



✿ Arrow River Forest Hermitage News ✿

President's Report

Hello everyone, and welcome to the latest edition of River Dhamma. I am Winston Loh, the new President of the Board of Directors at Arrow River. Many thanks to Scot Kyle, our past President, who has served faithfully for the past 3 years, and continues to do wonderful things in the Arrow River community.

If you have visited Arrow River, you may have met me at one of Ajahn Punnadhammo's Dhamma talks. For those that haven't met me, allow me to make a short introduction. Seven years ago, I was living in Singapore, and attended a Dhamma talk by Ajahn Brahmavamso. I was struck by the simplicity, and profound wisdom of his teaching. A year later I was living in Perth, Australia, where Ajahn Brahm resides. I listened to many Dhamma talks, and was moved by the Buddha's teachings. The following year, when I returned to my hometown of Thunder Bay, I was delighted to discover the Arrow River community, and I have been involved for the past 5 years or so.

Over these past 5 years, I have been fortunate to receive many teachings from Ajahn Punnadhammo, and have had the opportunity to come to Arrow River for meditation retreats. I have met many wise and kind human beings, who have been an inspiration to me. Many wonderful friendships have been forged.

Arrow River was founded as a place for people to find refuge in the Dhamma, to orient their lives towards Dhamma, in a hectic society. For the past 30 years, it has served this function, and continues to do so, because people continue to feel that this is a worthy and noble purpose. We are all a part of this community, in whatever role we may play in it, meditator, steward, student, lay supporter, board member, monastic, donor. Even if you simply read this newsletter, and some feeling arises in your heart, you are a part of this community.

To the past and present members of this community, and there are so many, my deepest gratitude. Thank you so much for keeping Arrow River Forest Hermitage a place of spiritual refuge for all beings. Thank you for supporting a community where the Dhamma is offered freely, as the Buddha did 2600 years ago. Thank you for supporting a teacher who has helped me and many others so much along the spiritual path.

In this issue of River Dhamma, may I bring to your attention to our library project. Ajahn Punnadhammo feels strongly that it is important to preserve these precious teachings for future generations. We would like to build a library for this purpose, to store these books safely, so that the next generation of the Arrow River community can draw on these resources for their benefit, and the benefit of all beings. If you also feel that this is worthwhile and

noble purpose, please consider making a donation towards this project.

May your life be filled with health and happiness, and opportunity to practice on the path to awakening.

Yours in the Dhamma,
Winston Loh

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Arrow River Forest Hermitage welcomes visitors. Prior notification is necessary if you would like overnight accommodations. Retreats must be scheduled in advance with Ajahn Punnadhammo. Retreatants are required to abide by the 8 precepts. Guests are required to abide by the 5 precepts.

Winter at Arrow River

Ajahn Punnadhammo

By the time you read these words, spring will be in the air, but as I write (in early March) winter is still very much with us. It has been a cold winter in this part of the world, with a moderate amount of snow. But you can learn to love the snow and cold; winter has become my favourite time of year in many ways. There is apprehension in the mind in late fall, but strangely a sense of relief after the first blanket of snow - a sense that "things are back to normal."

A good Dhamma lesson here! The fabrications of the mind often cause much more suffering than the reality of which they are the shadow. It works with pleasure too. When A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh was asked what is "the bestest thing in the whole world?" He answered immediately, "the first taste of honey from a new pot!" But on reflection he corrected that, noticing that there was "something even better; the moment before actually tasting it!" (reference - "The Tao of Pooh")

The silence of the forest on a still winter day is profound, and fosters internal quiet. The air is sharp and clean, and the quality of the light on a clear day is wonderful as the sun reflects off the intense whiteness of the snow. At certain angles, the sun will reflect off the diamond-like points on the surface of the snowpack causing a field to glisten with multiple points of different colours in a northern variant of Indra's Net. The night-sky in winter is so much more intense, the stars showing hard and brilliant in a sky which has had all the haze frozen out.

It is a mistake to think of the winter as lifeless. Indeed, it is only in the winter that one is made aware of the multitude of sentient beings which inhabit the forest, by their tracks in the snow. Several species of birds winter over, and the feeder is crowded every winter morning with blue and grey jays (locally called "whiskey jacks") and chickadees. The last can sometimes be persuaded to take a morsel from your hand. The little red northern squirrel comes too, and has burrowed a tunnel under the hard frozen snow with an entrance right under the feeder.

I wonder if the Buddha had been born in a northern clime, how the metaphors and parables in his teaching would have been different. For instance, "coolness" is always a desirable thing in the Ganges valley but perhaps we can get a bit much of it here! Nibbana is described as cooling, but that meant something different to me when I was in Thailand and it was forty plus in the shade than it does on a January morning here when it might be minus thirty with a howling wind! I recall another Canadian monk, Ajahn Sona, once comparing the realization of Nibbana to being lost in the woods at night in the winter and coming across a warm cabin.

Certainly a climate with strongly marked seasons makes the teaching of impermanence obvious. The idea of rebirth seems natural in a world that takes new life every spring, fertilized by the melting snows of the old year. Karma could be illustrated by the autumn task of preparing the firewood for the coming winter, a metaphor for laying up a store of merit to be enjoyed in a future existence. "What, King Milinda, is the essence of chain-saw? Here is the chain, here the carburetor, here the oil-pump. The name chain-saw is only a conventional designation when these parts are organized in a certain way..."

But wherever and whenever a Buddha arises, the teaching remains the same although the outer wrapping may vary. This is because the Buddha did not invent the Dhamma, he rather uncovered it, "like clearing an over-grown path in the jungle." (Like shoveling the snow off the driveway?) That is the beauty of the Dhamma, its timeless quality - teachings that remain valid for all ages and nations.

This is very striking when one reads the original suttas. The vast cultural difference between ancient India and the modern West seems to matter very little. Beings then, as now, were driven by craving and beset with delusion. The eternal human tragedy of birth, aging and death has not changed. The Four Noble Truths and the Dependent Origination are still fresh and living ideas. Even the narrative sections have a homely truth beyond cultural form. How many times have I read a story from the canon and had the thought, "I know that guy!"

We moderns can get overly prideful because of our technological wizardry. But wisdom is not to be found in gadgets. It is to be found in the quietude of the mind, and that is the same for the ancients as it is for us. I'll finish now, and go throw another log in the fire. □

Arrow River Library Project

Anthea Kyle

The teachings of the Buddha are subtle and can be difficult to penetrate. While different monastic lineages emphasize different approaches to the Dhamma, study and meditation are two important vehicles that help us access insight into the wisdom therein. The layperson relies on the study of texts to delineate the teachings and to describe the subtleties and connections among them. Practitioners know that the Buddha taught in a variety of ways, from simple stories that are easily understood to complex conceptions that are difficult to decode. Study assists us to achieve a more complete comprehension of the Buddha's words. Comprehension allows us to internalize the wisdom so as to improve our practice.

Often, the teachings are described in steps. For example, in the Canki Sutta, the Buddha explains to Bharadvaja that the practices required for the arrival to truth are attained through striving, and that it is the application of will that leads to our striving to arrive at the truth. However, the Buddha points out, without a desire to understand the Dhamma, we do not develop the application of will that leads to striving. Ultimately, the Buddha explains, what is most helpful to develop the desire to apply our will is "accepting the teachings as a result of pondering them" (MN 95, Canki Sutta EE, 168-77). Access to Buddhist texts gives us a bounty of lessons to ponder.

And this brings us to the library project at Arrow River Forest Hermitage. Throughout the years since Arrow River has existed, and especially since 1995 when Ajahn Punnadhammo returned to Canada from Thailand, the Hermitage has been collecting books. And more books ... in fact, over 600 volumes! They are currently being housed in a variety of locations: Ajahn's cabin, the Pavilion, Ridge House kuti, and a storage shed. The active community at Arrow River would like to build a modest home where we could gather and display the canons, discourses, commentaries, pamphlets and videos that we have now and continue to acquire.

A library would be a beautiful addition to the Hermitage, providing not only a repository for the current collection, but also a room where visitors could read, study and contemplate the teachings of the Buddha. With support from the wider community, a library could become a reality. This may be the very thing you have been looking for, and you can direct dana to the library by designating your wish to donate to this worthy project. Details of how to give your support can be found on the Arrow River website.

The resident monk at Arrow River Forest Hermitage is Ajahn Punnadhammo, whose name in Pali means "full of the Dhamma". The Arrow River lay community is fortunate to have a teacher who is skilled in both study and meditation, and a library would complement the teaching and meditation activities that are his ongoing work. To truly penetrate the Dhamma, we strive to understand its truth in all its subtlety. A library would allow access to texts that support the practices that lead to penetration of the wisdom of what the Buddha taught. □



Reader by Nicholas Blicharski

Winter Retreat 2009

James Arthur

From January 10 to 17, 2009, four retreatants spent what might have been the coldest week of winter at Arrow River Forest Hermitage. At this time of year it is still dark during the walk to the sala for morning puja at 7:00 am and dark once again at 6:00 pm. Some mornings the moon illuminated the way through the bush and at night it gave a ghostly blue cast to the snow. The temperature rose to about -22°C on the coldest days, making for a marked contrast between the photos of walking meditation in Thailand and the corresponding practice in Northwestern Ontario.

Mornings consisted of morning puja, individual and group discussions, the meal and mindfulness work. Afternoons saw the daily Dhamma talks, walking and sitting meditation and readings by retreatants. Of course, Ajahn Punnadhammo maintained the central focus of the retreat through his daily Dhamma talk on the Transcendental Dependent Origination. (Go to: <http://www.arrowriver.ca/printfiles/deporigp.html> for an outline.) While the Specific Dependent Origination expands on the first and second Noble Truths, the Transcendental Dependent Origination delineates the series of steps toward liberation and the end to all suffering and defilement. Ajahn's depth of understanding and ability to impart his knowledge helped us grasp the concepts and connect them to our specific experiences. Similarly, his discussion and suggestions provided timely encouragement and guidance for individuals' practice and development.



Mask by Nicholas Blicharski

The balance between specific instruction, meditation and group and individual discussion offered an ideal opportunity for spiritual growth and practice. The individual readings, reflecting the wide range of the retreatants' backgrounds and experience, helped us appreciate different expressions of the Dhamma and supported our ability to adjust our lives.

The utter quiet, calm and peace of Arrow River Forest Hermitage, Ajahn Punnadhammo's knowledge and guidance, supplemented by Esko's service as Acting Steward, gave us the opportunity for sustained focus on our practice. The smooth emergence of a sense of community encourages us to return here in the future and to recommend retreats at Arrow River Forest Hermitage. □



Arrow River Updates



Events Calendar 2009

Every Saturday starting April 4	April 29-May 18	May 9	June 12-14	July	August 29,30	Fall 2009	Winter 2010
Dhamma Talk at 7pm at Arrow River	Ajahn away at IMS. No Dhamma talks	Vesak Celebration	Retreat weekend	Day of Mindfulness Date TBA	Work retreat weekend	Series of monthly Dhamma talks in Thunder Bay Dates TBA	Book Study Dates TBA
		May 23, 24			August 30		
		Work retreat weekend			Annual General Meeting		

~~~~~ Membership and By-Laws ~~~~~

The Board of Directors received a number of applications in response to our call for applications for membership last fall. The applications were approved and membership cards for this year are being prepared for sending out to all members. Also, the board has formed a committee to review the By-Laws of Arrow River Forest Hermitage.

Research was undertaken and the committee reviewed the By-Laws of Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery, Abhayagiri Monastic Foundation and Tisarana, Buddhist Monastery. The committee has prepared a draft amended By-Law which will be considered by the board this spring. After final approval by the Board, the amended By-Laws will be submitted for ratification by the members at the annual meeting later in the year.

~~~~~ New EMAIL Address ~~~~~

Riverdhamma newsletter has a new email address

Riverdhamma@gmail.com

Report from the Treasurer:

Another year has come and gone, and a new one is underway. Spring is challenging winter to finally let go of its hold. With spring comes a time of change and growth as animals come out of hibernation, young are born, and plants start to grow.

Arrow River Forest Hermitage also has its challenges and continues to grow.

One challenge is trying to keep its original rustic nature. Another is maintaining the Buddhist tradition of not charging for teaching or meditation retreats. The biggest challenge as a registered charity is whether or not there will be enough funds to meet expenses each month.

In 2008 Sitavana Birken Forest Monastery generously donated an Astro van. The lay community was generous in the giving of donations, mostly as money, some as goods, or volunteering of time, and sharing of knowledge or skills. Each individual gives for a variety of reasons: as a thank you for teachings given by Ajahn Punnadhammo at a talk or meditation retreat, in memory of a loved one no longer with us, or because they believe in the spirit and tradition of Buddhism.

Monetary donations received by ARFH help to cover the costs of supporting the monastic community and those that come to learn during a meditation retreat. Such expenses include: groceries and supplies, fuel (propane, gas), firewood, building maintenance and the running of the van. ARFH continues to receive funds for the building of a library. Today ARFH has \$1,950 towards this worthy project. Once the library has been completed, a simple plaque with the names of all those who helped to make the library a

reality will be displayed.

Dollars spent on charitable programs are at 95% of donations received. Management and administration costs are at 5% - due to the volunteer work by our local community, the board of directors and the steward(s).

On behalf of Arrow River Forest Hermitage I would like to thank the members of our lay community for their continued support. While continuing on our current path, we too can grow as we

meet the challenges and changes presented with mindfulness, humility and generosity.

May you be well; May you be happy; May you be free of suffering. □



Free by Nicholas Blicharski

Any questions regarding donations, tax receipts and charitable status for ARFH can be sent to: treasurer@arrowriver.ca

Canadian residents that make a donation of \$10.00 or more will be sent a charitable tax receipt. Include your email address, I will send your receipt electronically.

Arrow River Forest Hermitage will re-allocate all unused donated funds received for specific projects to other charitable programs or activities.

Support for ARFH can be mailed to:

Arrow River Forest Hermitage - Treasurer
c/o Lori Smetaniuk
2-19 Skeen's Lane
Etobicoke ON M8W 4Z5

Check out Canada Revenue Agency's web site "Charities and Giving" for information on charities and giving.

<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/chrts/menu-eng.html>