested to notice an inner reaction when someone commented that I was now living more of a lay life than as a nun. Thinking about it, it is clear that the external circumstances are more like those of a layperson but there is no doubt that at a deeper level the practice of renunciation continues – as must be the case for many householders bound by obligations to family, or to elderly or sick relatives.

A question I have been asked several times is whether I miss the simplicity of monastic life. My immediate response is that actually it is a relief to enjoy the simplicity of life away from monastic community! As a senior person I tend to have many duties and to be involved in many aspects of community life; this often includes attending long meetings and receiving, digesting and responding to all kinds of information. Living with my father has been much simpler. However, up here in Edinburgh, I do miss the sight and presence of other *samanas*.

Besides having the joy and privilege of supporting someone like my father, it has been beneficial in unexpected ways. I have had several opportunities to hear different women speaking about their religious life. Being one of the first in our community I have felt a lack of suitable role models, so it has been very helpful



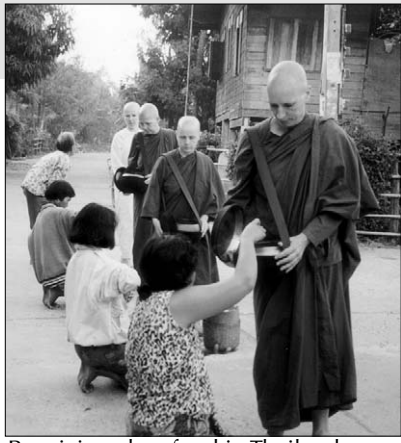
The four: Sr Candasiri, Sr Sundara, Sr Rocana, Sr Thanissara

to meet other women in positions of leadership. One noteworthy occasion was a conference entitled *Spirituality and the Sacredness of the Divine Feminine* where I had been asked to share some thoughts. What was encouraging was to hear women speaking in a way that was calm and clear about the need for humanity to find a better balance: one that allows for a more intuitive response to the challenges of our time, rather than simply allowing intellectual or material concerns to determine the way forward.

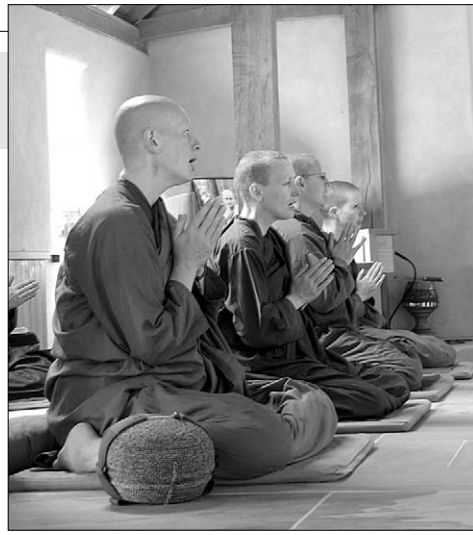
I have been glad too of the contact I have had with those of other faiths. It is always a delight to me to be around people who love Truth. I enjoy feeling what we share in common; what separates, although it has a place, seems less inspiring to me ... even though I still feel quiet delight contemplating the Buddha's Way of Training. Some weeks ago a Christian friend arranged for me to lead a day retreat in a spacious church hall right in the centre of the city. It was billed for 'those of any faith or none' and it was encouraging that about 50 people came: some Christians of various denominations, as well as Buddhists from the different practice groups here in Edinburgh, also a Hindu. I was glad that people seemed to benefit from the Buddha's practical common-sense approach to life in the human realm.

You mention it being helpful meeting other women in positions of leadership, given a lack of suitable role models within your training. As you and the community have come of age across these 25 years what models of leadership have you found are supportive of women's spiritual growth? Well ... having initially had role models that we tended to perceive and emulate with varying degrees of consciousness, it is clear that a strictly hierarchical and authoritarian approach simply

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Receiving alms-food in Thailand



Mealtime chanting at Cittaviveka Monastery

Ajahn Sundara

(Continued from page 6)

How do you see the evolution of your practice? The first few years of my monastic life were years of ‘becoming’ – fuelled by that kind of youthful energy of ‘going somewhere’. I was intent on meditation, on learning how to live this life within the restraint of the discipline and adapting to the complexities of communal living. Inspiration kept us going even when things seemed hopeless.

Being a senior nun of the community brought a radical change in my practice. I became a visible manager, organizer, decision-maker and role model, all without any training for such responsibilities, and at times the task seemed frightening and Herculean. I focused on developing *metta* (loving-kindness) for myself and others for several years, and persevered in the face of real and perceived difficulties. Finally, after having lived in community for 15 years, I wished to discover if I could sustain this monastic life without group support, and was yearning to experience solitude. Ajahn Sumedho once told me, ‘Never follow the party line, Sister Sundara’, and this suited my inclination to venture into new territories. So in 1995 I travelled to Thailand with no sense of where I might go, or for how long.

Eventually I stayed for nearly three years. I was fortunate to be welcomed into a forest monastery whose abbot was Ajahn Anan. He is a remarkable monk whose strong compassion and *metta* helped me to accept myself; to reflect on my ultimate and conventional natures so clearly that my personality fell away as a problem altogether. At least, for a time. I felt happy there, strengthened by living in the midst of some beautiful and magical forests.

As part of my quest for solitude I spent over a month in a remote rainforest on the Burmese border, populated with tigers, elephants, poisonous snakes, and far from human habitation, with only a plastic sheet, mosquito net and a small bamboo platform for shelter. On the second evening there, as I tied the last branch of my mosquito net to a tree, the rain began

pouring in torrents, and the night became very dark. I had a choice: to be frightened, or to laugh. I began to see the situation as very funny; if anything happened to me, I would not have a clue where to go! At that point I turned around and saw quite close to me a fluorescent light in the pitch black. I pondered every scientific possibility to explain what it might be, without success. Finally, I accepted the mystery of

everything we cannot see or hear, and I had a companion in the midst of the lashing rain; perhaps a *devata* (heavenly being), a little gift of certainty that everything is, after all, OK.

Upon my return to the West my practice once again deepened in unexpected ways, as I faced questions regarding monastic conventions. The community had changed in my absence, and re-entering a relatively complex Western monastery, from the simplicity of a rural Thai forest monastery, was trying and disheartening at times.

In 2000 I accepted an invitation to spend some time at Abhayagiri Monastery. I stayed in the U.S. for three years, during which time I discovered a spiritual culture that surprised me by its positive outlook, as well as its supportive and empowering approach towards women. My meeting of a number of mature spiritual practitioners and teachers gave me a broader context within which to view and experience monastic forms.

Finally, in recent years I have faced the heavenly messengers of sickness and ageing. Despite the pain that they cause, I can receive their teaching of impermanence as a blessing. When I look back, I feel enriched by a life whose sole purpose is to free the heart from its miseries. It has taken me on a journey into the mystery of our human existence, filled with paradoxes, pain and joy, and it instils my heart with a deep trust in the path of liberation.

And how do you see the future of the community?

I feel quite strongly that as long as the Dhamma-vinaya (‘doctrine and discipline’) is protected in our hearts, our community with its creativity and wisdom will evolve in harmony with the needs of the group and the individuals committed to the path of Dhamma. We have demonstrated from the beginning an ability to adapt to the changes occurring in community rather than adhering to fixed norms and views of the way things should be. I feel sure that this approach will continue to sustain us in the future, however uncertain the future is. ☸

Ajahn Candasiri

(Continued from page 7)

does not work for us as women; some of us may be able to respond to such an approach, but it certainly does not bring out the best in us. This has been true for the monks as well. One time an elderly Christian nun visited our nuns' community and surprised us all by her response to a question about what to do with rebellious novices who always think they know better. She simply said, 'With firmness – and a lot of love!' I realized that it was a huge relief for me to hear that. That was what felt right to me and, in a sense, it allowed me to develop a much more familiar and softer approach in guiding others. It feels important too to really trust people; to encourage each person in making their unique contribution to the life of community – and for that to be properly acknowledged. Currently we are experimenting with ways of sharing information and decision making; at one time everybody in the community was involved in almost every decision and so our meetings tended to be very very long. So I am interested in being more discerning around the different sorts of information and decisions: who needs to be involved, and at what stage in the process? How is information shared with those who were not part of that process? I feel glad that now the community has sufficient maturity and trust for this approach to be viable. When people understand the reasoning behind certain agreements there is a much greater chance that the agreement will be fully accepted and supported. Although in some ways I liked the unquestioning obedience of the very early days, it is clear that for us now it does not support spiritual maturation and liberation – even though it may, for a time, look good on the outside.

Since I have been out of the community for extended periods in recent years, there have been opportunities for others to experience positions of leadership. It seems vital for there to be many in the nuns' community who are able, as necessary, to adopt a leadership role – having learned how to take this on without identifying too strongly with the role itself. Our experiments with shared leadership also allow this to happen.

How has your understanding of 'practice' altered over the years? I began with an earnest desire to end any suffering as it occurs in each moment – that aspiration has not changed at all. What has changed most is an understanding that well-being, while being a natural fruit of practice is also a fundamental requirement. So in the last few years, particularly since my close encounter with Yama (the figurative 'Lord of Death'), I have placed much emphasis on the importance of having a deeply rooted sense of self-respect and a firm commitment to enjoy the nun's life. This applies both in relation to my own practice and also in guiding others.



Ajahn Anandabodhi shaving the head of Maria, a new novice

What particular direction or shape do you discern for the community of siladhara across the next 25 years?

Well, I hope that it will grow – that there will be many more women willing and able to take on the training either as siladhara, or perhaps as bhikkhunis (I wouldn't rule out that as a possibility). So we will need a lot more accommodation since currently both Amaravati and Cittaviveka monasteries are full to capacity. I would envisage our first nuns-only community being fairly close to one or other of the existing nuns' communities, so that the new community can be adequately supported and encouraged in the resolution of inevitable difficulties that arise. We have also received invitations to start nuns' communities further afield so in due course I would envisage there being more monasteries for nuns in other parts of the world where conditions are favourable.

Along with this I long to see many more opportunities for nuns to practise in different cultures and surroundings – living in cities, in nature, in large monastic communities, in tiny ones, walking tudong, learning how to care for elderly and sick sisters, and having contact with nuns of different traditions. We can learn so much from others and, at the same time, value our own tradition.

I would also hope to see the double communities maturing so that while each group (monks and nuns) exists as a separate entity, there can also be even more cooperation and dialogue – particularly around our shared monastic commitment and what that means in terms of Dhamma practice. However, that may not come about until the practicalities of our lives in community arrive at a more satisfactory balance. Much has changed over the years; it has been a remarkable process of evolution, but I am curious to see how we move forward in a way that both acknowledges the tradition that gave rise to our precious community and that also responds to the increasing dissonance felt when viewing it from the viewpoint of prevailing social norms. It seems to me that what is needed is an equal sharing in the public face of the Sangha that we all serve and participate in.

These are a few of the possibilities that arise in the mind from time to time when considering the question of what the future holds for the Siladhara Sangha. ☸

The peel of the fruit

~Thanissara~



It is 25 years since the 14th of August 1983, when the first 'Going Forth' into alms mendicancy was undertaken by four women at Chithurst Monastery inspired by the Buddha's dispensation. I was one of those women. The four years leading up to that ceremony involved us in powerful processes, galvanized by the integration of a 2,500 year-old tradition from Asia into contemporary Britain. Part of that integration revealed the incongruity of the historic placement of women within Theravada alongside the feminist awakening within the West. These are my personal reflections on this experience, which I frame within the profound appreciation I have for the Buddha's teaching and the Forest Sangha.

I met Luang Por Chah during his first visit to the UK in 1977 – he walked into a retreat I was attending in Oxford. Ajahn Chah's presence communicated the power of freedom. Soon after entering the meditation room he went up to a Buddha statue in the corner and bowed. I had never seen someone get down and bow before. It struck me as a perfect response to life and this teaching of Ajahn Chah has stayed with me. Later I travelled to Thailand and was graced with a few hours in his presence at a small monastery on the Mekong River in early 1979. I was 22 at the time. The course of my life was mysteriously influenced from the impact of Ajahn Chah's well-known 'stab to the heart', his uncompromising dedication to awakening those who came into his presence.

In the same way a river inevitably takes its course, I found the flow of my life taking me back to England and Chithurst Monastery which at that time was still a tumble-down house. On October 28th 1979, alongside Rocana, Sundara and Candasiri, I took the eight-precept ordination. We were called *maechees*, as nuns are called in Thailand, and with faith we began the journey into uncharted waters. We were inspired by the teachings of Ajahn Sumedho and the dedication of a group of young monks. Those early days were heady, challenging, inspired and enthusiastic. I had no doubt I would spend my whole life devoted to this path and, even though I am not currently in robes, that sense of dedication has not changed.

The 1983 ordination, shaped around the Ten Precepts which the first four of us took together, firmly placed the nuns as alms mendicants and set a template for a training forged out of Vinaya observances. This was a significant step towards validating a place for women within the order. Before that it was considered absolutely out of the question that women could re-

ceive higher ordination, wear ochre robes or carry an alms-bowl. This view was framed by the teaching that one's place within the monastic hierarchy was just a convention, the peel of the fruit. The point was to use the teaching to transcend the form. Transcendence was the 'fruit'. To chew on the peel without tasting the fruit would be a bitter experience. This I subscribed to. However, inevitably I entered a very difficult struggle around this issue. I couldn't accept the 'transcendent' response to the ethics of women's place in the order and found myself challenging the attitudes that got shaped by that very form.

In those early days nuns weren't considered part of the Sangha. Within the tradition this view still holds true for many. I was shocked as I awoke to the discrepancy in how monks and nuns were historically viewed: monks as holders of spiritual power, teachers and vessels of merit; nuns, for the most part invisible and not respected. In Theravada, monks are natural heirs to the lineage; the traditional role of women is as enablers and supporters of the monks' aspirations, which gives a clear (though questionable) place for laywomen but an ambiguous place for nuns. A real low point came when I realized some women were motivated 'to make merit' by the wish for rebirth as a male, and how unchallenged this view is within the tradition.

In retrospect, I realize that I had tried to be a monk at first. Ashamed at having breasts, I wore a tight bodice as though my whole body were somehow wrong. Not being welcomed on equal terms was psychologically confusing and painful. Eventually it generated sickness and emotional turbulence. Feeling dispirited and rebellious I remember one evening secretly putting on a monk's robe. As I looked at my reflection in the mirror I saw back through two and a half thousand years of patriarchy that had denied so much value to women's spirituality. I felt that my inheritance was of a seemingly impenetrable wall.

When I contemplated this wall I saw that there were many complex pieces that kept it in place; in particular, a loyalty to a tradition that had faithfully preserved a profound teaching and way of life. This tradition has a long history of authority invested in monks, without a corresponding valuing of nuns. In Thailand civil laws prevent the re-establishment of the nuns' lineage. At the heart of this are the powerful effects of a tradition that holds the feminine and the place of women in ambivalent relationship to itself. I question whether this ambivalence was the Buddha's true intention. Clearly the Buddha challenged brahmanical and

Thanissara considers her experience
entering the robes and leaving them
in her continuing commitment to a Buddhist path

other inequitable practices of that time. My sense is that it was a later concession to conservative forces that reshaped the original template of the order.

That speculation aside, however, the reality of this historical legacy for me was a blow to the kind of inner confidence which comes with a sense of being part of the lineage. Adherence to the form offered me access to depth, clarity and direction; it also created havoc at a psychological level, with implications at a transpersonal level.

In the language of archetypal psychology, the 'masculine', (expressed as form), seeks to release itself into space; while the archetypal 'feminine', (space), seeks to fulfil its expression within the world of form. When a tradition is strongly preferential towards shaping from the masculine, transcendence tends to be seen as a movement into space, or 'emptiness', and within that view the world of form is often denigrated. Enlightenment when seen as a movement beyond the world 'out there', reflects the early Indian perspective prevalent at the time of the Buddha – and against which he posited the immanence of the Dhamma. Later, in such Mahayana Buddhist texts as the Heart Sutra, this immanence is articulated as the indivisibility of form and emptiness.

As I faced that impenetrable wall, another seed germinated in the crucible of my heart: a challenge to my understanding of transcendence. Does the realization of 'emptiness' imply only a movement *away* from the world of form, or can it translate into a noble exploration of how the world may be *informed from* a transcendent view? This latter perspective is how I understand the movement of compassion.

Deep insight into emptiness and interdependence opens into a non-dual consciousness, which has the taste of compassion as its underlying attribute. When the capacity for compassion is not invoked, this healthy inner dimension can get subsumed by a need for power, and this can be a shadow of religious organizations. Ultimately, it is the knowledge of 'world as self' – with each understood as inherently empty and co-arising – that dissolves the fear underpinning separative consciousness and its drives.

In those early days, we worked so hard to build the monasteries and bring the mendicant life to a new culture that there wasn't a lot of space for the consideration of philosophical subtleties. It's astonishing that in the face of so many challenges we found the creative energy to evolve a training template for women. It is a credit to the legacy of Ajahn Chah and the profundity

of the teachings offered. The nuns' life – in spite of swirling 'issues' – promoted access to a taste of real

peace and a framework for practice. In the context of my personal struggle there was never a loss of appreciation for what we had received. However, in spite of my sincere efforts to try and transcend the effects of the hierarchical conventions, I couldn't trust the degree of 'letting go' into those conventions that seemed to be required.

By 1991, 12 years from my first ordination the river of my life took another turn when I went through the ceremony of disrobing. First I bowed to my fellow nuns and asked for forgiveness. The nuns were like my own body: we had lived inspiration, despair, tiredness, loneliness and beauty together. As I bowed I felt shame and failure. It was as if I were deserting an embattled group of warriors. As I made my offering to the senior monk who officiated at my disrobing I felt on the edge of a precipice looking out to nowhere. It was as if I'd been reading an engrossing book – the book that had been my life – that abruptly ended. Looking up from the page, I noticed a cold and dark night sweeping in. On that 'dark night' I left the monastery with only the clothes I stood in and with a heart shredded.

People who know my story know that I married Kittisaro in 1992. Kittisaro had disrobed in Thailand. To disrobe from the community is a death of sorts. No one does it lightly. It entails a painful inner process usually undertaken alone. The mutual support and commitment to continue the practice within our relationship is what has allowed me to recover the trust that authentic spiritual life is accessible beyond the robes. Our practice of the *Bodhisattva* ideal offers a template for the inner integration of wisdom and compassion, the masculine and feminine principles.

I no longer look for empowerment from outside but realize it is given when I turn to trust the inner listening, the awareness, the teaching that the flow of life reveals. This was always the encouragement of Luang Por Sumedho from whom I received incalculable blessings through the beauty of his teachings. The day I left the robes I put down one training and picked up another. It has been a different going forth, which is informed by the gift I received in the monastery carried within my heart. ☸



Thanissara and Kittisaro



Ajahn Thaniya

What supports waking up?

Ajahn Thaniya, the senior nun at Cittaviveka, looks at how things have been...

Taking a retrospective look at the nuns' community at Cittaviveka and my time here isn't easy. As with anything, what you see depends on the time and place you look from – a different mood equals a different reality, different people means different realities. And, even if there is some consensus on 'what happened' or even 'how things are now', writing a few paragraphs reduces it to crude statements. Trusting you'll bear this in mind, I offer just a few comments.

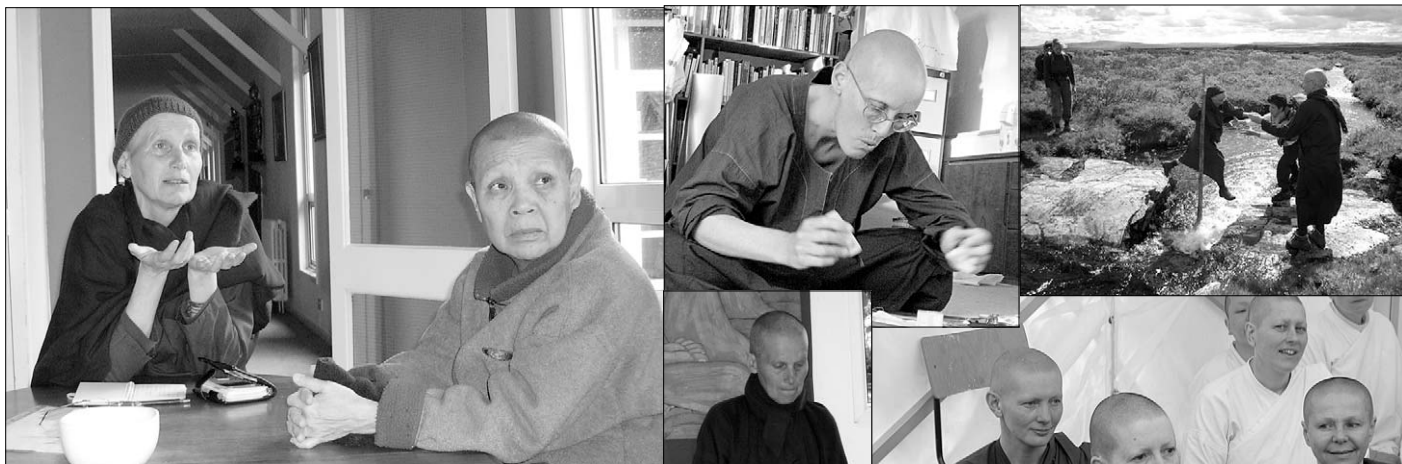
Twenty-five years – almost nothing in terms of the *sasana* – isn't long enough to reveal all the aspects of development specific to our nuns' community. Living in a shared context with the monks' community there are obviously aspects related to both. But one obvious difference is the absence of a historical 'mother community' with experienced nuns to refer to. A consequence of that being that there wasn't an experienced Senior to lead the community in England from the beginning, as the monks had in Luang Por Sumedho. From the outset the sisters have had to be more cooperative; which was a challenge given the hierarchical leadership style that was being modelled. Ajahn Sucitto helped with the initial establishment of the Vinaya training. I entered the community in England just when that phase was about to change. The sisters were clearly ready to be more self-referencing. Naturally it takes time to gain the skills required to work well together as a community – it seems to be one of the marks of the years since then, letting that take shape.

Virtually since Cittaviveka was established there have been sisters benefiting from its conducive environment – apart from the few years when all the sisters went up to help establish Amaravati. Until last year we had been based around Aloka Cottage ('the Nuns' Cottage') in the valley by Hammer Wood. Given physical and planning limitations, the community numbers fluctuated around a limit of six shaven-headed sisters, with three guests; so making up around a quarter to a third of the larger community. With the advent of Rocana Vihara – which we were delighted to name after Sister Rocana, one of the first four nuns – we have the capacity to have more sisters based at Cittaviveka. I was

moved by the response to the possibility of purchasing Rocana Vihara. Given its cost it seemed such an unimaginable thing – walking past it, knowing it was for sale, I never even speculated about it. Yet on hearing it was on the market the English Sangha Trust was immediate in their wish to do something that would support the well-being of the sisters (and the wider community as a consequence). So much support, from the monks, from the lay community, has flowed in its wake.

One of the advantages of increased numbers is that we can look at new models of leadership. Ajahn Candasiri was the 'Senior Nun' when I arrived at Cittaviveka; she filled that role for seven years until returning to Amaravati to take up the role there. After her departure I stepped in. Now, too many years later, thanks to the blessings that Rocana Vihara brings, the sisters can experiment with a model that may better serve the community, and which acknowledges the strengths of the particular individuals involved. Before the vassa the *theris* now resident here happily shared out the duties that have traditionally fallen to the 'Senior Nun'. A team approach has been growing over the years; it feels suitable to frame it more clearly.

This shift in leadership is one manifestation of a larger inquiry we sisters find ourselves in: as women what supports our waking up? Being women within a largely male monastic tradition necessitates this consideration. Obviously it's complex – biological factors, gender conditioning, and the spuriousness of a binary system at all.... Waking up involves a journey out of ignorance: practical realities must be handled. Over the years, like many of the sisters, I've found my relationship to the inquiry changing. It has moved from a more 'ultimate' view of 'just practise contentment', to a more 'immanent' orientation which is interested to tease apart what is actually going on, on a personal and collective level. Since our conditioning has usually been different from the monks, it can require different Dhamma medicine to understand and release it. Being in a leadership position has necessitated my opening into this difficult inquiry – that's one of its blessings.



Aloka Cottage was an intense experience given the number of women orbiting around it. A visiting friend said it took them back to living on a submarine. Only with the advent of Rocana Vihara was I aware how intense it was; we'd become partly inured to it. The sisters living there shared it with a flow of lay-guests – some there for a day, others for much longer, some matured in their Dhamma cultivation, others new, women in crisis.... All moved through the tiny kitchen cum laundry cum meeting place. That meant particular aspects of Dhamma cultivation were essential, others weren't supported. What was glaringly obvious was how permeable many of us were; we were affected by those around us, sensitive to the needs of the collective field.

Differentiating out of the group to listen inwardly was difficult – and still can be. This is commonly ascribed to our feminine conditioning. What can be a strength, in a bounded context, can be a challenge when too much contact can't be avoided. It was something we had to learn skills around. What Rocana Vihara supports is finding a balance with that. When we first moved in it felt like we had space to breathe: not only were we in a less congested living space, but we had enough space to experience ourselves as a distinct community. We could settle out of the displaced experience many of us had felt with constantly transiting between Chithurst House and our dwelling place – there was space to have breakfast, meet informally ... and one of the first marks of those early days was how playful it all felt. This question of our permeability is still something many of us contemplate; how to come into Right Relationship with others, with duties ... to keep energetically upright within the flow of life; neither leaned overly forward nor withdrawing back; the mind embodied and upright so it can't be knocked over.

Many sisters have lived here. Everybody has done their bit, offered what they can in their different ways to our development. This community has arisen through a web of support, so much bringing it into being and sustaining it. I'm gladdened to see our maturing community supporting Dhamma cultivation and valued in the wider context. ☸



Vision

An eagle slices its way through a sky deep with snow. Following the river-flow that has discarded these in-pressing mountains this flat white-out: winged curve, it too sweeps this ever-deepening channel. An up-thrust of millennia, a ceaseless attrition, and this body's brief purchase – fluvial elements – all fall under the shadow of its flight.

What if you saw everything was doing exactly the right thing, would you soar, riffling radical wings?

Thaniya

Pushing at the edges

An interview with Ajahn Upekkha

When I came to the monastery I had a sense of urgency because my sister, just one year younger than me, had died. I cared for her through that process. She showed me that I had work to do, this was her gift. I didn't want to die the way she died, with terror and fear. In the end, bless her, she found peace. Her death accelerated my spiritual process. I had been taking my time, then *wham* – I realized I didn't have time.

I also had a strong motivation to help people. As a child I wanted to create a world of beauty, of love and kindness. From very young I was living in an ugly place. I am from a big family, being number twelve out of fifteen (two died). I was separated from my family to go to an orphanage. I didn't want anybody to feel the deprivation I experienced. The orphanage could not offer better than it did, nobody was to blame. Wherever I went I had the motivation to create abundance.

When I arrived at Amaravati my commitment was not to a community or to a religion. It was about realizing the Truth; being free from fear. I've found it challenging because I had strong reactions to religious orthodoxy. Some people are insistent about how to hold the rules and what we should or shouldn't do. I struggled because I find community life is alive when we pay attention to individual people not just to a system of values that looks good from the outside. That was my battle; between what it looks like, and what is important for us as individuals and as a group.

The fortnightly Vinaya recitation, for example, is like a foreign language to me. If I want to investigate desire, sexuality, attachment, anger, it's not by such recitations that I will learn about them. It's in my daily life – using Luang Por Sumedho's teaching – by reflecting on Dhamma, by being mindful and aware, that I learn the most. I find that reciting rules, or focussing more on them, can shame you if you don't understand what Vinaya is all about. You can feel guilty because you are eating too much chocolate, or are attracted by someone. Whereas, in fact, it's a process of discovery of what it is to be a human being. You have to understand what the senses are, the process of feeling – and experience it all, neither rejecting nor indulging in it. What the Vinaya shows me is that when I have sense desire, for example, I can reflect, 'this is how it feels when something is not available'. Then I see, 'Oh, believing that something is missing is causing me suffering', rather than the experience itself. If I don't allow myself to feel, out of fear of the Vinaya, then I'm not doing the real work. I never wanted to be part of an institution. Rather, I want to use rules as tools to help me under-

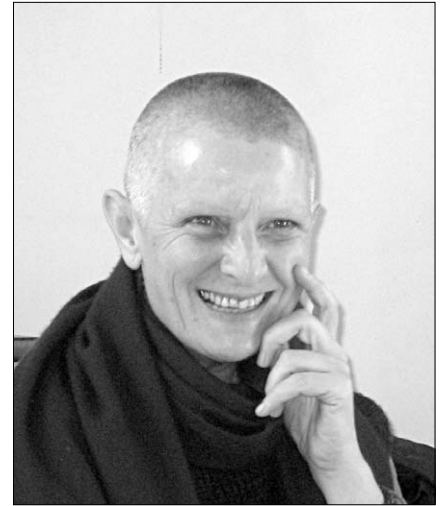
stand who I am, and to detach myself from wrong views and opinions.

At first as a nun it felt like I was in military training. I thought 'Where is love? Where is kindness? Why must the discipline be harsh?' That's something I could not accept, with my passion to create a world of beauty and love. I came here, because of the Buddha's teaching, to find wisdom and joy in life. Though this is not based on external conditions, in the beginning of the training we do need some support of kindness from outside. That was something I felt was missing.

It's a strange feeling coming to the Sangha when you have been an independent woman. I had my job, I had my flat, I was divorced. I travelled freely around the world. I was passionate about independence yet here, at that time, I was not allowed to go out of the monastery alone down the lane. This was something I couldn't understand, and at first my objections were dismissed. It felt painful but prompted me to stand for my truth. I would keep on pointing out what would support the nuns.

So, my twenty-two years involved pushing at edges to find what works for women. And Luang Por responded to that by explaining that little by little he and the monks were learning to understand women. I didn't know anything about men either. I had brothers, I had a father, but I learned more about men in the monastery. I heard their reflections and they shared their space with me. Over the years we've been having dialogue; when we listen to each others' experience then we can support each other. Luang Por made space for it because he wanted to learn. I'm grateful to him for enabling women to be ordained here. He has said he would support us in establishing independent places. He wants to support women; that is his gift and his wisdom. He took that risk and not everybody wants to take such risks.

What do you think the risk is in supporting women to live this life? I think it was risky for him in relationship to Thailand because he is committed to Ajahn Chah, and to the Thai community. In the first ten years they were watching how we would behave, and he didn't know what we would do. So he did take a risk. But I



think the result is great. He has said he has no regrets and that it is a benefit for the monks' community to have nuns. I have gratitude for Luang Por and the monks' community; and for the nuns who had to bear with me for the last twenty years with my passionate character. I'm grateful also for the laypeople who support us; we are able to practise here because of their trust and support.

What changes have you seen in the nature of support from laypeople, and in the type of people who come to the monastery? Initially mostly Thai and other Asian people supported us. As the years passed by, more English and European people came through. They were interested in meditation but didn't know much about alms mendicants. But they did learn. It is clear that we can go anywhere and we will be supported by Western people. That's thanks to Asian people who supported us from the beginning; without them we could not have created this community. We started with nothing much at Amaravati. Everything was broken, just rice and beans to eat, and in the winter nobody wanted to come because it was too cold. I particularly remember Mr Tan Nam and Khun Lim bringing blankets and cooking food for us. If they hadn't sustained us from the beginning we could not have stayed. And now it feels important – and, thanks to that support, possible – to create something independent for women as the next stage in the development of the nuns' community.

What form might that take? I'd like to have a hermitage to give the opportunity for women who want more time in retreat, a small place with no more than six *kutis* (huts). It is said that a good-sized community is when you can all sit around a fire. I have never experienced a small community. Even in my family I was in a big group. This is my last longing. Maybe I will experience it before dying, maybe not. But I feel sure that in the future there will be a monastery for nuns. The ground for it has been prepared over the last few years. Though some of us feel not quite ready ...

What would it take to be ready for it? I think more trust in one another. We can't wait for someone perfect. We have to support someone to do her best. If we don't empower her, then it will not happen. Everyone has something to offer. If we focus on having to 'look good' – comparing ourselves with the monks because of the wider support they have – it weakens us. This denies our particular strengths. There is not yet the trust to recognize and accept those strengths.

We can bring our particular understanding of life – of what suffering is all about – because many of us have been through so much ourselves. We can reach and help a wide range of people. We have an aspect of acceptance, we embrace all, we don't separate ourselves off. This can be a limitation too because we can become weak by depending on other people. But when we are able to stand on our vertical, we don't separate ourselves from the world, we understand it. I think this is a gift women have.

My experience through these twenty years is that I always received what I needed. When I felt low, someone always gave me a hand, a smile, a cup of tea. I always had support to take the next step. I came here because I trusted intuitive awareness - my inner voice saying 'This is your place'. I arrived five years after the nuns' Sangha was established. Later, the people who had been with me all disrobed. This was not necessarily because of a lack of faith, or misunderstanding of the Dhamma, or because they were too weak, or whatever. I respect them for trusting their intuition: for them it was time to go. We are all on the spiritual path of one form or another, so I find it important that we live true to our life. Trust and faith are essential; they make us powerful. ☸



Surrender sliding down
into this wonderful abyss.
How simple! How amazing!
Just the way it is.

Sr Santacitta

Staying with the journey

Ajahn Kovida shares some of her recent experiences practising in Asia

In October 2005 I departed for Thailand, planning to spend eight months away. As it turned out I extended the trip for a further eight months in order to practise in Burma.

After 12 years living between Amaravati and Citaviveka I embarked on this journey because I had an urge to take more risk. To let go for a while of the relative security of these monasteries where all my needs are taken into account, and female mendicants are not unusual. I wanted to step off an edge. Also, amidst the busyness of administering to community life I sometimes fantasied about other conditions for practice. Some combination of solitude, friends, Dhamma input, nature, quietude, space to study. The 'if only' experience.

At first I lived for a while in a retreat centre for women set in the hills of central Thailand. Its founder, Khun Lek provided every possible support in this tropical haven. The most striking thing for me was adjusting to the differences between West and East: the language, the trees, the birdsong, the smells, the climate, even the sound as the wind moved through the trees! As I began taking in my new surroundings I started to enjoy the people, the place and the tropical beauty. In this, and many other ways, being in another environment and culture highlighted my habitual bearings on things. In the process of adjusting I saw how many things I had taken for granted and become blindly attached to.

For the latter half of my stay in Thailand I lived in a monastery in central Issan. It was remote – a place where few foreigners passed through. I was a strange sight for the local villagers but the abbot, Ajahn Sudhiro, was skilful in connecting us. At the meal offering for the first few days he would introduce me, explain where I had come from, and ask me to say a little about my practice and my intentions for being there. He then encouraged the villagers to share reflections of their lives with me. In this way we got to know each other. I would walk on almsround each day and felt a welcome part of their world.

As the journey progressed to Burma, the different practice situations influenced my way of inquiry. The time spent in branch monasteries of Sayadaw U Pandita and Sayadaw U Janaka practising the 'Mahasi' method showed me the value of slowing down and stilling. I was instructed to note each activity throughout the day to develop the ability to observe in detail bodily and

mental experience. I found this helped to stabilize mindfulness and I felt much more clear, still and sharp. Attachments, reactions and assumptions became much more obvious. As did the relationship between this mental activity and the external experience. In one walking meditation where I determined to make extra effort to observe precisely, I noticed concentration increase, then lessen, and tension arise. Investigating the tension I saw there was craving for the pleasant experience of a concentrated state; a desire to be sure and clear and collected. I saw just how easily I became unconscious during these pleasant experiences – automatically attaching to them. And how this sets up an expectation for meditation to be a particular way. As those biases in intention gradually loosened I became more naturally mindful in an interested and relaxed way. Then it became possible to observe in more detail without straining.

For six months I stayed with Ashin Tejaniya, whose teaching style is similar in many ways to Ajahn Sumedho's with an emphasis on establishing awareness, and also inquiry (*dhammavicaya*). He made no requirement to adopt a set practice schedule. The only responsibility was to observe and investigate what the mind is doing, what the mind is paying attention to. He gave regular group interviews.

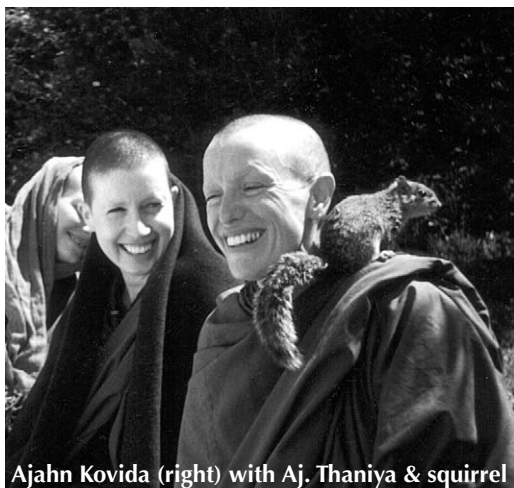
Initially he encouraged establishing the right attitude towards practice. Whatever sight, sound, smell, thought, mood or emotion was happening – to know that as an object. To establish the perspective of the mind knowing the object. And in doing so, gauging how mindfulness varied depending on what was happening. How steady and attentive is my mind? Is there enough equanimity to detach and see experiences more objectively? If not, what would help bring these qualities about? If we know the object as an object, and the 'mind' as 'mind' there is no identification.

He encouraged us to investigate:

Where is attention going to be? On persons, ideas, stories, views (objects of perception)? Or on Dhamma and reality – *paramatha*? [If we choose we can] deliberately recall our understanding of the benefit of paying attention to direct experience. It is our habit to only pay attention to objects of perception and interpretation. This is the nature of ignorance and living in *samsara*. When [we're] aware, we can see previous memories more clearly [and how] the mind is not attached to the object itself but to the habitual tending towards the object. If we see on a deep level that [the experience of the] defilements is suffering we naturally let go.

Seeing feeling, emotion and thoughts as objects, I paid particular attention to the *kilesa* (the 'defilements' of desire, aversion and delusion). I found it helpful to be reminded to see them more objectively. They became more like events in the mind, aspects of nature built up through the force of habit. From this perspective I observed the particular ways in which greed and hatred operate. For instance, how greed can become eagerness and make the variables of life seem like an obstacle, wanting to have things a certain way. I saw how the amount of desire or aversion seemed commensurate with the idea of 'me' and 'mine'; How this delusion of self-view (*moha*) presents a biased, one-sided view, whereas awareness brings a broader view, which then brings more peace and acceptance. With this it became possible to let things be and detach from the influence of the defilements.

This process of investigation brought vitality to my practice and enhanced what I'd already learned. These and various other experiences during this journey deepened my appreciation for the Dhamma. I am grateful for the support and guidance I received in understanding how to let go of desire. How these insights arise depends on many factors. Steeping into other contexts gave new input and fresh perspectives which helped inform my practice and broaden my ability for inquiry. As a result, some of the places in my heart to which I return repeatedly are seen in a new way. ☸



Ajahn Kovida (right) with Aj. Thaniya & squirrel

Angophora's Welcome

She stands grand, guarding the entrance to my cave.

She is the guardian protecting, welcoming me in

Offering encouragement.

She is not ashamed. She does not hide her nature nor her presence.

Handsome, strong, ancient and powerful woman of the
Tree people.

She welcomes me into myself.

Rejoice. You are woman.

Feeling things deeply you process the pain of the world and give back life.

Rejoice

So far from myself

I do not know what I feel,

The characteristics of my own personality

Or what drives me.

It is a crying shame

Cycles repeat and women do to each other what has been done to them.

Aching for the birth of a relational way

Where feelings are received,

Essence is valued

And power an aspect of presence.

Aching for the healing of past mistakes that have left scars

For balance to be restored

And to find her true voice

Authentic power

And place of purpose

Full of life living potential,

Smelling the aroma of Earth Mother in the change of a day.

Feeling the vitality, fecundity,

Life force as it surges through me.

Embracing Life, creation, and utterly chaste.

Holding sacred the longing for truth.

Ferns uncurl in the wetness,

Waterfalls fall into

The hollow pool below.

The lichen grows in the tree hollow.

The red bark of the manzanita glisten in the rain.

The mist people dance through the canyon.

Earth Mother pulls us

Back into ourselves before she devours us in the night.

Holds us

Until she shows nothing can last or be held.

Both hearts bleeding, tears fall, rejoicing.

Angophora's welcome.

Ajahn Thanasanti

Note: Angophoras are trees that are prevalent in Australia.

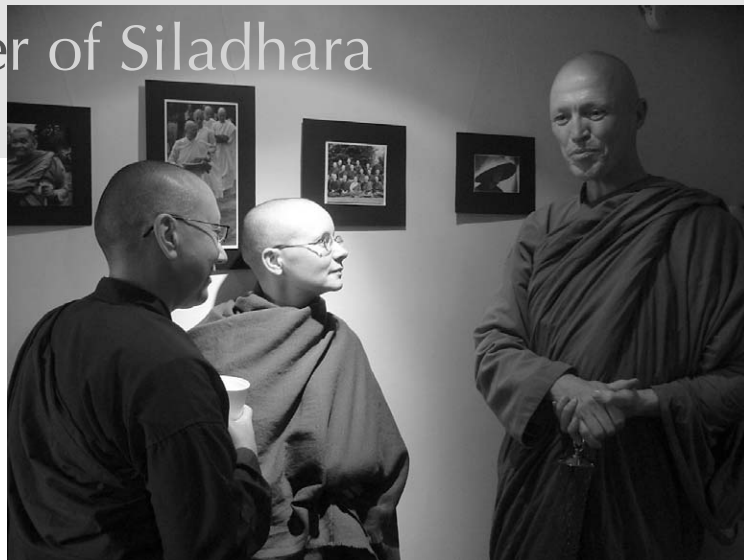
The Creation of the Order of Siladhara

Ajahn Sucitto

I have spent all but a year or so of my 32 years of monastic life living in monasteries with nuns. Actually it all depends what is meant by living with, and what is meant by nuns. In Thailand the monastery I was living in had many *maechees*, that is shaven-headed women keeping the Eight Precepts, practising meditation, virtue and renunciation, and often making commitments of many years. Yet the culture then as now, to a large extent, did not regard them as a female equivalent to the monks – the bhikkhus. The status of the bhikkhus, independent of their personal qualities, was totemic: their form carried the weight, sanctity and auspiciousness of the Buddha-Dhamma in a society where correct ritual observance, and charismatic qualities carry as much and even more significance than the teachings themselves. For a son to become a bhikkhu is a source of great merit to a parent; for a daughter to become a *maechee* is likely to be a disappointment. She may well be seen, not as a daughter of the Buddha, but as a misfit who doesn't have a husband and won't bear children. However crude these generalizations may seem, they do carry a good deal of truth.

Meanwhile, although I didn't see them that often, the *maechees* themselves seemed content to have a place to practise and offer service to the monastery. Maybe what they had was good enough for Dhamma practice ... and anyway I had enough to be dealing with in my own mind to even offer much consideration to the state of nuns, the monastery or even Buddhism. The whole thing seemed to be chugging along in some mysterious way, offering support and benefits to many folk. Everything seemed stable, unquestioned, and contented: this set-up had been going on for over seven hundred years.

When I returned to Britain in 1978, things were anything but stable, unquestioned and contented. The English Sangha Trust was just coming out of suspended animation brought about by the disrobing of the last of its resident bhikkhus in the 1970s and the conclusion that living the bhikkhu life in the West was not possible or relevant. When I arrived in 1978, it was looking for a new direction under Ajahn Sumedho, following the systems and teachings given by Ajahn Chah. The resident community comprised three bhikkhus, three samaneras and three anagarikas, jammed together in a house in Hampstead. Pretty soon we were to be moving to a very uncertain future in a derelict house in West Sussex. And there were Western women who wanted to join the monastic community. When one of them asked Ajahn Sumedho about becoming a nun, he turned to me (for rhetorical effect, I imagine: I was far too green to be a source of informed wisdom) and asked what we should do. My comment was that it would be good if Katie would show us how to live as a nun in the West. Anyway, Ajahn Sumedho must have already de-



Ajahn Sucitto speaks with Aj. Metta and Sr Sumedha at Rocana Vihara

ecided to give the idea a chance, because within weeks of moving into Chithurst House in 1979, Katie and three others started out by cropping their hair, wearing white and taking on the eight-precept training.

What became clear was that it wasn't easy. The sisters seemed to find a comfortable niche in the community in the kitchen, garden and in supporting the monks, but with the four of them sharing one room in the House, and later a small cottage, there were difficulties. A year or two into their training, they were looking for something that would give them a stronger basis in renunciation rather than just community service. Ajahn Sumedho's response was to look into the possibilities of their taking the Ten Precepts (*dasa-sila*) and with the relinquishment of money, of the cooking and driving duties, to live more fully as alms mendicants. In 1983 he obtained permission from the Thai Sangha to give the *pabbajja*, the 'Going Forth' which formalizes an individual's determination to live this renunciate life.

This raised some objections in Thailand from the more conservative laypeople – predominantly women – to whom the robe was a sacred object that should only be worn by males. We compromised by using a dark brown colour for the robe. Meanwhile, for their part, our four nuns had no experience of the protocols and community structures that come along with the training for a monk. So despite taking the Ten Precepts, they had had no guidance in regard to the detailed training in conduct and deportment that comprises the Vinaya: matters such as how to handle the robes and bowl, how to sit in an upright and composed manner, how to live in a respectful but not stiff way with seniors, how to handle differences of opinion and know the time, place and means to arrive at decisions. A novice monk (*samanera*) picks up a lot of know-how just from living in close proximity to the more experienced monks. But nuns didn't live in a close informal way with the monks. Therefore ... Ajahn Sumedho asked me to be their teacher.

I spent a great deal of time instructing the nuns from 1983 until 1990. I spent as much time listening to their concerns, difficulties and expressions of gratitude. All of this

In this brief account Ajahn Sucitto offers an outline of the considerations that went into formulating a Rule for the nuns. It would take volumes, however, to do justice to the remarkable, steadfast commitment he showed and the enormous effort – on every level – made by the nuns themselves and everyone involved, over those seven years.

meant that I spent a good deal of time considering their training, consulting such texts as I could find on male ten-precept, that is samanera, training and reviewing the bhikkhuni training rules. I did this even though there was no agreement to establish a bhikkhuni training system, and we were led to believe that the procedure for giving *upasampada* ('Acceptance' or 'higher ordination') to women had died out. Yet, I had to consider the welfare and training of the nuns in the here and now. It was clear they couldn't have a training through the medium of one-to-one contact with the monks, neither were they novices making a tentative commitment to the Holy Life for a year or two; they needed a system that they managed themselves. So it seemed responsible to at least look at how the Bhikkhuni Order had functioned, what challenges it had faced, and how the Buddha had responded to the issues of the time, just to get some guidance. What was needed were guidelines for community living, on making decisions, as well as on topics more relevant to women such as their protection from sexual harassment. The nuns whom I was trying to support were certainly keen, committed, worthy and capable of taking on a Holy Life. The more I listened and studied and thought the more it seemed possible to develop protocols and ways of conduct within the framework of the Ten Precepts – including matters of deportment, of how to look after the bowl and robes and so that they would be able to function independently as a community.

As I formulated the training guidelines, I'd pass them by Ajahn Sumedho, then talk to the nuns about them and listen to feedback. Every year or so, the ongoing training system would be reviewed by the senior monks of the community. I also consulted the senior Sri Lankan Sangha in Britain, and visiting Thai Ajahns. They all seemed satisfied that things were going in the right direction, and some offered help with details of procedure regarding the going forth ceremony itself, or of Pali technical terms. Gradually a consensus regarding conventions was arrived at.

The last piece that I was part of formulating was the procedure for admission to the community of nuns ('ordination') itself. This is crucial because it sets up the firm outlines of what a *samana* has to refer to in his or her training. Apart from the training, there is also the definition of whom the newly-admitted person will look to for guidance. So for the Going Forth, there is the preceptor – in this case Ven. Ajahn Sumedho; and in the Acceptance or 'higher ordination' there is the community. The community is as important as the preceptor. The Bhikkhu Sangha requires a community of at least five monks to accept a new bhikkhu. The question that arose was, what community 'accepted' the nuns? A community of monks seemed necessary to confer the validation of the ongoing lineage. But on a day-to-day level, each nun would be living in a community of nuns, which she would wish to re-

spect, work with and seek support from. Once again, the precedent for bhikkhunis seemed to hit the mark exactly: to be accepted first by the nuns into their community, and then offered a further validation by the order of monks.

In all of this, I was aware of the current Bhikkhu Sangha, the bhikkhunis of the past and the opinions of contemporary Buddhists East and West 'looking over my shoulder' so to speak. Was all this suitable, was it fair, was it legal? What makes something legal? Who has authority? Regarding this point, and with remarkable foresight, the Buddha did determine a series of decision-making parties: that of the Buddha; that of the Sangha as a whole; that of a group of elders, and finally that of a single elder. In the case of the nuns and their training, Ajahn Sumedho had received permission from the elders of the Thai Sangha for a ten-precept *pabbajja* for women; and the group of elders of our community in Europe had agreed to all the procedures that we now use. It seemed good enough to present a good opportunity for women to live the Holy Life. I have always felt that the larger issue of bhikkhuni ordination and training is a matter in hand, both in terms of legal procedure, wider Sangha consent, and of course the interest and capacity of the nuns. Because, as the siladhara training became established, one aim and result was that it no longer needed me to guide it. This point was reached in 1991, when the nuns came to a decision that my services would no longer be needed in that respect. And although my past role and ongoing interest still make me concerned for the welfare of the nuns, I appreciate that too close an involvement now is something that could be sensed as sticky and patronizing.

Coming to the West has always entailed trying to juggle between the Thai tradition that is our root and inspiration and the values of the West. With regard to the religious role of women, there is a gulf between the two, and this gulf has always had its effect on how the nuns sit within the Sangha – that despite their commitment, leadership and teaching skills, some people still don't regard them as members of the 'Sangha.' This alone may be adequate cause to undertake the bhikkhuni ordination and training. But whichever way the nuns' order develops, I feel I have myself learned, or been through, a lot on account of this involvement. There have been the conflicts of the emotional (and sexual) energies that can be aroused through male-female contact with the need to maintain clarity of intent. I have been offered trays of flowers and had things thrown at me. And there is the ongoing dilemma of being a 20th century westerner (and ex-hippy to boot) with the cultural attitude of male-female parity, yet committed to a Buddhist lineage that has non-parity at the roots of its conventional structures. I have no doubt been less than perfect under the stress of all these conflicts, but it has left me with no solid ground. And for that I am grateful. ☸

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE SANGHA

Sister Cintamani reports on the recent Hamburg Congress on bhikshuni ordination

From July 18–21 the first *International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages* was held in Hamburg, Germany. The congress was initiated by HH the Dalai Lama, and attracted a gathering of senior Sangha members from all Buddhist traditions, and eminent scholars of Buddhist monastic discipline and history.

Twenty years ago the Dalai Lama had initiated an examination of how to introduce bhikshuni ordination into Tibetan Buddhism. More recently he has been pressing to bring this to a conclusion: 'The Buddha taught a path to enlightenment and liberation from suffering for all sentient beings and people of all walks of life, to women as well as men, without discrimination as to class, race, nationality or social background ... While the bhikshu ordination lineage still exists in almost all Buddhist countries today, the bhikshuni ordination lineage exists only in some countries. For this reason, the fourfold Buddhist community (of bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas) is incomplete.'

As the Dalai Lama – and many of the congress presenters – pointed out, gender discrimination conflicts with the ethic of social and spiritual equality maintained in core Buddhist teachings. Therefore the issue of full ordination for women has become a concern in the contemporary international Buddhist community. Congress organizer Ven. Bhikshuni Jampa Tse droen introduced the discussion saying: 'From a Western point of view the main question is not: can we or should we have bhikkhunis in all three traditions? That question has already been answered by the Buddha himself, who gave full support for the women's Sangha. The question is: how can we develop the Bhikkhuni Sangha in the best possible way? ... to follow this path requires not only a lot of inner strength, but should also be accompanied with the support of the respective society and should meet with the cooperation and support of the Bhikkhu Sangha.'

When our own Elders' Council convened earlier this year the Elders agreed it was important to have representation at the congress, it being an international gathering of Buddhist Elders addressing a topic of global significance for Buddhism. It is generally understood that religious and cultural traditions influence women's social status, and that women need female role models. Given the restricted roles of women in Buddhist religious structures, and of nuns within that, the Siladhara is one of the longest-standing communities of Buddhist nuns in the Western world. Not to attend would have signalled our disinterest in the global Buddhist community. So it was a party of eleven, mostly senior nuns and monks, who attended from the

Cittaviveka, Amaravati and Dhammapala communities. Although we did not make any formal presentations at the congress, we were there to listen, to be a visible presence, and to be available for contact and discussion with those present. The Theravadan tradition was well represented with papers presented by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Ven. Ayya Tathaaloka, Ven. Bhikkhu Sujato, Ven. Bhikkhuni Kusuma, Ven. Bhikkhuni Dhammananda, and others.

Across the first two days of the congress a staggering 65 papers were read out, with little time to adequately discuss the issues raised. The themes and content of the papers were roughly divided into: lineage-focused and sectarian approaches, text-based and historical approaches, and more contemporary socially-conscious approaches. Though speakers were invited to address a range of perspectives, the bigger picture was often lost to legal technicalities. It often felt as though the audience present was not being addressed; rather, papers were appealing to the absent Tibetan Vinaya scholars (*Geshes*), men opposed to bhikshuni ordination on the basis of Vinaya. Consequently there was a mounting intensity that generated a collective urge to reach a clear resolution. It seemed that these Vinaya arguments against bhikshuni ordination needed to be addressed before the more vexed question of historical Buddhism's ambivalence to women – the subtext of the congress – could be acknowledged.

Many papers questioned conventional reading of the Vinaya texts; particularly those aspects related to women, such as the *garudhammas*, ordination, origins of the Bhikkhuni Sangha. Scholars presented evidence of a later brahmanical bias through the texts, thus questioning literalist approaches. Several papers concerned with lineage traced the movement of bhikkhuni ordination



Listening to presentations. 3rd row from left to right: Aj. Anandabodhi, Sr Cintamani, Aj. Thaniya, Thanissara, Aj Kovida, Elaine and Richard Allen. In front: Aj. Candasiri, Aj. Sucitto, Aj. Khemasiri Aj. Vajiro

from India, at the time of the Buddha, to Sri Lanka and onwards to China. There was a general consensus that the bhikkhuni lineage remains unbroken, in much the same manner as the bhikkhu lineages can be posited as unbroken, given scant textual evidence either way. It became evident that the three main schools of Buddhism share a common root and are not different lineage traditions.

Along with those of a few other Sangha members and scholars, Bhikkhu Bodhi's paper straddled all these (lineage, text, historical, social) approaches, and he became instrumental in formulating the preferred model for introducing bhikshuni ordination into the Tibetan tradition that was presented to the Dalai Lama on the last day.*

On the third day of the congress a panel of nine bhikshunis and nine bhikkhus gathered around the Dalai Lama to present to him their suggested model for introducing the bhikshuni ordination into the Tibetan tradition. The panel offered resounding support for bhikshuni ordination, and urged immediate action for providing Tibetan women the same opportunities as are available to Tibetan men. Bhikkhu Bodhi affirmed that, after exhaustive research – 'no stone had been left unturned' – the Vinaya cannot be held to present any genuine obstacle to introducing the bhikshuni ordination and that the remaining obstacle is social and political in nature.

Having heard the presentations the Dalai Lama read from his prepared response that offered in principle support, suggested some interim measures, but called for more research. To many present this felt like more irresolution, rather than the much anticipated resolution. He emphasized that he was not able to act unilaterally, without Sangha consent. Yet expectations of a result had been raised by the framing of the congress as a forum for deciding the best model for bhikshuni ordination. In retrospect though, the Dalai Lama's response was a way of keeping open the dia-



Bhikkhu Bodhi speaking with Aj. Anandabodhi, Aj. Candasiri and Aj. Thaniya at the congress

logue and, with the backing of international support galvanized at the congress, to include the more 'narrow-minded *Geshes*' (as he described them) into this process. To that end he later invited the Tibetan bhikshunis to a conference with the *Geshes* in India in December of this year.

In the context of the congress, aimed at introducing bhikshuni ordination, the siladhara and *maechees* present seemed to occupy an anomalous position within the 'fourfold Buddhist community'. Within a legal framework we had no standing; but within a community framework we were acknowledged for our experience of living and working in a mixed community of nuns and monks. Our personal aspirations were respected and our presence, amid the gathering of global Buddhists, welcomed. The questions raised by the congruence of Buddhist ethics with contemporary standards of gender equity seem of more relevance to our communities than do the technicalities of lineage. Nevertheless, if this gathering of Buddhist Elders and eminent Buddhist scholars is any indication, there is a global movement toward re-establishing the historical 'fourfold assembly'. This momentum may require us to stay in touch with developments in the global Buddhist community. ☸



*See <http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org> for details regarding the proposed models. Copies of the conference proceedings are held in the Amaravati library and the nuns' library at Cittaviveka.

Glossary — Some of the Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the *Forest Sangha Newsletter*

Please note: Due to typographical limitations, Pali diacritics have been omitted throughout. Below are brief descriptions of how these words are being used in this issue of the FSN; they are not full definitions. Often used, they have generally not been italicized.

Ajahn (Thai) : Senior monk or nun; literally 'teacher'. Used for those with ten vassas or more, regardless of their role in the community.

anagarika : A male or female postulant in the preliminary novice stage.

bhikkhu : A Buddhist monk.

bhikkhuni (Pali) / **bhikshuni** (Sanskrit) : A Buddhist nun.

Bodhisattva (Sanskrit) : A Mahayana Buddhist ideal.

Buddha : Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.

Dhamma : The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.

garudhammas : Eight 'vows of respect' pertaining to the Bhikkhu Sangha.

Luang Por : (Thai) A title of affectionate respect (lit. "Venerable Father").

maechee : (Thai) An eight-precept nun in Thailand.

Mahayana : The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Tibet and E. Asia.

samana : One who has entered the Holy life; religious recluse or wanderer.

samsara : The 'endless round' of birth and death.

Sangha : The community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns.

sasana : The dispensation of the Buddha's teaching.

siladhara : A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.

theri : A nun of ten or more vassas (**thera** : a monk of ten vassas).

Theravada : The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

vassa : The three-month summer "Rains Retreat"; a mark of how many years ("vassas") a monk or nun has been in robes.

Vinaya : The monastic discipline.



AMARAVATI

News from Amaravati:

Sangha and lay friends alike were shocked by the tragic death of our friend and long-term lay resident Alan Cole. Struggling with depression and under medical supervision for some time, Alan took his own life on August 25th. A funeral was held at Amaravati, overflowing with family, friends, Sangha and some of the young people Alan used to entertain at the Amaravati Family Camps. He is sorely missed.

Kathina — Sunday, November 11th

Almsround begins at 10:30 am

The Royal Kathina Robe will be graciously offered by the King of Thailand through a representative.

This year's Kathina ceremony and Kathina cloth will be sponsored and offered by Mrs Namtip Milligan and Mrs Linda Liew. Particularly, this kathina will be offered to mark the 80th birthday of the King of Thailand.

To join the offering or for further information on the day, please contact Alison Moore: email: [amala at petalmoore dot net](mailto:amala@petalmoore.net) telephone: (01442) 865 519

Gardener needed

A space has arisen for a lay resident at Amaravati: if you have gardening skills and an interest to live and practise with the monastic community as site gardener for up to a year or more, please apply to the Amaravati Secretary.

Site caretaker needed

A space may still be available for another lay resident at Amaravati: if you have reasonable maintenance skills and an interest to live and practise with the monastic community as site caretaker for a year or more, please apply to the Amaravati Secretary.

Family events

Booking forms and further information about all family events can be downloaded from www.family.amaravati.org

Amaravati Family Camp presents a 🍷 **Creative Weekend** 🍷 from Dec. 14–16th 🍷 for anybody over 18 🍷
email: [familyevents at amaravati dot org](mailto:familyevents@amaravati.org)

Amaravati lay events 2007

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association:
Events are led by experienced lay teachers. All are welcome.

Days of Practice (DoP) – no need to book
9.45am for 10–5pm (Please bring food to share)

Sat Oct 27th – DoP – Determination
(Alison Moore)

Sat Nov 10th – DoP – Kindness
(Martin Evans)

Sat Dec 1st – DoP – Equanimity
(Nick Carroll)

ALBA Events 2008

January 12th Day of Practice

February	9 th	DoP
March	8 th	DoP
April	11–13 th	Weekend Retreat
May	31 st	DoP
July	11–15 th	5-Day Retreat
August	9 th	DoP
September	6 th	DoP
October	17–19 th	Weekend Retreat
November	1 st	DoP
December	6 th	DoP

Please see: www.buddhacommunity.org

Buddhist Women's Network

is organizing a *Day of Sacred Dance* at Abbots Langley on Nov 18th, from 10–4 pm.

Contact: [jennijepson at yahoo dot co.uk](mailto:jennijepson@yahoo.co.uk)

ARUNA RATANAGIRI

Kathina — Sunday, October 28th

This year's Kathina celebrations at Harnham will be held on 28th of October **starting at 10 am**. For more information about how to join in the offering, please contact the donors, Mr & Mrs Than Lwin on (0125) 742 3744.

Accounts Scrutinizer

The Trustees of Harnham Monastery are looking for a volunteer familiar with charity accounts to scrutinize the Trust's accounts once a year (NB full audit not required). If you are interested, please contact the monastery on (01661) 881 612 or at: www.ratanagiri.org.uk/contact.htm

Retreats 2008

A **women's retreat** will be led by Ajahn Anandabodhi from May 2nd to 5th. For information and booking please contact Kath Jones at: www.ratanagiri.org.uk/Kusala/contact2.htm or by phone on (0770) 762 1717.

A **men's retreat** will take place from the 25th to the 31st of May, led by Ajahn Munindo and Ajahn Abhinando. For information and booking please contact Jim Holt at: [kusalaretreats08 at gmail dot com](mailto:kusalaretreats08@gmail.com) or by phone at the monastery (01661 881 612).

In order to be able to offer the usual mixed **summer retreat** we will still need volunteers to do the cooking. If you're interested to help, please contact the monastery on (01661) 881 612 or: www.ratanagiri.org.uk/Kusala/contact2.htm

CITTAVIVEKA

Siladhara anniversary – Nov. 3rd

Kathina — Sunday, November 4th

25th anniversary celebration of the Nuns' Sangha – Sat. November 3rd – Dhamma Hall, Cittaviveka, from after the meal onwards.
All welcome!

This year's Kathina will be held on November 4th and is being organized by Dr Indra Angunawela, tel: 01202 738 132 and Ramani Yapa, tel: 0208 537 9320
For details, news and more please visit our website: www.cittaviveka.org

HARTRIDGE

Kathina — Sunday, November 18th

All are most welcome to join us for our Kathina, which will be held on Sunday 18th November.

For more information please contact Khun Wasana at: [wasana_hunt at hotmail dot com](mailto:wasana_hunt@hotmail.com), or Khun Nopaporn on 0146 054 938 – or check our new website: www.hartridgemonastery.org

BODHINYANARAMA

News from Wellington:

Our small community has expanded to six with the arrival of Ajahn Uttamo and Ven. Gavesako. This fortunately provides the opportunity for us each to have a six-week retreat during the Rainy Season and still keep the monastery functioning.

A very mild, dry winter has allowed the continuation of forest and landscaping work, for which we have two dedicated lay supporters. This external work together with a harmonious community and generous support allows the continuous nurturing of the 'Garden of Enlightened Knowing'.

WALKING RETREATS IN CRETE

WITH AJAHN KARUNIKO AND NICK SCOTT

April 15th–22nd 2008 – South Coast

April 22nd–29th 2008 – White Mountains

Alternating days of silent meditation and all day challenging walks in beautiful scenery. Morning and evening *pujas*, group Dhamma discussions and occasional reflections from Ajahn Karuniko. For experienced meditators only. Places limited to 16 on each retreat. For more information and to book contact: [Sanghawalks at gmail dot com](mailto:Sanghawalks@gmail.com)

Amaravati Library

Acrylic journal rack

The Amaravati Library would benefit from having a rack for displaying the printed journals and newsletters that are sent to us, preferably made from sheet acrylic and plywood. We can offer the materials and workshop if a supporter can offer the time and skills to make such a thing.
Please contact Caro at the address below.

Computerization

The collection of 10,000 books available at Amaravati for the Sangha and lay visitors is being computerized. Each book must be entered individually to a database, and the project will take some time. If you would like to come to the library and contribute by entering a few books on a regular basis please leave a message for Caro or email her at: [library at amaravati dot org](mailto:library@amaravati.org)

Computing beginners and adepts both welcome.

Much more can be found on the various monastery and Dhamma websites linked at

www.forestsangha.org

CONTACTS AND PRACTICE VENUES

AMARAVATI RETREATS

ENGLAND

Bath	Anne Armitage	(0122) 585 9219
Bedford	David Stubbs	(0123) 472 0892
Berkshire	Anthea West	(0118) 979 8101
Brighton	Sam Halter	(0788) 882 1524
Bristol	Lisa Daix	(0117) 935 0272
Cambridge	Dan Jones	(0122) 324 6257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	(0122) 746 3342
Chislehurst	Jean Nelson	(0122) 854 3491
Chichester	Tony Halter	(0124) 367 2126
Cookham, nr. Maidenhead	Emily Tomalin or David Lillywhite	(0162) 881 0083
Hemel Hempstead Bodhinyana Group:	Chris Ward	(0144) 289 0034
Kendal Fellside Centre, Low Fellside:	Sumedha	(0153) 972 9793
Leeds Area	Daniela Loeb	(0113) 279 1375
	Anne Grimshaw	(0127) 469 1447
Liverpool	Ursula Haeckel	(0151) 427 6668
London Hampstead, 1 Hillside (Rm. 6)	London NW5, (Entrance in Highgate Rd):	
	Caroline Randall	(0208) 348 0537
	Ann Booth	(0207) 485 0505
London Buddhist Society,	58 Eccleston Square, London SW1	(0207) 834 5858
London-Notting Hill	Jeffery Craig	(0207) 221 9330
Leigh-on-sea	Liamanda Webb	(0126) 865 4923
Newcastle	Ian Plagaro-Neill	(0191) 469 2778
Newent-Gloucs.	John Teire	(0153) 182 1902
	email: john.teire at virgin dot net	
Newmarket	Richard & Rosie Pragnell	(0163) 860 3286
	email: rpragnell at gmail dot com	
Norwich	Robert Coggan	(0195) 345 1741
Penzance	Lee	(0173) 676 2135
Portsmouth	Medhavi	(0239) 273 2280
Redruth	Vanessa	(0120) 921 4031
Sheffield	Greg Bradshaw	(0114) 262 1559
	email: greg.bradshaw at btclick dot com	
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati)	(0130) 578 6821
Southampton	Robert Elliot	(0238) 061 2838
Steyning, Sussex	Jayanti	(0190) 381 2130
Stroud	John Groves	(0796) 777 7742
Surrey-Woking	Rocana	(0148) 376 1398
Taunton	Annie Fisher	(0127) 845 7245
Teeside	John Doyle	(0164) 258 7274
Totnes	James Whelan	(0180) 386 5667

OUTSIDE ENGLAND

Co. Clare, Ireland: Sunyata Centre		(+353) 61 367 073
Cork, Ireland	Paddy Boyle	(+353) 214 622 964
Dublin	Rupert Westrup	(+353) 01 280 2832
Edinburgh	Neil Howell	(0131) 226 5044
Glasgow	James Scott	(0141) 637 9731
Machynlleth, Wales	Angela Llewellyn	(0165) 051 1350
Pembrokeshire, S. Wales	Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson	(0123) 982 0790
A Coruna, Spain	David Williams	(+34) (981) 432 718

New group: Newmarket Meditation Group meet in a comfortable retreat centre within the sheltered grounds of a Catholic nunnery. There is a large walled garden ideal for walking meditation. Currently meeting once a month, we're willing to make this fortnightly or weekly if there is interest. Those wishing to participate should telephone Richard or Rosie on 01638 603286 or email [rpragnell at gmail dot com](mailto:rpragnell@gmail.com)

Retreat Schedule 2007/2008

2007 – Remaining Retreats

No.	Date	Duration	Teacher
R11	12–14 October	Weekend	*Ajahn Jayanto
R12	19–21 October	Weekend	*Ajahn Metta
R13	2–6 Nov.	5 Days	*Ajahn Nyanarato
R14	16–25 Nov.	10 Days	*Ajahn Sucitto
R15	7–9 Dec.	Weekend	*Ajahn Anandabodhi
R16	27–1 Jan 2008	6 Days	*Ajahn Vimalo

* Full – waiting list in operation

Retreat Schedule 2008

R1	18–20 April	Weekend	Ajahn Gandhasilo
R2	25–29 April	5 Days	Ajahn Ariyasilo
R3	9–18 May	10 Days	Luang Por Sumedho
R4	23–25 May	Weekend	to be decided
R5	6–15 June	10 Days	to be decided
R6	20–22 June	Weekend	Ajahn Karuniko
R7	4–8 July	5 Days	Ajahn Thanasanti
R8	18–20 July	Weekend	Ajahn Santacitta
R9	1–5 August	5 Days	Ajahn Jayanto
R10	12–24 Sept.	13 Days	** Luang Por Sumedho
R11	3–12 October	10 Days	Ajahn Candasiri
R12	24–28 October	5 Days	Ajahn Anandabodhi
R13	7–16 Nov.	10 Days	Ajahn Sucitto
R14	28–30 Nov.	Weekend	to be decided
R15	12–14 Dec.	Weekend	to be decided
R16	27–1 Jan 2009	6 Days	to be decided

** For experienced meditators – must have done at least one 10-day retreat

General Guidelines

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat. Due to high demand:

- There will be a limit of three retreats per person per year;
- Places for Ajahn Sumedho's retreats will be allocated by lottery at the end of 2007. Priority will be given to people who have not taken part in his retreats during the last two years.

Booking Procedure

Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form, which can be obtained by:

- Downloading from the website;
- Emailing or writing to the Retreat Centre.

Please note that bookings **cannot** be made over the telephone.

Start and Finish Times

Registration is from 16.00 – 19.00 on the first day of the retreat. The orientation talk is at 19.15. Weekend retreats end at 16.00, longer retreats at lunchtime. Attendance is expected for the whole retreat.

Donations

No advance booking fee is required. The Retreat Centre is funded solely through donations. Donations are invited at the end of the retreat.

Contact Information

Retreat Centre, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 3BZ UK

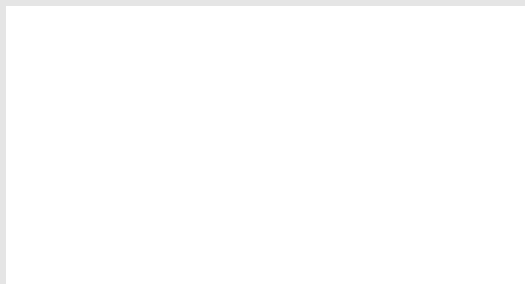
Telephone: +44 (0)1442 843 239

Email: [retreats at amaravati dot org](mailto:retreats@amaravati.org)

Website (for updated information): www.amaravati.org



Forest Sangha Newsletter



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Moon Phase ● HALF ● NEW ● HALF ○ FULL

OCTOBER	4 (Thu)	11 (Thu)	19 (Fri)	26 (Fri)✳
NOVEMBER	3 (Sat)	9 (Fri)	17 (Sat)	24 (Sat)
DECEMBER	2 (Sun)	9 (Sun)	17 (Mon)	24 (Mon)
JANUARY	1 (Tue)	7 (Mon)	15 (Tue)	22 (Tue)

✳ Pavarana Day

DHAMMA PUBLICATIONS

Reprints and translations of Sangha publications are often being proposed for various areas in the world, yet the people involved don't know how to inform others who might be interested to know of such ideas. To this end we aim to add a web page to the Sangha portal website, forestsangha.org, which will show what's happening in the wide realm of new publications proposals and ongoing projects. Please stay tuned ...

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To receive the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* in Thailand, please write to Amaravati.