



RIVER DHAMMA

✿ Arrow River Forest Hermitage News ✿ Vol. 4 No. 1

Winter 2007/2550

President's Address

The very tendency to dissect the whole is a characteristic of the human mind. There is only one harmonious, whole universe, but we love to pull things apart and set them upon opposing poles: yin and yang; male and female; good and evil, ad infinitum. This process of polarizing is not only artificial but the energy required to maintain things in their opposite corners is a place of pain.

One of the Buddha's central teachings is that the sacred or holy spiritual path is that of The Middle Way. The bodhisatta, as he was called before he reached his enlightenment, was born into fair luxury. On his excursions from the palace he witnessed four human conditions: old age, the suffering of sickness and the sight of a corpse. The fourth experience, though, a sage dressed in rags, was a life to which he was naturally attracted. It seems that Siddhartha Gautama knew that torpor in the lap of luxury would be a fetter to a lower consciousness, and, as history proved, he was right.

So the primary interpretation of the Middle Way, then, should be viewed between the life of luxury (one of immersion in the sensual delights) and the extreme ascetic practices which the bodhisatta pursued upon departure from domestic life (one of an attempted outright denial of the human body). The bowl of rice milk which Siddhartha accepted from a young country girl, which has been called the greatest gift ever given, was the actual beginning of the discovery of this Middle Way.

There are endless nuances, though, to the balancing act that is the Middle Way lived through experience. Attachment and aversion are another way to express what the Buddha discovered in his subtle truth: clinging to what feels good and avoiding what doesn't. Again each form of attention requires a mode of energy.

But establishing citta or equanimity is an antidote to the swing of the pendulum either way. Through the practice of meditation, mindfulness and wisdom, the pendulum of desire may settle at the centre. Here is where one may discover the perception of the heart. Leading with the heart, while treading one's path, is the practice of developing inner peace and sympathetic joy.

The establishment of compassion firmly in one's own heart will allow the love, which is effortless understanding, to flow outward and unbounded to the world. The Middle Way between self and other is established when we view the self in the other. Practice becomes mastery.

The heart is the doorway to the spirit and the spirit is the pipeline to Nibbana. An awareness of the heart is the Middle way between flesh and spirit. May you be well and happy.

Scot Kyle.

Table of Contents

President's Address	1
Visit to Amaravati Monastery.....	2
Metamorphoses of the River.....	3
Knack.....	4
Donations	5

Arrow River Forest Hermitage
Theravada Buddhist Monastery
Box 2, RR 7, Site 7
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 5V5 Canada
Telephone: 647-477-5919
Email: arfh@xplornet.com
Web: <http://my.tbaytel.net/arfh/>
Abbot: Ajahn Punnadhammo
Newsletter Email:
riverdhamma@sympatico.ca

Board of Directors:
Scot Kyle: President
Email: scotkyle@hotmail.com
Winston Loh: Vice President
Ian Moores: Treasurer
Lori Smetaniuk: Secretary
Tony Carfagnini: Director
Anthea Kyle: Director
Tim Alexander: Fundraising Coordinator

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.

A Visit to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery Hemel Hampstead, England

by Lori Smetaniuk

It's October 4, 2006, the cab pulls through the gates at Amaravati, the driver stops the car, I get out and retrieve my backpack. As I stand and turn around, looking at my surroundings for the next 2½ weeks, the first thing that hits me is that there is not a person to be seen. The only sounds are a slight breeze through the trees and a bird singing in the distance. Compared to the first part of my month long visit to England it was peace and quiet, a chance to relax and unwind after a whirlwind tour of England.

I arrived during the last week of the rains retreat. It is a quiet week and most of those in residence are doing a week of meditation and reflection.

In the beginning I found the rules to be somewhat restrictive. The routine structured and rather formal. Other than being able to use the temple or attending to personal matters you can't do anything without going through the right people. However, after a couple of days, I realized that the rules are not that much different from Arrow River Forest Hermitage. Because of the number of people living at Amaravati, the rules are just more obvious and there are just more people to go through (unlike just asking our one and only monk and abbot).

There are about 70 people in residence at Amaravati (including monastics and lay guests). On weekends it is not unusual to have 150 people show up for the meal. The thing that amazed me the most was dana. They buy virtually no food or supplies, it is all given freely. The Thai and Sri Lankan supporters come to visit the monastery and visit with the monastics. Lay supporters come into the sala (dining hall) bringing bags and bags of food and supplies, which are lined up in front of the shrine. Many will stay for part of the afternoon, just walking the grounds or sitting in the temple. The children can go into the rainbow room and paint or do other arts and crafts.

The main meal is very formal, dana is officially offered to the monastery, merit is requested and prayers are said. Two monks accept the offering of the meal on behalf of all monastics. Once offered, the monastics go up to the server in order of ordination. The monks go first, then the nuns, samanera and lastly the anagarikas (males before females). Only after the meal is formally relinquished can the lay guests go and get their meal.

On observance days, one of the senior monks sits in front of the shrine, with a fan in front of him. An appointed lay follower will ask for refuge and precepts in Pali. Anyone is welcome to join in. Some of the lay followers follow the tradition

of wearing white.

Most afternoons I would spend doing a couple of rounds of sitting meditation in the temple. Surprisingly, the temple was least busy place in the afternoons. Most days there would be at most 6 of us doing sitting meditation. Many times after the hour was up I would just continue to sit (not in meditation) enjoying the quiet and solitude. There was something about being in the temple that was calming, peaceful, relaxing, and sublime with a sense that I would soon find my way home.

At teatime, you meet and get to know most of the lay guests. Some people were there to follow a dream of becoming a member of the monastic community, others were there just to check out the place because they found the website. You may meet another lay-guest and find you just click, becoming instant friends. It's a great pleasure to meet new people, people from all over the world.

On their first visit, lay guests generally stay for 4 - 7 days, so the nature of impermanence is in the forefront. One thing I came to understand while staying at Amaravati is that it's ok to enjoy experiences and pleasures. It's also ok to feel a sense of loss or sadness when newfound friends are parted. The trick is not to cling to or become attached to the pleasure or the sense of loss, just enjoy the experience for what it is, for as long as it is. The experience then becomes just a moment in time; the feelings that arise are inevitable and are just temporary guests that will eventually continue on their way. They are impermanent. Just as all things are impermanent. By knowing and understanding this, I believe that letting go is no longer the goal; thoughts, ideas, feelings and aversions will just pass away on their own accord.

All in all, my stay at Amaravati was very enjoyable and if conditions are ripe, I will go back for a longer stay at some point in the future. I'm sure that other insights from my visit to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery will come to mind as I continue to follow the precepts, continue my meditation practice and serve our hermitage in anyway that I can.

Lastly, for anyone thinking of visiting a Buddhist Monastery I would highly encourage you to go. It is definitely a worthwhile and fruitful path on the journey through samsara.

Metta, Lori



Metamorphoses of The River

by Paramito Samenera

One of the reasons why I enjoy staying at Ridge House is the time spent on the way to the Pavilion. I usually use the trail along the river because it gives me an opportunity to see the life of the river, its changes and effects on the environment around it. In the winter time it is frozen. On first sight it seems that it is lifeless. Covered by ice and snow, without movement, but a watchful eye can notice new cracks forming on the ice or a little movement of the ice mass. To become more familiar I find a little courage to enter on and spend some time looking around. This way it is possible to hear the sounds of flowing water under the ice, or to see how water from an inflow brook finds its way onto the top and stacks new layers of ice, or to discover a place where rising ice overflows the bank each day more and more and causes ice to flood an area of forest.

Walking downstream I watch the banks allowing the mind to imagine a flowing river in summer time. The number of snow dunes are visible in the corners. Walking upstream settles the mind into watching the surrounding areas, hills, cliffs, clearings in the forest. On the surface of the snow are a number of tracks of animals. Using the Book of Animal Tracks, (which Ajahn provided me) I can recognize the track of moose, wolf, fox and rabbit. Coming back, passing through the cascade is always a little adventure.

The quick stream doesn't allow the river to make the ice thick enough. The safe route goes along the farther bank and there I can cross shortly before the waterfall. With the coming warm spring days the ice continually loses solidity. Then the narrow stream of water can find its way through the ice in the middle. It is a slow and quiet movement. With this opportunity to approach and watch, one can stay quietly with the still flowing water. In some places the water soaks onto the surface.

During the last two days that I have visited the river, a strong stream has broken through the ice in the cascade. Its sound has brought new atmosphere into the Pavilion. It seems that the chance to see the river from the surface might only last now for a couple more days. I have been at Arrow River more than two months. The simplicity of life, Ajahn's support, the quietness of the environment and the support of lay friends helped me to settle down easily, which I am thankful for. I really enjoy cultivating the Dhamma in this place.



Knack

by Ajahn Punnadhammo

Learning to meditate effectively is a lot like learning anything else; there are technical aspects that can be learnt from listening or reading, but there is also a critical element best described as a knack, that perhaps can be pointed to, but in the end can be learnt only the hard way, by repeated trial and error.

One of the most important of these is learning not to take your mental states seriously. This is difficult for most of us to get a handle on. Theoretically, we may know that the contents of mind are impermanent, empty, without substance. And yet, they hurt. How can something as insubstantial as a mental state cause suffering? Certainly, we know that they do. How much human misery takes the form of depression, anxiety, fear, grief and distress? The suffering is real, even if its referent is not!

The answer is found in the dependent origination; which states in part, because of craving, clinging, because of clinging, becoming. The initial energy of craving (tanha, thirst) is a rudimentary drive of the mind towards a desired object, or away from an undesired one. In itself, it is pregnant with suffering, the misery of longing. But it is a more or less unformed and primitive drive. If seen clearly with insight, at first arising, it is not so hard to dismiss.

If allowed to mature, it blossoms into clinging (upadana) which is much stickier. It is the whole mental complex surrounding a desire (or an aversion) and is point at which a self-concept really comes into play. Craving is a raw wanting, but clinging means that "I want" and in this way it matures into becoming (bhava) and leads on to birth, death, and this whole mass of suffering.

As long as the mind remains in samsara, craving will arise. It is the natural condition of the unliberated consciousness to be always in a state of want. At it's most primordial form it is the simple impulse of consciousness to take an object, a dynamic that can be observed in the restlessness of "monkey-mind." This primitive dynamic expresses itself at another level as the craving for particular objects of the senses, and when this complicates itself into a "project" we have arrived at full-blown clinging and inevitably tumble along into various states of misery.

The knack that has to be discovered here is principally one of attitude. You cannot shut off the flow of craving by force of will, or at least not for long. The trick is not to believe in it. This is easier said than done, because many mental states seem important; emotionally charged memories, or anxieties and fears for the future. However, even in such cases where there may be a "real-world" referent (whatever that actually means) the mental state itself, in its own nature, is utterly void and without substance. Nothing to see here folks, move along.

When a mental state arises, and is seen with clear insight, it is known as just an object of consciousness; without essential reality, ownerless, powerless, void. A shadow-play of nothingness that came from nowhere and goes instantly back where it came from. Seen with clarity, it has absolutely no power to distract the mind or cause pain.

On the other hand, if it is grasped unskillfully, and given an ersatz reality then it will take the mind for a ride. The concept, memory or speculation will spin an increasingly complicated web of supporting concepts and the mind will be lost for shorter or longer period. Unable to see the void nature of the object, the mind loses the idea of its own void nature and becomes centred on a self-structure; which is how suffering comes to be.

Whatever arises in the mind should be known as just that; not me, not mine, ownerless, alien, void, insubstantial and transient. Don't take it seriously, don't make it into an issue. As said above, it's primarily a question of attitude. When assorted objects and emotional states arise in the course of meditation, don't fall into the trap of seeing them as "my issues; stuff I need to work on." Better to see them as irrelevant noise, static or spam.

But even better is to cultivate the pure choiceless awareness where there are no distractions; there are just pure objects arising in crystal awareness (and all objects seen this way are pure.) Each mental object is the momentary object of penetrating awareness, and none become the seed for the further becoming.

Donations

Donations can be sent to the treasurer at the following address: **ARFH Treasurer, Ian Moores**

#105 - 805 College Street

Toronto Ont M6G 1C9 Canada

IMPORTANT ▶ All cheques should be payable to:
Arrow River Forest Hermitage.



[spoken by the Buddha about his enlightenment] I considered:
This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and
hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by
mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise...it is
hard to see this truth, namely the stilling of all formations, the
relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dis-
passion, cessation, Nibbana.
(Majjhima 26, 19, Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)