



River Dhamma



News & Articles From the Arrow River Forest Hermitage Community

President's Message

Spring Issue 2011/2554

Dear Friends of Arrow River:

Thank you for reading the latest edition of River Dhamma. I am currently writing this on my holidays in Southeast Asia, thanks to the wonders of technology. Being away from home often brings up feelings of appreciation for our community at home, and this is definitely the case for me. So wherever in the world you may be, thank you for being part of the Arrow River community.

Winter at Arrow River is peaceful, quiet (you don't hear the waterfalls!), and an ideal time for retreat. I am happy to report that many folks have been taking the opportunity for practice at Arrow River this winter, and we have had quite a bit of help with stewarding as well. Thanks especially to John, who



appeared suddenly in Thunder Bay just as a steward was required.

Winter is also a time for study for the lay community in Thunder Bay, and Ajahn led us in our 6th annual winter book study. This year we discussed select readings from different Thai forest masters. Many thanks to Ajahn, and Anthea Kyle for organizing. Ajahn also recently led a day long meditation workshop, which was well received by a packed hall of meditators!

Last summer Ajahn led a group week long retreat at Arrow River. We are considering doing that again. We haven't set a date, so if you would like to attend, let us know what dates might work for you, and we will try to set a date which will work for most people.

Please enjoy our latest newsletter.

Yours in the Dhamma,

Winston Loh

New Editor's Message: The Path With Heart

My most humble greetings to all River Dhamma readers, Arrow River community members and supporters.

It an honor to serve as the next editor for our community's newsletter. Our sincere thanks to Giovanni and Marianne for their

dedication to River Dhamma's publication during their years of service.

Since moving to Thunder Bay 5 years ago to study business, I have found both physical and mental refuge in the Arrow River community and Ajahn Punnadhammo's relating of the

Buddha's teachings.

This issue's theme, The Path With Heart, was inspired by one of the winter book study sessions. I hope it will shine a light for you, as it did for me, in learning the 'Middle Way'. Enjoy!

-Hugh Mullally

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Words From Our Treasurer

Lori Smetaniuk

Last year, Canadian registered charities were finally starting to feel the trickle down effect of layoffs and job losses from 2009. As a result, in October 2010, Arrow River Forest Hermitage sent out a letter inviting our members and friends to support ARFH with a donation.

On behalf of the Arrow River Forest Heritage community, I thank you all. The response to our invitation was truly amazing. As of December 31, 2010, ARFH supporters from across Canada and the United States have donated just over \$14,600.00. This exceeded the amount needed to close out 2010. As ARFH does not receive funds from any government program and depends solely on donations, the generosity of our supporters has allowed us to continue forward into 2011.

"The Economy of Gifts" by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

According to the Buddhist monastic code, monks and nuns are not allowed to accept money or even to engage in barter or trade with lay people. They live entirely in an economy of gifts. Lay supporters provide gifts of material requisites for the monastics, while the monastics provide their supporters with the gift of the teaching. Ideally — and to a great extent in actual practice — this is an exchange that comes from the heart, something totally voluntary. There are many stories in the texts that emphasize the point that returns in this economy — it might also be called an economy of merit — depend not on the material value of the object given, but on the purity of heart of the

Many of our supporters consider ARFH to be a very special place. Some have been able to spend time at the hermitage for meditation retreats and teachings, attend in-town book study and talks. Still others have been able to listen to Ajahn Punnadhammo when he goes to other communities to teach the lessons of the Buddha.

Besides the cost of running the Hermitage, ARFH is continuing to raise money for the Learning Center, which will house a library and meeting/study area. Initial estimated cost of this project was set at \$20,000. Currently, we have collected \$6,600.00 from talks and designated donations for this project.

donor and recipient. You give what is appropriate to the occasion and to your means, when and wherever your heart feels inspired. For the monastics, this means that you teach, out of compassion, what should be taught, regardless of whether it will sell. For the laity, this means that you give what you have to spare and feel inclined to share. There is no price for the teachings, nor even a "suggested donation." Anyone who regards the act of teaching or the act of giving requisites as a repayment for a particular favor is ridiculed as mercenary. Instead, you give because giving is good for the heart and because the survival of the



We Thank You For Your Generosity!

"There is no price for the teachings, nor even a 'suggested donation'... Giving is good for the heart."

Dhamma as a living principle depends on daily acts of generosity.

RD

Submitted by Lori Smetaniuk

Source:

Access to Insight, 5 June 2010

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/economy.html>.

For information on donating to ARFH, see details on page 6.

Advisory: Dhamma Talk Times Changing With Season

This is a kind reminder to those who visit the Arrow River Forest Hermitage for weekly Dhamma Talks of our upcoming schedule:

- *The current Sunday 2:00pm time for Dhamma Talk will continue up to and including April 17th;*
- *There will be no Dhamma Talk April 23-24 due to Ajahn travelling;*
- *Summer schedule will begin April 30th. Dhamma Talks will be at 7:00pm on Saturdays until further notice in the fall;*
- *No Dhamma Talk scheduled for May 7-8, due to Ajahn travelling.*
- *For directions, see our website, www.arrowriver.ca/contact.html*
- *Sharing a ride is encouraged and carpooling from Thunder Bay can be arranged, if enough notice is given.*

Please drive carefully to and from the hermitage, as there is an abundance of wildlife active in the area, especially in the spring.

Winter Book Study, 2011

Anthea Kyle

Every Tuesday evening, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m., from February 1 to March 8, the Arrow River Forest Book Study was held at the Brodie Street Library. A dedicated group studied and discussed selected works of five Thai Forest Masters. Beginning with Ajahn Mun, we proceeded to read teachings of Ajahns Chah, Maha Boowa, Lee and Buddhadasa. Different group members led the discussions, presenting articles, pictures and videos, which made for interesting dialogue.

Thank you to Ajahn Punnadhammo, who provided commentary that helped us to gain perspective on how these masters fit into the body of Theravada teachings. Special thanks also to Mani and Lak Rappon who helped us with Thai pronunciation

(e.g., Mun rhymes with “fun”, not “June”) and brought in some very interesting historical photographs of the Thai masters.

Thank you also to the presenters: Scot Kyle, Darlene Barrette, Mani and Lak Rappon, Giovanni and Marianne De Crescenzo, and Winston Loh. Preparing and presenting the material is rewarding for all and group members appreciated the extra effort of these individuals. The candied ginger and chocolate was welcome too!

Although it was chosen last year, the topic of this year’s study, Thai Forest Masters, turned out to be timely. Luang Ta Maha Boowa shed his body on January 30th and the funeral was held on March 3rd; the two events

happened to occur at the beginning and the end of the group’s time together.

We’re still deciding on next year’s topic, resources and location for the 2012 Book Study, which will be our seventh consecutive one. If interested in joining us, please contact Anthea Kyle through the arrowriverforest@gmail.com address.

RD

Please feel free to offer any and all of your suggestions for next year’s book study sessions to the email noted above, or to the River Dhamma email.

THE HEART OF PRACTICE

Ajahn Punnadhammo

The heart of our practice, indeed the heart of our entire being, is the knowing mind. It is something which it is imperative to find, and it is something we can never lose. If it is difficult to understand, it is not because it is too complex, it is because it is so absolute in its simplicity.

What is the knowing mind? Knowing in this sense does not mean processing information, it does not mean recognizing, perceiving or analytical understanding. It is more primordial than any of that. It is the simple act of awareness; the quality of experience itself. Knowing in the sense we are using it here, does not think but it knows thought. It does not feel but it knows feeling. It does not see or hear or smell or taste but it knows all of these senses.

Mind is not the brain. Strictly speaking, it is not in the body or of the body at all, although in our human experience they always occur together. The mind is not a thing at all. The limitations of our language mislead us here, because we refer to it with a noun. But no one can say where the mind is, how big it is, how much it weighs or what colour it is. All such attributes have no meaning here. The mind is emptiness and yet it knows.

There is a Zen story about two monks debating the nature of mind. One says it is like a brilliant mirror set in a high place that illuminates and reflects the ten thousand things. The other says that that is close but not quite right. The mirror set in a high place does indeed illuminate the ten thousand things but nothing is reflected in its face thereby.

Thus, the knowing mind being primordially empty cannot be defiled nor can it be purified. How can the voidness ever be made other than what it is from beginningless time?

To find this place of simple knowing is to abide in the vast luminous emptiness. To

centre your being there is the perfect practice. From this place there is nothing to do, nowhere to go, nothing to lose, nothing to gain. From this still centre all the ten thousand myriad of objects can be known but nothing happens at all. No effort is made, but not a moment is lost. Nothing exists but the object of awareness and the mind knowing the object, and both are intrinsically empty.

If we identify with any of the objects we move away from the void centre into the whirling periphery. In the process a self is created as a point of reference to serve as a false centre. Me and mine come into being, together with birth, suffering and death.

In the Thai Forest tradition what we are calling the knowing mind here is referred to as the Citta from the Pali, or sometimes as poo-roo, a Thai phrase meaning the one who knows. Many Zen koans and stories are ways of pointing to it. In Tibetan is called Rigpa. In English we might call it consciousness or bare-awareness. It doesn't matter what we name it. To be centred in the simple void knowing is to be awake, to be free, to be fearless and at peace.

Why is it that we miss this great truth so easily? The objects entice us, they frighten us and they bewilder us. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts, emotions, desires, fears pull us away. None of these are problems by themselves, because all are indeed empty. The problem is when we enter into a relationship of self and other with them. This is me, this is mine. Immediately there is a self to nourish, to protect from danger, to cling to. There is now a point of reference without any security, a mote in a whirlpool. Suffering and confusion follow in short order.

The practice is to reside always in the simplicity of just knowing. When the pull of desire or the push of fear arise, know

them too as just empty objects (dhammas) occurring in the empty awareness. If necessary, remind yourself; not me, not mine.

This is the great liberation; this is awakening; this is the residing place of all the Buddhas and this has been with you since beginningless time.

RD



Ajahn Punnadhammo

“If we identify with objects we move away from the void center into the whirling periphery [...] A self is created as a point of reference to serve as a false center.”

Inward Path to Heart-Mind

Scot Kyle

Within the writings of our Theravadin or Southern Buddhist Tradition we'll encounter the term heart-mind in reference to a region of understanding that is sometimes also termed *citta*. *Citta* is most often defined simply as consciousness, but this word is not only broadly amorphous, but can also be vague or even fall well short of any useful mark if one hopes to bring clarity to one's spiritual development. I can be conscious of the fact that the professor is speaking at the front of the class, while at the same time whispering plans about where I'm going with a friend after the lecture. The patient can also be said to be still conscious if we continue to pick up a brain wave and/or a faint heart beat.

Strange social insecurities can be said to be a sign of self-consciousness. But, being self-conscious in a spiritual sense can imply a highly developed moral awareness, which may be at the other end of vast polarity from the state of insecurity just mentioned. So, what to do with this word consciousness? Consciousness is only one component of the heap of aggregates defined by the Buddha as the five *khandhas*.

“Perception can be said to be a kind of end result of where the five sense doors meet the human mind”

The five *khandhas* are a bundle of labels or traits, which the Buddha used to describe the individual person or human being. They are: body (*rupa*), feeling (*vedana*), memory (*sanna*), thought/imagination (*vitakka*) and consciousness (*citta*). Even though our English word, consciousness, is one of the *khandhas* or aggregates, it can't be said to be sim-

ply and cleanly synonymous with the *citta*. This is so because the *citta* is broad enough to also encompass the other non-physical components; that is, feelings, memories and thoughts. Imagination is included in a kind of overlapped way with thought because we usually refer to mental objects as they arise to consciousness and memory can be seen as a kind of attachment to these “objects” of thought. But memory in a Buddhist sense also encompasses the nuance of all conditioned circumstances which have preceded the moment, or *kamma*.

We're instructed in our meditation practice to monitor our thoughts. But, if we monitor our thoughts, a rather curious and legitimate question may arise: “Just what is it that is doing the monitoring?” Presumably, it would be the *citta*, since it is this foundational consciousness that envelopes all others of the *khandhas*. Once this subtle human trait or ability to “observe” one's own thoughts is actually admitted and recognized as functioning, we've approached mindfulness. A kind of subtle corridor or conduit is now noticed between the entity that is body, feelings, memories and thoughts and their encompassing primal consciousness, or *citta*. Of course there are also other subtle filaments which knit together in all directions the others of the four remaining *kandhas*.

The discovery of, in particular, the connection between the *citta* (as monitoring agent) and the other *khandhas*, is perception. Perception can be said to be a kind of end result of where the five sense doors meet the human mind (the Buddha's sixth sense); again expressed as, objects arising to the mind. To give a simple portrayal of how perception can be a completely different human experience between, say, two individuals

viewing the same object, let's use a beautiful Northwestern Ontario landscape. Two people are viewing the cliffs and forested vista at one and the same time. One is having a pleasurable, highly aesthetic experience, while the other is feeling fear and anxiety. We find that at the root of the latter's experience is a past traumatic outing (having been lost) in a similar landscape which has led to the rather negative, fear-based reaction. Same sense object: different thoughts arising. This malleability of perception is also why we should never assume that two persons in any given situation are having the same experience.

The implication here is that the monitoring element – *citta* – can determine how harmonious or chaotic the vehicle of perception will be. The case in point being the different experiences between an initiate taking his first wobbly steps on The Path and the seated Arahant: the former swinging back and forth between involvement and aversion while the latter remains steadily, peacefully equanimous.

Mastering both the recognition and the creative implementation of such awareness may be termed *mindfulness* itself. The awareness that we're referring to is of course the ‘discovery’ of the *citta's* elemental or foundational quality. It is elemental in the sense that it can't be analyzed, added to or really described in any way. The *citta's* presence in the phenomenal world makes contact with sense objects as though it were a bead of water rolling down a lotus leaf. That is, they are co-mingled, but unaffected of each other. We highlight the word discovery, since it's rather akin to an ‘uncovery’, in the very real sense in which it, the *citta* was already there. This *citta* is already there in and of the perceiver or sentient being in question.

Inward Path to Heart-Mind

Continued

The double whammy comes when one sees that the perceiver, the individual and the sentient being are all a conditioned, randomly significant bundle of traits called the five *khandhas*. As the Buddha teaches, this bundle of traits is a kind of illusory construct. If it is clung to with feeling one way or another, *samsara* is consistently maintained. If it's inherent falsity is penetrated, stream entry, or transcendence is achieved. When one has penetrated the illusory nature of the five *khandhas*, one achieves an understanding of the Buddha's teaching of not-self or *anatta*: the truth that all phenomena are devoid of anything substantial or abiding, such as the notion we commonly cling to in the self. Following this perception far enough leads the practitioner to a penetration that the entire cosmos is voidness itself.

Our Buddhist practice mandates that sitting with the stillness and our *citta* is really the only thing with any merit or 'substance' at all. And it's not an outgoing process, but rather an inward journey back to one's own heart. When one abides with the ears and eyes of the heart rather than those of the flesh, one gains release from the perpetual cycle of suffering that is *samsara*. It's also a kind of remembering of what was there all along, an uncovering of an undefiled element residing in oneself. The Buddha referred to the presence of this peace as the *sublime abiding*. There's been nothing to do, achieve or accumulate in this sublime abiding.



The highest teachings imply that certainly even the human mind, with all of its incessant suppositions will also fade away without a trace and that one must eventually release any attachment to it and the elemental *citta* as well. But, suffice it to say, that until we've penetrated these higher realms, there truly is nowhere to go, nothing to do, but only to *be* with the Dhamma: the way it is. [Notice the word 'nowhere', when defraged into its other configuration is also: now here.]

The Path, then, is simply an inward journey, to one's own heart, here and now. Neophytes to the Buddha's *Dhamma* are often keenly and busily accumulating the "five of these and the seven that's", without probing with texture or perhaps even the presence of their own hearts. Accumulation and memory work are the work of the head, the mind. But the perception of the heart remains aloof to the endless suppositions and machinations of the mind. Trying to capture a maximum of the vast teachings in the scriptures will never reveal the pure Dhamma that is patiently waiting in the heart. For if we don't go within, we go without.

May you be well and happy.

Brother in practice,

Scot Kyle.

RD

Arrow River Forest Hermitage

Donation Information

The Arrow River Forest Hermitage community greatly appreciates the generosity of all of our supporters throughout the years and in the future.

In order to continue offering the teachings of the Buddha to those who seek them, we do rely entirely on the generosity of our supporters, along with the funds generated by Ajahn Punnadhammo's various talks and speaking engagements in Canada and the United States.

All donations towards our annual budget of \$35,000 are received with gratitude, and Canadian residents who donate \$10.00 or more will receive a charitable tax receipt.

Your contribution can be sent to:
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Arrow River welcomes visitors. Prior notification is required if you would like overnight accommodations. Retreats must be scheduled in advance with Ajahn Punnadhammo. Retreatants are required to abide by the 8 precepts. Guest are to abide by the 5 precepts.