NEWSLETTER OF THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Dhamma greetings to all,

Life continues to flow in its perfect and harmonious way. Winter has given way to spring and spring itself is only another interlude before the coming of summer. The monastic Rains Retreat came and went and now the year 1985 gently turns into 1986. Within this stream of change which we call life there arises the whole spectrum of experience, the extremes of the pleasant and the painful and the shades in between. There are birth and death, health and sickness, success and failure, love and hate and all the other ups and downs that we all meet.

For the wise whose minds are attuned to the Dhamma this whole process is perfect in itself. As the third Zen patriarch said,
"The Way is perfect like vast space,
Where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess
Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject
That we do not see the true nature of things."

The deluded mind though, is continually caught in choosing to accept or reject, forever trying to get this while getting rid of that, wanting only the pleasant without its inevitable consequence - the unpleasant - like wanting a body without its shadow or a coin with only one side. So living becomes a pleasure seeking, life asserting onslaught against reality, a struggle which only leads to conflict and frustration.

There was once a king who was already quite wise for at least he knew the source of his problem, although he did not know the remedy. One day he summoned all his ministers and advisors and told them that he wanted something which would keep his mind balanced so that when pleasant experiences came he would not be overcome by excitement and when unpleasant experiences arose he would not get lost in depression.

The king's advisors must also have been quite wise for instead of immediately prescribing a dose of valium, or some other such stupefying remedy, they tried to find a real solution to the problem. After much consideration they agreed to present the king with a special ring with
the instructions that whenever he caught himself getting lost in either excitement or depression then he should immediately stop and contemplate the inscription on the ring. The inscription was simply "This too will pass".

It is such a simple and obvious truth, but yet if it is deeply understood it becomes penetrating wisdom which leads to liberation. The mind will become tranquil, at peace with life, calm in the face of the ups and downs, accepting of both the pleasant and unpleasant.

Unfortunately, for many people this "Middle Path" of the Buddha is difficult to appreciate for these people only know extremes; if it isn't white it has to be black, if it isn't active and outgoing it must be passive and dead. So when some read of this Middle Path which leads to detachment, they jump to the conclusion that the sole concern of a Buddhist is to become disinterested with the useless equanimity of a water buffalo or the nibbana of a corpse. But when we look at the life of the Buddha, or reflect on the examples of the great masters living today, we realise that true peace of mind and equanimity is much more than cold indifference. One at peace has so much joy it is contagious, so much kindness that it is inspiring and so much wisdom that it is enlightening.

The Buddha explained that the mind is the forerunner of all things, whether good or harmful and this is why he stressed developing and purifying this mind. A mind which has become peaceful from understanding the true nature of life will be a cause for great peace and understanding among others. Generosity and compassion will arise spontaneously in one who understands that prosperity, fame, health and happiness are all changeable and uncertain. Realising that one's death may occur on any day one is disinclined to waste any opportunity in idleness and one cares for others with a sense of urgency.

As we grow in the understanding that all people and all things are inter-related, inter-dependant, the more mindful and caring we become in whatever we do and in whatever we say. Indeed, kindness and sharing emerge as the natural expression of one who knows and is at peace.

I write this because it is important for us to have a right understanding of the goal of our spiritual
path as this will give us the guidelines for determining the qualities and attitudes to be cultivated. Life can become quite dreary and mechanical if we fall into the habit of living it only for ourselves in a heedless way.

Unfortunately just like water that flows down hill, so the mind tends to develop in the direction which requires least effort – the heedless state of indulgence. This is why the Buddha has said that if one wishes to realise the highest good then an effort must be made.

The coming of the new year, although only a tradition, offers us an opportunity to renew our effort to cultivate those very qualities which the Buddha personifies – wisdom and compassion.

With metta

Jagaro Bhikkhu
SOME EARLY EXPERIENCES
of Ven. Ajahn Chah

During my third year as a monk I began to wonder what Samadhi was, what a concentrated mind was really like. So I decided to try sitting meditation and to my surprise, as I tried to meditate, the mind became even more scattered and filled with thoughts. When I wasn't trying to meditate it wasn't so bad, but as soon as I tried to meditate the mind really went wild!

However, I kept at it and began reflecting on what was happening and why it was like that. Eventually it occurred to me that concentrating the mind may be like the breathing. If one endeavours to make the breath short or long or tries to maintain a regular, even breath, then the meditation becomes a task. But whenever one is just walking around the breathing is no problem, the breath is comfortable and there's no suffering with it. As soon as there's an effort to force the breath then the problem arises. In the same way if one sits meditation with the intention of making the mind peaceful then there is upadana (attachment), and difficulty or suffering must result.

One night while I was doing walking meditation at about 11pm I was feeling rather unusual - in fact I had been feeling like that since the middle of the day. There was not much thinking in the mind and I had a feeling of peacefulness. At the time I was staying in a forest monastery and in the village about half a kilometre away they were having a very noisy festival. As I had been walking meditation for along time and was tired I thought I would sit meditation. It was as if I could not get into my sitting posture fast enough, for the mind was wanting to withdraw into peaceful concentration. It seemed to be happening by itself, effortlessly and as soon as I sat down my mind became truly peaceful. My posture was firm. There was the noise of music and singing from the village which I could hear but I could also withdraw all my attention from it so that I didn't hear it, leaving me undisturbed and in complete silence. Within my mind it now became as if there were two separate things established there. One was the true
mind and the other the mental content. Just like two things set side by side but not really connected so the mind and the mental contents were seen to be separated. When the mind became concentrated it became obvious. If one sends the mind out one will hear the sound but if not it is silent. The quality of knowing was there and it was separate from the mental object. As I continued to sit meditation I was not concerned with anything else. It was automatic. There was no thought of laziness, discomfort or tiredness. There was just complete balance.

When it came time to stop, I stopped, but it was not due to laziness. I only stopped the sitting posture, however, the mind remained the same as before. I thought I'd lay down and rest for a time and as I reclined my body the mind remained just as peaceful as before and as my head reached the pillow the mind began to withdraw deeper and deeper. It was just as if there was an electric wire which finally came to a switch and made contact. The body seemed to explode with a loud noise but the knowing was as refined as can be. When it passed that point the mind withdrew deep within where nothing at all could reach it. It remained there for some time and then came out again to the normal state. However it was not I who was doing it. I was just the observer, only the knowing.

This process happened twice and each time the mind went deeper so that on the third occasion it was as if the whole world with everything and everybody in it had broken up and disappeared. There was only a nothingness.

When my mind returned to it's ordinary state the question came to mind as to what this experience was and immediately the answer came:

"This is just as it is. No need to doubt it!"

It is indeed a difficult thing to describe or talk about for there is nothing with which to compare it. Who is going to put a name to the experience? This is to do with the true nature of the mind and so there is no need to talk in the conventional and theoretical terms. If you have confidence go ahead and practice as though your life is at stake. After an experience like this the whole world appears different. Your knowledge and
your very existence - everything changes. Go ahead and try it! You don't have to go looking far away, just look at your own mind.

So far this is all to do with the power of the mind, the power of concentration. This is the limit of concentration. From here on it depends on what you want to use this for. If you want you can use it to develop psychic or miraculous powers. The rishis use it to make holy water, charms and spells. This is all possible but it is like eating good food and getting drunk on it.

This is where the Buddha took a different path. He used this as a base for developing Vipassana or insight meditation. Here we use this basis of calmness to reflect on the forms, sounds, tastes, smells, touches and mental objects. Whatever arises, whether good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, praise or blame, we reflect on it all from this basis of calmness and this will result in the arising of wisdom which is Vipassana. Insight is not something that we think out or construct, it occurs spontaneously of its own accord and it arises from that basis of calmness. You can't force it.

This is an extract of a Dhamma talk given by Ven. Ajahn Chah and is a loose translation by the Sangha in Perth.
A friend arrived at the monastery a few weeks ago to stay for a few days. "I've brought my working clothes", he told me, "where do you want me to start?" The routine of the monastery has changed since he last came, a year ago, for I told him that there is no work going on, just go and put your things in the guest house, meditate, walk and be peaceful. The routine is now more in line with that of a meditation monastery, a place where nothing much goes on, where the 'sameness' of every day and the lack of distraction makes it a refuge from the business of worldly life, a place to slow down, relax and reflect.

Our biggest event of the last three months was the "End of the Rains Ceremony" which was very successful with many attending and enjoying the day. However, we may have to change the name of this event for the rains didn't end, there were some heavy showers in the week that followed! Nevertheless, the customary banquet was a gastronomer's delight, though we did have to explain to a few of those visiting the monastery for the first time that we ascetic monks don't always eat like this.
Then the Ajahn sprinkled those attending, and drenched those who were heedless, with the traditional "holy water", to dampen their clothes but not their enjoyment. The most interest, at least by the Australians, was shown to the "money tree", a frangipani colourfully decorated by the Thai-Australia Association of W.A. with an expensive foliage of banknotes pinned to the branches in place of leaves. After the "money tree" was donated to help with future development, some Westerners enquired if they might have a cutting to plant in their garden!

Soon after the End of the Rains Retreat Ven. Pannavatavo left us to return to his family in Melbourne as a layman. We hope that his diligent years as a monk will stand him in good stead for the worldly life. Disrobing should be seen as no disgrace in Buddhism, as long as it is done in a proper way. It is more to be seen as a kind of a "bump" on the long road to enlightenment.

The saying goes "win some, lose some" and indeed a few days after Ven. Pannavatavo's departure two more monks arrived, Ven. Ajahn Too-ey and Ven. Nyanadhammo. Ajahn Too-ey, a Thai, is a forest meditation monk, a disciple of the highly respected Ajahn Maha Boowa of Thailand and his presence was a soothing reminder of the monastic tradition of reclusive simplicity, a convention of which we monks are heirs. Unfortunately his English was rudimentary and so his visit was more to the benefit of the monks than the laity. Ven. Nyanadhammo, an Australian, has been a monk for six years in Thailand and is visiting us on his way to see his parents in Adelaide. Ajahn Too-ey could stay with us only a month but Ven. Nyanadhammo will return here in January and we hope he will stay much longer.

The visit of a meditation monk from the Thai forest tradition gave us much inspiration concerning the direction which we want Bodhinyana monastery to take. The Sangha agreed that in order to maintain a quiet atmosphere conducive to the arising of mindfulness and concentration it would be preferable not to hold organised retreats at the monastery. The monastery will still be
available to those who come for "personal retreats", where they come to dissolve into the quiet monastery routine for a few days, to come and live as "monks" for a while. But organised retreats with twenty to thirty people descending on the monastery all at once, bringing more of "the world" with them than just their baggage, would disrupt the monastery unnecessarily, for other premises to hold retreats are already available.

As organised retreats are not planned for Bodhinyana monastery our overall building scheme has had to be rethought and is still being rethought! The hardest part of building, as in any task, is usually thinking about it! Notwithstanding, we will soon begin work on two new chalets to accommodate our growing community, trying a new double brick wall design because our existing hut get so roasting as to become unliveable for many hours during the very hot summer. We are also contemplating a meditation hall, possibly underground, but the ideas has been buried for now. Whatever work we do though, it need never again be as "full on" as our first two years when we struggled to get established. We can take things more gently now. The days of the "Serpentine Hard Labour Camp" with allusions to Siberian salt mines are over, giving way to slow and peaceful "Bodhinyana Meditation Monastery".

Ven. Brahmavamso
These last months have been very busy for us all at the Buddhist Society. During November we were greatly privileged to have as our guest Ven. Ajahn Too-ey from Thailand, who kindly gave three Friday night Dhamma talks to a packed Shrine Room. The Ven. Ajahn has now returned to Thailand and hopefully will visit us again in the future. His simplicity and wisdom were an inspiration to both laypeople and Sangha alike.

As you must be now aware the Vihara in North Perth is just too small for our needs and we are in the process of looking at some likely properties, but as yet we have not found one suitable. If we are to have a new centre we must ask all of you who use the Vihara and benefit from the Teaching of the Lord Buddha for regular financial support. We are not asking for huge amounts, but a small regular amount to ensure monthly mortgage repayments. If we truly value the Buddha's Teaching of peace, compassion and wisdom then we will naturally want to help in establishing the conditions whereby others may also benefit as we have. This is not the sole responsibility of the Sangha but all of us who value Buddhism (Please see our special article "New Vihara Foundation on page 14).

Due to other commitments Ven. Ajahn Pannananda was unable to visit us in November and is now expected to visit Australia around mid-January. Therefore the ordination of Samanera Ariyasila and Ian Sloan has been put forward to that time.

Magha Puja Day will be celebrated at Serpentine on Sunday February. Auspicious chantings will begin at 9.30a.m. and offering of food to the monks will follow at 10.30am. All welcome.

The Buddhist Society has been asked to represent Buddhism at the Commonwealth Day religious celebrations at St. George's Cathedral in March. All major religions are represented and on this day all come together to pray for peace in the world. Please come along and share this experience.
Ven. Ajahn Sumedho from England, will visit Perth from March 8th to 23rd. He will be giving several public talks prior to a five day meditation course beginning the evening of Wednesday 12th to Sunday 17th March. The retreat will be held at the Theosophical Centre, Bunning Road, Mt. Helena. The cost of the retreat is $60.00. Registration and payment must be made before February 20th to ensure a place as space is limited.

Many of us at the Centre have been deeply moved by the plight of the Cambodian people and therefore the committee has voted to join the government funded "Community Refugee Resettlement Scheme". This programme aims to help refugees to settle into their new and often bewildering life in Australia. If you can help with time, good second hand clothing and furniture please see a member of the committee or ring Lynne on 381 4929.

Unfortunately there are no Cambodian speaking monks in W.A. so we have invited Ven. Longsakkon, a Cambodian monk now living in Sydney to visit Perth. He was due to come in January, but because of ill health will probably visit around March or April. We hope that his visit will greatly inspire and help the small Cambodian community now living in Perth.

We would like to thank all those folk who through the year have given so generously of their time and to all those generous donors who have made possible the running of the Perth Vihara and Bodhinyana Monastery. We would like to say a very special thank you to all those Thai donors who have consistently given following Ven. Ajahn Jagaro's visit to Thailand in '85 and in response to a magazine article on the Perth Sangha and Bodhinyana-Monastery that appeared in Thailand recently. Thank you.

There are two new booklets printed here in Perth for free distribution - "An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation" and "A Lay Buddhist's Guide to the Monks' Code of Conduct". Both are on the bookstand in the Vihara and please feel free to take copies for yourself and friends.
The Annual General Meeting of the Buddhist Society will be held on 22 February 1986 and because we plan to move to new premises we need a good team of dedicated workers for the new committee. Can you help? If you can please ring the President David Miller on 459 3606 and discuss it with him.

We would like to thank all the outgoing committee members and to say a special thank you to our hard working, long enduring Treasurer, Ronald Storey. Thank you for all your hard work Ron.

This has been a truly full year for our resident Sangha - building, a constant stream of visitors, attending meetings, giving Dhamma talks, travelling, running courses and teaching at retreats and workshops. Therefore it is important for all of us to reflect on Ven. Ajahn Jagaro's selfless giving of his time and energy and gentle guidance and be inspired to give as selflessly as he always does. This is a great blessing for all of us in W.A. to have such a fine and inspiring resident Sangha – may we all prove worthy of it.

Please note that subscriptions for the Buddhist Society for 1986 are due on 1st January.

May 1986 bring you all peace, equanamity and wisdom as we tread the Path to the Deathless.

FUND RAISING

Our fund raising and social party in December was very successful and we managed to raise over $300 for the support of the Buddhist Vihara in North Perth.

The first major fund raising day for '86 will be a "Health Awareness Day" to be held on Sunday 9th February at the Park Recreation Centre, Victoria Park. We will be conducting workshops in Meditation, Hatha Yoga, T'ai C'hi and Playback Theatre. The cost of the day will be $20 and this will include a vegetarian lunch. Members and friends are needed for food preparation and in helping to run the day. If you can help please ring Brigid Field on 399 7552 or Christine Banks on 448 2180.

Fremantle will be holding another "Body, Mind and Spirit" festival on the Labor Day Weekend, Feb. 28 March 2, 1986 at Terminus Exhibition Centre, Fremantle, and the Down to Earth Association have asked us to participate once again. We will need people to man the information booth and to prepare and sell food on our food stall. If you can help please ring Lynne on 381 4929 or see one of the Committee members.
The bell has been designed and made in Thailand especially for our monastery. It took three months for it to be made as the craftsman wanted to use a particular metal composition and process of casting which makes the sound of the bell more resonant.

The inscription on the bell reads:

Offered by Vanee Lamsam to the Sangha of Bodhinyana Monastery.

"May the Sound of the Dhamma spread far and wide for the benefit of all beings."

Size of Bell: Height 97cm, Diameter 130cm
NEW VIHARA FOUNDATION

Just as a seedling carefully sown soon outgrows its pot, so now a new Vihara (City Centre) is needed to help our Buddhist Society extend its services for the benefit of more people. Thus we are seeking 100 members, or sympathetic friends to join the NEW VIHARA FOUNDATION. Foundation members would manifest their support by pledging $3 per week (the pledge may be discontinued at any time, only we would ask that the Treasurer be informed at least a month before). A quick calculation will show you that the regular income produced will be substantial, rough to cover the anticipated mortgage repayments incurred in establishing a new Vihara.

By renouncing something small, for example the price of a cup of coffee and a hamburger, each week for a limited time, your generosity would provide for a new Vihara. By demonstrating just this amount of altruism by your commitment to a weekly pledge you could show the committee and the Sangha that there is enough enthusiasm to merit a new Vihara. By this simple act of giving, which shouldn't be too painful to the pocket, you would be sowing seeds of compassion so that those who have yet to benefit from the teachings of Buddhism as you have done, may do so in the future.

The gift of Dhamma (the Teachings) is the greatest of gifts, said the Buddha. We invite you to be a participant in this gift. An account has been opened and membership cards, acknowledging support of the New Vihara Foundation, are available. Please talk to the Treasurer, Ron Storey, committee member or one of the nks.

May all beings continue to grow in the good qualities praised by the wise!

8 PRECEPT OBSERVANCE DAYS

January 3rd, 9th, 17th, 24th (full moon)
February 1st, 8th, 16th, 23rd (full moon)
March 3rd, 9th, 17th, 24th (full moon)
REGULAR ACTIVITIES

AT THE BUDDHIST CENTRE (VIHARA)

FRIDAYS:  
7.30pm–8.00pm Guided sitting meditation
8.00pm–9.00pm A talk on Buddhism by Ven. Ajahn Jagaro

SATURDAYS:  
9.00am Food offering (dana) to monks at Vihara
3.00pm–3.45pm Meditation for beginners
Instruction by Ven. Ajahn Jagaro.
7.30pm–8.30pm Sitting meditation

SUNDAYS:  
Dhamma day at Bodhinyana Monastery
10.30am Offering of dana to the
Monks.
Sharing a meal with the
community.
2.00pm–4.00pm Sitting meditation, instruction and a Dhamma
discussion with Ven.
Ajahn Jagaro

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