



RIVER DHAMMA

✿ Arrow River Forest Hermitage News ✿

Winter 2010/2553

President's Address

Welcome everyone, to the latest edition of River Dhamma. It has been a busy year for the Arrow River community, with many retreatants coming to practice, and Ajahn traveling to other centers to give teachings and lead retreats. We have also kept Ajahn busy in Thunder Bay with a book study group, and having him give talks in the city.

Anthea Kyle, a member of the Board of Directors for many years has stepped down and decided to take a break from meetings this year. We are very grateful for her energy and commitment, and she continues to be an important part of our spiritual community.

We feel thankful that we are able to continue as a spiritual center, with the help and good wishes of many beings.

In this issue I would like to give special attention to the role of the steward at Arrow River. The Buddha set up the monastic system in such a way that the monks and nuns are directly dependent on the laity for their daily needs. The monastic community cannot exist without the support of the lay community. At Arrow River we depend on stewards to make and offer the daily meal to Ajahn Punnadhammo, and take care of his other needs as they arise. Our stewards not only take care of Ajahn Punnadhammo, they make the meal for the other residents and retreatants at Arrow River, they help in other chores and maintenance, and shopping and laundry once a week! The role of steward is crucial to the operation of the Hermitage.

The position of steward is voluntary (as are all positions at Arrow River!), and we have been fortunate to have had consistent volunteers for this position over the years. We have had men and women of all ages and backgrounds from all over North America, and as far away as Scotland! The steward's role is so integral to the daily routine at Arrow River, and our community is quite small. Every steward that comes makes a significant impact on our community, and that is felt even long after they leave Arrow River.

In particular I would like to acknowledge Lucas, who filled this role skillfully with care and attention to detail. He was steward at Arrow River for one and a half years, and left us in April of this year. We wish him all the best. I would also like to gratefully acknowledge Esko Parvainen, a long term resident of Arrow River. He came to Arrow River in 2003 as steward, and has stayed ever since, helping daily with many building and maintenance projects. The duties of steward have

often fallen on his shoulders when volunteers have been scarce. Much gratitude to past stewards, and to Eugene, our current steward. Without you Arrow River would not be able to exist. May your good merit bring you happiness and wisdom on the path to awakening.

Anyone interested in learning more about stewardship can email us or go to the Visitor's page on the website.

Yours in the Dhamma

Winston Loh

Table of Contents

President's Address	1
Tisarana Monastery.....	2
Making Decisions.....	3
Winter Book Study.....	4
May Work Project.....	5
Support.....	6

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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.

First Bhikkhu Ordination at Tisarana Monastery

On Oct. 31, 2009, I had the privilege of attending the first bhikkhu ordination at Tisarana monastery (near Ottawa.) This was also the first ordination in the Ajahn Chah Forest tradition in Ontario. An ordination is always an inspiring ceremony. It is a potent reminder of the continuity of tradition. The new monk, Bhikkhu Sumangalo, was ordained by the sangha with Ajahn Viradhammo serving as upphajhaya (the monk conferring ordination). This represents the latest in a connected series. Ajahn Viradhammo was himself ordained by a sangha with Ajahn Chah serving as upphajhaya, and he in turn was ordained by another sangha and another upphajhaya in a direct line of transmission all the way back to the Buddha in ancient India.

A very human and direct transmission; the monks conducting the ceremony sit within a defined boundary (the sima) within arm's length of each other (hatthapassa.) An unbroken human chain beginning in the ancient Ganges valley and forging it's latest link in an old barn in Perth County.

This sense of tradition and continuity has always seemed to me to be the greatest strength of the Theravada school. We are a very conservative lot, we still dress in the fashion of the early Iron Age, not yet adopting such new fangled innovations as trousers. There is a sense of being the custodians of a very precious heirloom; the Dhamma and Vinaya of the Lord Buddha. There are adaptations to new technologies, different climates and cultures, but these are taken on cautiously and with a strong sense of preserving the heritage.

The core of the tradition is the teaching of the Buddha, preserved in the Pali Canon. This literature is itself an impressive instance of continuity; few collections of writing of such high antiquity have been so well preserved. And the teachings remain relevant and fresh to modern students. We recognize the characters in the stories; the psychological insights ring true; the teachings still work.

Here at the Arrow River Forest Hermitage we are also doing what we can to preserve and transmit the teachings for the benefit of present and future generations. What is needed at this stage of our development is a structure to house our library, including the translations of the canon, to make them accessible to visitors and students. We have made plans for a suitable structure with a modest budget, but we still need to raise the funds. If you would like to help in this task, you can make a donation to our library fund. This will be a meritorious deed, helping to preserve the precious legacy of Dhamma for future times.

Punnadhammo Bhikkhu

www.arrowriver.ca/library/library.html

<http://bhikkhublog.blogspot.com/>

Making Decisions According to Dhamma *Ajahn Punnadhammo*

The Buddha taught Dhamma not as a speculative philosophical system but as a practical set of tools for living, with the purpose of making an end of suffering. The development of spiritual health through meditation is a central part of that, but not the whole. The tools given by the Buddha are also very immediately useful in daily living.

For example, we are all faced by countless choices of both great and small consequence. The skillful way to make decisions, according to the Buddha, is to examine the mind and make certain the decision comes from a wholesome place and not otherwise.

To be specific, when contemplating a fork in the road of life the decision will be unskillful, that is, moving toward greater suffering, if it is based on greed, anger, fear or delusion. It will be skillful, that is moving towards happiness, if it is based on generosity, compassion, courage and wisdom.

Greed is the desire for more and more without restraint. It is impossible to satisfy the greedy mind; having acquired its desired object it very quickly becomes restless and dissatisfied, and soon begins seeking for something else, or something more. This is not a recipe for happiness. On the other hand, contentment is peaceful. It has been called "the wish-fulfilling gem" because when a person is content, she already has all her wishes fulfilled.

Generosity leads to the happiness of one's self and others. Small acts of kindness and consideration go a long way to brighten the day of both the giver and the receiver. And when considering the role of generosity in making decisions, don't forget to be generous toward yourself as well! It is a perverse form of egotism to consider oneself less deserving than others.

Anger is a poison, it never helps the situation. Someone into competitive martial arts once told me that one of the "cheap tricks" a contestant might use is to try and get the opponent angry, so that he makes mistakes. Think about that, even in a situation where warrior skills are required, anger only makes you less effective! Beware especially of so-called justified anger. This is only the rationalization of defilement.

Compassion and loving-kindness open the heart and make for a spacious mind. Decisions made from this space will further everyone's happiness. Again, remember to be compassionate toward yourself. Acting from compassion instead of resentment and anger definitely does not mean allowing yourself to be a victim. A difficult situation can always be handled best with clarity and compassion, even when one must firmly stand up for oneself.

Fear is a very debilitating condition. It makes any kind of rational response impossible. Fear only exists when the delusion of self exists; the arahant is fearless because he understands there is no "me" or "mine" to defend. Decisions made from a place of fearfulness will be constricting; they will lead to greater suffering.

Courage comes from seeing, to whatever degree, through the illusions of "me" and "mine." It is liberating and spacious. It is impossible in this world to stop the inevitable process of change. The trick is not in finding greater security, but in making peace with insecurity.

Delusion is a tricky one to see through, because the deluded mind isn't thinking straight, by definition! A good first step is to stop taking our views and opinions so seriously. It is not that we shouldn't have opinions, like a tree-stump, but that we should hold our opinions lightly; being humble enough to always remember that we might be wrong.

Wisdom is seeing things in their true natures, as they actually are. One definition of this in Buddhism is seeing things according to the three characteristics of unsatisfactoriness, impermanence and not-self (or emptiness.) Seeing things in the opposite way is called an hallucination. Just like the old bumper sticker, "I brake for hallucinations," wouldn't make for a safe driver, decisions made on the basis of unreality are bound to come to grief. Wisdom comes little by little with long practice of looking at things dispassionately.

These simple rules can be applied in any situation where a decision must be made. And when we make a mistake, and suffer the consequences of a bad decision we can still learn from it by considering the state of mind that led to that choice.

Invitation to the Winter Book Study “Buddhism and ...”

In Chapter 14 of Rita M. Gross' *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, the author states “a feminist interpreter of Buddhism could make a strong case that the core of the tradition is without gender bias” (p 210). Interpretations of the teachings as they apply to practice within the Sangha appear, from a feminist perspective at least, to contradict the non-sexist spirit found in Buddha's words. As Gross puts it, “Despite a strong basis for gender equality in key Buddhist teachings, Buddhism's record on gender equality is not significantly better than that of any other religion” (p. 210).

She goes on to look back at past practices in a patriarchal Buddhist structure, to identify present problems for women who wish to practice Buddhism within its current structure, and to look forward to how Buddhist practices will naturally evolve (with a shift in perspective) to be more androgynous in orientation. The manner in which this will happen, and whether Buddhism must embrace feminist principles to continue to flourish in the West are interesting side trips that Gross takes the reader on.

If you think you would enjoy reading and discussing an article such as this one by Rita M. Gross, you might consider joining the Arrow River Book Study this winter. It is going to begin the first week of February (day and time to be determined) and will continue for either six or eight weeks at a location in Thunder Bay. This year, we are trying something new as we are developing an anthology of articles about current topics as they relate to Buddhist teachings and practice. Ajahn Punnadhammo will attend and lead the discussion, but lay people will present the articles they have chosen, looking to Ajahn to “fill in” with authoritative information on the Dhamma (teachings) and Vinaya (rules).

So far, we have thought to include writings about Buddhism and feminism, Buddhism and the environment, Buddhism and political activism, and Buddhism and health. However, nothing is settled yet, so if you have ideas, they are welcome. Also, if you would like to participate in the Book Study, please get in touch with Anthea Kyle at anthea.kyle@lakeheadu.ca to indicate the level of your involvement.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

If you would like to contribute your time and expertise to the Arrow River Community, please consider acting as Steward's Relief for a day.

The duties involve preparing and presenting the daily meal and cleaning the kitchen after the meal. No particular culinary flashiness is required – just a healthy meal served with respect. Interested

Please email Anthea Kyle at anthea.kyle@lakeheadu.ca

May 2009 Weekend Work Project - new roof for the log cabin



Ways to Support Arrow River Forest Hermitage

www.arrowriver.ca

A charitable tax receipt will be sent to Canadian residents making a donation of \$10.00 or more

Donate by cheque

payable to
Arrow River Forest Hermitage

(preferred for non-Canadian residents)

Arrow River Forest Hermitage
c/o Lori Smetaniuk
272 Townsend Drive
Breslau ON N0B 1M0
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Donate on Line

Use the CanadaHelps.org
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Note: receipts will be sent
direct from CanadaHelps.org

Donate Goods

Check the wish list on the
website

Note: to receive a tax receipt,
proof of market value must
accompany goods.

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

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

Canada Revenue Agency's - "Charities and Giving": <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/chrts/menu-eng.html>
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