THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY OF W.A.

NEWSLETTER

April – June BE 2537 (1994)
VESAKHA DAY

Sunday 22 May, 1994

The full moon day of Vesakha is an event of the utmost importance as it commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana (final passing away) of the Lord Buddha who, through his own efforts, was able to reach the pinnacle of perfection and wisdom. This gives us all much encouragement and inspiration in that, if we make the necessary effort, we too can attain the same enlightenment.

Everyone is invited to attend the Vesakha Day celebration at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre on Sunday 22 May.

Programme for the Day

9.00am  Gathering at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre
9.30am  Group chanting, taking the Three Refuges and the Five or Eight Precepts, Auspicious Chanting and Dhamma talk.
10.30am Offering of food to the Monks and sharing of a meal together
2.00pm  Taking of the Three Refuges and Five Precepts for new Buddhists. Meditation and Discussion for others
4 - 6pm  Tea and Biscuits
          Meditation and discussion
6 - 7.30pm  Evening ceremony including chanting, Dhamma talk and circumambulation of the shrine
7.30 - 8.00pm  Traditional Sri Lankan Buddhist Devotional Songs
NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDHASSA

There are many worthy things happening in today’s world, but also much that is regrettable and avoidable. In particular, there is the chronic inability among people to live together in peace and harmony. Whether in a nation or in a family there seems to be much conflict and unhappiness. All living beings, human or otherwise, seek for happiness and that is what motivates all action in life. However in our quest for happiness we quite often give rise to misery and suffering for ourselves and others. Despite our earnest wishes, we seem unable to establish peace within ourselves, our family and our world.

Buddhism has peace as its means and its end. The Buddha taught how to be at peace. He taught the Path to peace. He said that the mind is the forerunner of all things. The quality of mind is what determines the quality of life. A peaceful, gentle, joyous mind means a happy life. But when we see confusion, conflict, exploitation and war in the world, then this can only reflect the quality of mind of most human beings. Individuals in general must be a state of confusion, conflict and aggression. All our actions have mind as their source. Therefore the Buddha placed great emphasis on getting to know the mind, understanding ourselves and thereby learning how to live in this world skilfully, creating harmony and happiness. Buddhism is concerned primarily with understanding our source, the mind, training it and eventually liberating it. Therefore this Path of the Buddha has something very important to offer humanity today.

Modern man has explored this planet and is now beginning to explore the stars, but very few have explored their basic being - their inner world. Most people exist in a world of concepts and beliefs, obsessively thinking about life, about themselves and making problems. The philosophers amongst us think about liberation - and make more problems. This is because the proliferations of mind are endless and only take one to doubt. This conceptualizing is not the reality, it is only thinking about things, thinking around things, never going to the centre, the essence.
All created things in existence, both physical and mental, we call sankhara or conditioned phenomena. Views, opinions, thoughts and beliefs are all conditioned phenomena. They are objects which pass through the mind, they are not the mind itself. In the realm of conditioned phenomena, material or mental, there will always be variety, multiplicity. The problem comes when we attach, when we choose from among the variety, make a preference and become fixed to it. Whenever we attach to conditioned phenomena and assume a fixed position, then we are setting ourselves up for conflict. Such is the variety of ideas, views and beliefs, such is the nature of conditioned phenomena, that there will never be an end to the debate, never complete agreement, never true peace. If we mistake conditioned phenomena for reality then there will never be freedom from conflict.

The quality of mind is what determines the quality of life. A peaceful, gentle, joyous mind means a happy life.

So if Buddhism remains in the realm of intellectual study, if we Buddhists merely accumulate more knowledge and views, logical and intellectually satisfying as it may be, it will still not resolve the problem, the chronic state of conflict within and without. If we make little or no effort to get to the heart of Buddhism by applying the Buddha’s Teachings, but only remain on the level of belief and concept, then we will be contributing nothing new and useful to the world. We will just be adding our own type of fuel to the fires of conflict.

We should remember that the Buddha taught a Path, a way to freedom. He did not teach the ultimate reality. He taught Sammuli Dhamma, conventional truth. The Lokuttara Dhamma, the ultimate truth, cannot by its nature be described or taught. The Buddha compared his teachings, the Sammuli Dhamma, to a raft, a vehicle to get us across to the further shore. Or it may be compared to the road on which we can
travel to come home, or a map to help us in our journey. The raft is not the other shore, the road is not the destination, the map is not the territory. Rafts, roads, maps - there will always be a variety. Should we be foolish enough to attach to a particular raft, road or map as being the absolute then there will be suffering. Just so, if we grasp the Buddha’s teaching wrongly it will only cause pain and suffering.

Many people grasp the teaching wrongly, mistaking the path for the goal. Many cling to their own type of Buddhism in one particular cultural form. Some become very attached to their technique of meditation. They become exclusive believing that theirs is the only real way and that the other methods are inferior. They are attaching to a conditioned phenomena, an idea, to a conventional Dhamma.

The Buddha was not teaching people to act in this way. He was asking people to let go of ideas and views. He was encouraging people to turn to the essence of the mind. What Buddhism has to offer the world today is the means of going to the centre, getting to know the mind, training the mind and liberating it - as an experience not just a concept.

This may seem quite abstract at first. Unless one has taken some time to stop and reflect within, one can easily get confused on the meaning of watching the mind, training the mind and liberating the mind. One needs to meditate to understand these things.

Meditation is a systematic approach for getting to know the mind so that we learn to train it. The Buddha compared the untrained mind to a monkey. The “monkey mind” is continually jumping from one thing to another without rest, always thinking and living in concepts, again and again reacting with either desire or aversion to whatever it encounters. Even in sleep this type of mind does not rest for it is busily dreaming. In extreme cases, if the “monkey” really gets out of control the person will suffer nervous and mental disorders such as insomnia, chronic anxiety and the like.

The way to stop this restless activity of the mind is to use a simple technique of concentration. The particular technique used is not so important and in fact the Buddha taught many different techniques. As long as the method leads to breaking the hold of concepts, goes deeper than merely “thinking about” things and brings the
attention to being “here and now” and holds it there, then this technique will be of use to us. So the technique is just a skilful tool; it is nothing sacred and we don’t need to set our technique up against that of others.

In fact all the techniques of concentration are basically the same in that we choose an object, either physical or mental, on which to focus our attention. We endeavor to sustain our concentration by continually bringing our attention back to the object. A common technique of concentration is to be attentive to the breath. Developing concentration on the breath is a way of calming the activities of the mind, slowing it down so that we can see the whole process more clearly.

So the technique is very simple and nothing special. However to be able to do it requires a lot of skill which can only be developed through repeated practice. Having chosen our meditation object we resolve to keep our attention on it. When the mind moves we know it and make the effort to bring the attention back. Then we must be patient enough to repeat this over and over again. In this way we get to know the mind and we train the mind. These two go hand in hand. Buddhist meditation is about developing that attention which is present and knows fully that one is present. It is that transparent peaceful, fully awake state of mind which knows in depth precisely what is going on now. This is the mind that is fit for the work of reflection or inquiry. With this state of mind we are able to penetrate to the Ultimate Truth.

The Buddha said that this Dhamma, this Ultimate Truth, is to be seen here and now within this body and mind. This is a very important statement. It is the mind which knows the world through the faculties of sense. The world manifests in the mind. Therefore if we want to know the world we must turn our gaze within. We must train our mind to be clear and stable and then observe within.

What do we see when we reflect in this way? We begin to appreciate and realise through direct experience what the Buddha was pointing to when he said:

All conditioned phenomena is impermanent
All Dhammas are not self.

As we abide in awareness in the quality of knowing, we can see all that is
conditioned phenomena arising and passing away within the field of consciousness. Just conditions in nature following the laws of nature. All impermanent, unsatisfactory and not self. They are continually changing and so cannot give lasting satisfaction. As I can see them coming and going and I cannot completely control them, they cannot be me or mine.

All conditioned phenomena is impermanent ... as we let go we begin to experience the peace of non-attachment.

Once we have really looked deeply then we understand and pull ourselves out of the bog that is attachment to belief and opinion. Having seen that all conditioned phenomena is impermanent, we no longer take refuge in it. We begin to let go and as we let go we begin to experience the peace of non-attachment. Letting go of conditioned phenomena means that we are inclining towards the Buddha - “The One Who Knows”. This is really taking refuge in the Buddha, it is very different to believing in the Buddha. Taking refuge here is not holding to a concept. Taking refuge in the Buddha here means being that which knows, staying in the present with the knowing and in that one movement of knowing which is bare awareness there is not room for any concept of me or mine. It is not self. It is empty of attachment and of self and so it is free of all conflict. It is true peace. The realising and abiding in this Truth is to take refuge in the Dhamma, the Paccupanna Dhamma. It is not taking refuge in a belief.

Thus in meditation we incline towards this knowing, this Buddha-mind and abandon belief. We grow in peacefulness and clarity. Our wisdom becomes the very ability to reflect in the present. This is the way to resolve once and for all the conflict within. Belief is fully penetrated. Thoughts are seen for what they are. The body is understood. We see that these and all other conditioned phenomena or “samkhara”, are all impermanent and uncertain. These things will always be changing, they cannot
be fixed. So there can be no belief, no view, no idea which is absolutely, eternally right or wrong. Having seen this we are no longer imprisoned by our beliefs, no longer at the mercy of our thoughts.

So this is the practice of Buddha Dhamma and I am sure you will appreciate how relevant this is to the world today. So many people are striving for peace and losing their way. This Buddha Dhamma is the way to resolve all conflict and create lasting peace for it goes beyond the very source of this conflict. It attacks the root. Until we are able to incline towards the peace in the mind and observe the essence of mind we will always be caught up in the conceptual, caught up in the multiplicity, caught up in the conflict. As Buddhists we have something very precious to offer to humanity today. Namely this practice of meditation. When we as individuals incline towards the knowing, the Buddha, and turn towards the Truth in the present, the Dhamma, then we will be encouraging others to do the same. And doing the same is taking refuge in the Sangha, becoming part of the community of true Buddhists practising in this way. If we as Buddhists can do this much, then we will truly be of great benefit to the world today.

(Taken from a talk by Ven Ajahn Jagaro - “The Practice of Buddha Dhamma, Its Benefits and Relevance to the World Today”)

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ABANDON WHAT SHOULD BE ABANDONED

The asavas are deeply embedded cravings which usually escape our awareness. We take our delusions for granted because we know nothing else. Sometimes we have an inkling of them when our cravings run up against a barrier in someone else. But these underlying defilements are so deeply ingrained within us that we are not even sure that they exist until we start serious practice.

When our desires are not gratified, we either think the other person is at fault or that there was a communication gap or that others are peculiar. But that craving coming from us is met by the same thing in the other person is hard to realize until we have obtained strong mindfulness.

The first of our deeply ingrained desires is for sensual gratification. This is the greed inherent in us to have only pleasant experiences. Anyone who hasn’t practised will say ‘Why not? Why shouldn’t I want it pleasant?’ The reason is that we cannot rely on having pleasant sense contacts and, failing to get them, unhappiness ensues. Even when one does get them they cannot last. It’s a foregone conclusion that it is a losing battle. The whole world is engaged in it, yet it is impossible to win. All of us are trying to get what we want because we have craving embedded within us, based on the illusion that this is ‘me’ and ‘mine’, thus I want pleasant feelings. If we think about it for a moment, what else do we want?

The second trait is our ‘craving-to-be’. We don’t want to be killed or annihilated or diminished. We want to be here and as comfortable as possible. The third one is ‘ignorance’, which is the foundation for all our difficulties because we are ignoring the fact that the other two cravings are impossible to gratify and that reality lies somewhere else.

These three desires flow out of every ordinary person. Everybody is beset by ignorance, craving for pleasant sensations and craving-to-be-here which means being supported without any danger or fear. Everyone’s wants are at the expense of everyone else and our other reactions are coloured by these desires. And so we can understand why people have difficulty relating to one another.
If we can realize first, first of all, that these mind-states are creating problems and trouble for us, we can also accept that the craving to have pleasure and comfort cannot be permanently gratified. It surely is not a worthwhile goal to stake a whole human life on. When we consider our craving for existence, we can readily understand that it is a lost cause, since nobody survives. To stake one’s life on survival is futile and foolish.

Yet these two cravings underlie everything we do. If we can see for just a moment that they’re not useful, then we will be interested to find out how to get rid of them. Most people cannot see any alternative and aren’t aware of the fact that these mind-states cause all our unhappiness. Whether the unhappiness is called frustration, boredom, anger, worry, fear, envy or jealousy doesn’t matter. All of them are based on these two cravings, with ignorance as their underlying foundation.

If one has given enough consideration to the fact that one is saddled with such a problem and that one would be happier without it, the interest on how to abandon it arises. The Buddha gives very explicit instructions on how to go about that.

The first mode of conduct is ‘wise consideration’. One puts one’s mind in the direction where craving for sensual gratification does not necessarily arise or grow. We do not start to imagine what it would be like to take a trip on a luxury liner or to be swimming at the Riviera or to eat at an excellent restaurant, or couldn’t it be cool outside instead of hot. Such imaginings create more craving for pleasant sensations. If the mind gets enough food of that nature, then it will eventually try to actualize these desires which means a lot of energy output in that direction. Instead of giving the mind more cause for craving by thinking where it could get additional pleasurable contacts, we can give the mind the
possibility to see the truth, such as the reality of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness). This will not create unhappiness, because dukkha is not a personal matter; dukkha is universal. Everyone has it; one is not singled out. Naturally we give our own dukkha a special name and special reasons.

Interestingly enough, that’s all imagination. There aren’t any special causes or special dukkha. The cause is always the same, namely craving. Wise consideration is to look at all one’s desires which are not being gratified or which are not yielding the expected pleasures and then realizing the unfulfilled craving in the mind. This is the direct experience of the truth of dukkha and of its cause, allowing for the third Noble Truth: that there is a way out. But it can’t be found by getting everything one wants, nor by having more pleasures and comforts or more appreciation and praise, more ego support, but by letting go of wishes and desires.

The Buddha mentioned various unwise considerations, namely, past and future lives, having a self or having no self or being aware of myself or being aware of my non-self. All of that supports the ego illusion. Instead we must consider the basic fact of unhappiness and that its arising is due to wanting something. The stronger our ego illusion, the more unhappiness we experience. Of course it is very difficult to realize that because we don’t know any other state of being and cannot imagine that other people could feel differently. We might think they are putting on a good show or are just lucky. But the truth of the matter is, the stronger the ego, the more one wants, the more dukkha objectively does not mean being full of dukkha, but rather reflecting on it. One has an introspective attitude which is objective, and sees things as they are, not as one would like them to be, which is unrealistic wishful thinking. If one gains insight into the law of nature then one day everything will be as one would like it, only different from the way one would have imagined.

There are six other ways of working towards the elimination of our deeply embedded taints, towards getting rid of every recurring unhappiness. These work not by trying to achieve happiness but by letting go of ingrained habit patterns. The first step is to become aware of the reaction to one’s sense contacts. We make contact automatically through our six senses, and the ensuing feelings are also automatic, but our reaction to those feelings is arbitrary. Obviously we will not constantly be able
to stop reacting but once in a while it is certainly possible. We can change ourselves by not reacting to a feeling, by not liking or disliking it. Then we are taking the first big step towards freedom from compulsion. This needs the objectivity of mindfulness and one's undivided attention. As one practises more and more, it becomes easier as all repetitions do. That's the way of subjugation recommended by the Buddha.

The next one is 'right use'. These are all practice paths which will eventually result in equanimity (even-mindedness) and a removal of the barriers to deep insight. Everything we own should be something that we need. We should be very aware of the difference between a need and a want. The Buddha said there are only four items that one really needs - food, clothing, shelter and medicine. The rest are all extras. We can check to see whether we really make use of our possessions for the benefit of others or whether they are only kept to create pleasant feelings in ourselves. If the latter, it is best to give them away. It's good practice to check our belongings once a month and give unused items as gifts to others. It's not so much having nothing as having little. There is always the possibility of transforming one's belongings into the valuable assets of other people. The main consideration is to know whether one would be able to give everything away at a moment's notice. Not to imagine that one could do it, but to start doing it immediately. When death hits us we have to give up everything including ourselves. Life is uncertain, but death is completely certain - any time at all. The right use of what one has means that one does not have a strong attachment to the things one owns; one is aware of the fact that they are only on loan. One knows that they are for the benefit of everyone and there is no need to have more. This is another way again of seeing that pleasant sense contact will not create real happiness. On the contrary they will in the end create nothing but unhappiness.

In our affluent society pleasant sense contacts are a readily available as sand on the beach. Pleasant sense contacts can be had anywhere, any time; one just has to be able to pay for them. Yet how many people do we know who are truly happy? They can all get pleasant sense contacts over and over again and have probably been getting them all their lives. That's not the answer. The way to freedom includes 'subjugation' and 'right-use'.
A further step is avoiding wrong company and wrong places; namely where pleasant sense contacts are being bartered, where people have no interest in Dhamma. Wrong people are those who have no real yearning for spiritual growth. There are many people in the world who think they are practising. They might sit in meditation, chant or offer flowers, read Dhamma books, have philosophical discussions, yet it remains on the surface. It is better than no interest at all, but it doesn’t go to the depth of the problem; if it did, these people would by now have become very happy. Yet when one enquires, they have just as many problems as anybody else. The truth has not penetrated their psyche. The taints are the deepest layer where one’s whole being is felt. As long as our cravings are embedded in there, we are part of existence and that means dukkha.

Our third mode of transformation is avoidance of those contacts where sensual desire and pleasant sense contacts are the main issue. The world at large, not knowing that there are alternatives, considers these the most important. This is the underlying ignorance which gives rise to the wrong view of self.

Subjugation of reacting to the pleasant sense contacts is one side of the coin; endurance, which is the enduring of the unpleasant sense contacts, is the other. Where there is an unpleasant sensation, for instance in the sitting posture and the body becomes very uncomfortable, it is good practice to endure. Nobody gets away during a lifetime without physical pain. Being able to endure means that one does not have to suffer because of such pain. The more often one can endure, the more disciplined the mind becomes. The untrained mind becomes turbulent every time there is
something unpleasant that it doesn’t like or something pleasant that it wants to keep. These waves in the mind are the irritations, the lack of peacefulness that everybody experiences. They cause a feeling of uneasiness and insecurity. Endurance can also be practised in the face of an emotional discomfort. To be able to endure is another way of getting away from reactions which mean diminishing craving.

Then there is removal: letting go, dropping. Whatever we are reacting to, whether it is with anger and grief, with wanting or rejecting, envy or pride, worry or fear, we need to recognises the reaction and drop it. Removal does not mean suppression. One cannot remove what one hasn’t acknowledged first. This letting-go procedure is one of the most important aspects of spiritual maturing. The Buddha’s teachings cannot make any impact unless one practises them. ‘Letting go’ is not being attached, not owning what one thinks and feels. If one believes every thought and every feeling, if one is glued to them as the mind likes to be, then ‘letting go’ is not possible. How can we let go of something that is utterly myself? If it is ‘me’ thinking and feeling, how can we drop that? But when there is just a thought or a feeling and the objectivity of mindfulness points to its unwholesomeness or useless quality, ‘letting go’ is possible. When we can drop desires, rejections and resistances, then we have started to practise.

The Buddha said the practice is not external but strictly internal. We can wear different clothes, shave off our hair, stay up all night, eat only one meal a day, but if there is not internal change, then these practices are done in vain. There has to be insight into oneself since all our desires are within. They are not in clothes or food or wakefulness. Removal, letting go, is the most important aspect of our work or purification. It applies equally to meditation. If we don’t drop discursive thinking, we cannot meditate. When we say, ‘I’ve had a very bad meditation,’ it just means it wasn’t possible to let go of the thoughts. They kept coming and going constantly. Letting go in daily life of unwholesome thoughts and emotions strengthens the meditation; learning the same in meditation helps one’s daily life.

The last step is cultivation which applies to meditation - the cultivation of the mind - that process which eventually will result in the seven factors of enlightenment. Mindfulness is the first of these seven factors and without it there can be no practice.
Only the mind which has been cultivated has the strength and clarity to generate the factors of enlightenment, and will also be the sort of mind willing to practise diligently, because constant alertness, awareness and self-examination are required. Only a clear and strong mind is willing and able to do that.

This brings about an investigation of all phenomena (dharmas) with regard to their arising and ceasing, their essential impermanence. Everything that exists is a phenomenon; there is nothing else. If we examine in this way, then we are reflecting wisely. We can do this in the meditation practice as well as in daily living. In meditation, when the mind has become concentrated, it is essential to experience the arising of each mind moment and also the ceasing of it.

This investigation will help greatly to generate a calm mind which can see things in their true essence. When mindfulness and investigation have been practised in meditation so that they form a strong foundation, then subsequent factors will also arise which are tranquillity, joy and deep concentration. This will finally result in total equanimity. These are all necessary steps to be taken so that there is a path of practice which will not only improve meditation but will also change one’s whole inner being. Certainly meditation has a great deal to do with that but it’s not all of it. There are also instant reactions and confrontations, not only when other people are involved but even with trifles such as one’s own meal. One is confronted with oneself being sleepy or hungry, being bored or discontented. If one doesn’t use wisdom in these confrontations then it remains difficult to see a different reality. If we use introspection in our daily experiences our outlook changes.

This is a slow process and as it takes place the asavas are diminished. They only disappear for an enlightened one (Arabant) but the outflow is gradually not as strong anymore. It resembles a flood in the beginning; later it may become a meandering stream and then a trickle. The practice is to change the flood into a trickle. Then it may completely dry out one day. Cultivation of the mind presupposes that we know that craving is to our detriment, and only then will we take the necessary steps towards inner peace.

from Little Dust in Our Eyes by Ayya Khema
SANGHA NEWS

Our monastery is a peaceful place, where even the sounds of the forest often disappear into silence, where the work projects are mostly inner and gentle and quiet, where the hours amble by at a much slower pace, where nothing exciting is meant to happen and nothing much does. Which is all very well except when you have to write “Sangha News”! Mind you, there are many “ups and downs” of monastery life - up to the dining room, then down to the shower block, and up to the Meditation Hall, then down again to one’s kuti ....such are the “ups and downs” of a monastery in the hills! Moreover, there have been quiet a few close shaves at our monastery of late, but only with our razors I am happy to say! And, with Ajahn Jagaro away on retreat, some of the monks here have indulged what can only be called the “wild” life - and I hope I don’t shock you - for they have been feeding the kangaroos and the various birds which live in our forest, thereby getting involved in the “wild life” at Bodhinyana Monastery!

Joining the wild life that is at Bodhinyana Monastery with an increase of commitment is Ven. Santidhammo. On February 13 he took higher ordination as a fully fleeced monk (he had to give up all his money before he could be a monk!). He has written a separate article elsewhere in this issue about his thoughts on this day. It was a marvellous day. We had invited many people to come for the day and a large happy gathering turned up for the occasion. I had been told that at weddings those attending often get inspired to tie the knot themselves, and so I was hoping that among those attending the ordination, surely a few would get inspired to untie their knots, shave off their locks, and also become monks. After all a modern monk’s life is not all that bad: his salary may only be a breakfast and one meal a day, but it is not to be sniffed at, lest one’s appetite be lost(!), opportunities for promotion up the incorporate ladder on the fast-track to Nibbana are there for the meditating, and, best of all, our retirement plan is absolutely out of this world! Furthermore, there is much opportunity for travel for today’s jet-set monk.

Ajahn Jagaro travelled to Sri Lanka for a well earned retreat, released for three months from his responsibilities as abbot, dropping the burden of administration so
that he can soar free in meditation. Ajahn Jagaro was accompanied to Sri Lanka by Ven. Visarado who, true to the Dhamma, said it was “uncertain” when he’d return. Ven. Sumangalo was invited to teach in Melbourne and he rose to the occasion, above Perth Airport in an Ansett jet! He will return here in late March. But on the balance sheet of monks, our monastery is showing a profit. Ven. Vimalo, an English born monk four years a bhikkhu, came here in February to stay for 10 months. Ven Nyanavisuddhi, a Slovenian born monk six years in the robes, is soon to arrive as a permanent resident. Ven. Cattamalo, a German born monk six years “bald on top”, will arrive here in May for a stay of two years. And, Ajahn Nyanadhammo, who has stayed here before several times in the past, has arrived for an indefinite stay. It is
wonderful to have such good monks residing at Bodhinyana - welcome to you all. When all the comings, and goings, and comings back are complete we expect to have 11 monks resident here. That’s a whole soccer team, BODHINYANA WANDERERS it should be called!

We have also been honoured with many esteemed visitors in the previous three months. First came Ajahn Khemadhammo who is well known in the U.K. especially for organising Buddhist visits to various prisons. Maybe, not keeping up with the times, he still thought of Australia as a convict colony and so came as a prison visit! Or perhaps, and more likely, he came to meet with old friends.

Then we were enormously honoured by a party of monks coming from Thailand to help with the ordination and led by Tan Somdet Phra Buddhacharn of Wat Sraket in Bangkok. Tan Somdet is a very very senior monk in the Buddhist Sangha of Thailand and when I spoke with him shortly before he left he was obviously very impressed with what has been achieved for Buddhism in Perth. Indeed, Dhammaloka is a 5 star city centre and Bodhinyana a 5 star forest monastery, and all built up in little more than ten years. However, when I first came to this monastery it was a billion star monastery, for we began by sleeping out under those very same stars with not a roof over our heads. Later, in March, we were fortunate that the English monk, Ajahn Ariyesako, a long time disciple of the well known Thai meditation master Tan Ajahn Maha Boowa, came to visit for three weeks. A week or so later, the highly respected nun and gifted teacher of meditation Ayya Khema came for a short visit. Oh, the “ups and downs” of the jet set monks and nuns of the nineties!

More downs and ups: down at our local Shire Council the plans for our Cinerarium building are up for consideration. No a Cinerarium is not a place where the monks watch movies, it is a place for storing the ashes of those who have died! I have asked the Shire to get a move on approving the plans, because I have heard that one or two of our regulars at Dhammaloka aren’t feeling so well! Hang on there please - no-one is allowed to die until the Cinerarium is complete.

There have been earth shattering events happening around our new lake as we break up the clayey clods of earth that will become the top soil. But landscaping in
earnest awaits some more “ups and downs”, we’re waiting for the heavens to open up and the rain to pour down, and then we will start planting.

With all these “ups and downs” one would think our monastery no different than outside. Indeed, it can be a dog-eat-dog world, even at Bodhinyana: a couple of stray dogs from a neighbouring farm wandered into the monastery a few weeks ago. While waiting for their owners to take them back home, we gave them some frankfurters left over from lunch, and thus it was “dog eat dog” even at our monastery! But most of the time the place is so quiet and pleasant and calm. As you will understand, nothing exciting is meant to happen here and nothing much does.

Ajahn Brahm
Ven Santidhammo on the day of his ordination with Ven Ajahn Jagaro

The day of my ordination dawned cool and clear; would that my head had followed suit. But a mixture of trepidation and elation was inevitable given the significance of the occasion and the impending quantum leap from the 10 precept status of a samanera to the 227 training rules incumbent upon a bhikkhu. The final stages of my metamorphosis (from lay person, to anigrika, them samanera) to fully-fledged member of the sangha was about to take place.

For an event that was not advertised, the ordination proved to be a popular attraction. Of course the presence of 19 monks and especially such an important and senior member of the sangha as Somdet Phra Buddhacharn was bound to attract a crowd. In addition, the dearth of ordinations for several years with the consequence that many people, including myself, had never witnessed such a ceremony, was bound to provide a drawcard. The ordination ceremony has to take place within the sima (boundary) of the monastery which, at Bodhinyana, is marked by the sima stones incorporated in the
walls of the sala. Hence, given a capacity crowd, my concern for a cool day.

Though I had no doubts about my commitment, ordaining, while an everyday occurrence in countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma, is quite a dramatic step to take in the West. That someone should commit himself to a life of meditation and asceticism is beyond the comprehension of most Westerners. The power of the trained mind has long been appreciated in the East, but to the vast mass of hurrying humanity in the West, someone sitting in meditation is not regarded as doing something profoundly useful. Electricity and the internal combustion engine are synonymous with power but since there is, as yet, no instrument with which to measure the power of the mind, there is a tendency to doubt that power.

Having developed an unshakable confidence in the Buddha as “incomparable trainer of those who wish to be trained” (Anuttaro Purisadamma Sarathi), I had no such doubts. While neither logical reasons nor eloquent words can adequately explain the act of going forth into homelessness, I shall endeavour to put down some thoughts on my decision to do so.

One needs to have sufficient understanding of the noble truth of dukkha and to have suffered enough to ‘want out’. ‘Self’ and ‘the world’ are seen in a different light and a spirit of renunciation develops impelling one to strive towards deliverance or Nibbana. The most likely possibility of escape from the mire of ignorance (Avijja) and the consequent dukkha is offered by the life of a true monk. Though the Buddha’s teaching has been described as ‘running counter to the common current, profound, subtle and hard to realise’, there are those who, on hearing the Teaching feel irresistibly drawn to such a life. Some lay everything aside and ‘go forth’ without delay. Others, and I am one of these, are only able to develop an appreciation of the ascetic life after years of struggle. In other words I still had a lot of living, and suffering, to do.

The stage at which one goes forth depends not only on having a bent for the ascetic life and a genuine longing for it, but on one’s ties to worldly life. One may be bound inwardly as well as by external circumstances. Undertaking stricter practice in lay life may well be an option. After all, the suttas list at least 21 persons who reached the goal while still lay people. Fortunately I had neither internal nor external
bonds to prevent my ‘going forth’ and so opted to follow the path that offered the greatest support and the least resistance to my aspirations.

Also fortunate was the existence of the monastery with its teachers, a supportive Buddhist Society and a generous Buddhist community. Hence ‘going forth’ proved to be a relatively comfortable step for me to take. I had a strong sense of wanting to repay that “greatest of all gifts” and having run a small Buddhist study and contact centre for some eight years I had developed an awareness that true holiness is never attained without solitude; it is never perfected without the lonely struggle with the passions within. Not that solitude and happiness of seclusion are, as many think, the aim and end of the ascetic life; witness the untiring activity of the Buddha and many of his disciples. Solitude is, however, an incomparable mine of strength and inspiration to one who resolutely strives for the goal. As Master Eckhart put it: “You should know that such people practise the most useful practices. They produce more eternal gain in one moment than all the works ever wrought outwardly”.

This brings me back to my earlier comment on the power of the mind. A person seated quietly in the practice of metta bhavana (meditation on loving kindness) appears in most Westerners’ eyes to be doing absolutely nothing. To those who are aware of the power of the mind, however, such a person is a human dynamo, generating thoughts of love in a world that have almost forgotten how to love. Were there many such people, their united power might yet save the world from self-destruction. It behoves each and every one of us to make a contribution here.

At a more mundane level, the monastic order has two missions; firstly to learn and practise the Dhamma and secondly, to preserve and disseminate it. The first is the primary objective of most who request ordination, just as it was mine. A trained monk obviously preserves the teaching and he may also teach it formally and/or informally. I hope to eventually be able to offer to others “the greatest of all gifts”

The order, the monastery and the 227 training rules combine to enclose one in a protective blanket of warmth and mutual support. Living with “the oldest family of homeless ones” is indeed a noble way to live.

Ven Santidhammo
SOCIETY NEWS

The Society’s Annual General Meeting in February was well attended and provided an opportunity for members to show their appreciation to the outgoing Committee for their hard work during the previous twelve months. A number of office bearers and committee members stood down this year, including Don Weerakody who had been President for a number of years and Ron Storey who had been Treasurer for some time and a new committee was elected. They are:

Jill Hanna (President), Dennis Shepherd (Vice President), Sally Lee (Secretary), Glenda Ingwersen (Treasurer), Priya Barnes (Assistant Treasurer), Barney Viersma, Ian Johnson, Phusadee Cockburn, Shirley Jackson, Dr Ariyaman Mendis, Ron Battersby.

The committee: (Back left to right) Phusadee Cockburn, Jill Hanna (President), Barney Viersma, Dennis Shepherd (Vice President), Ven Ajahn Jagaro, Ian Johnson, Dr Ariyaman Mendis, Glenda Ingwersen (Treasurer). Front left to right: Priya Barnes (Assistant Treasurer), Shirley Jackson, Sally Lee (Secretary), Ratana Kay, Ron Battersby. Not present: Linda Ellis, Dave Reed.
Since the AGM Ratana Kay, Linda Ellis (Assistant Secretary) and Dave Reed have been co-opted onto the Committee.

Thanks are given to all members and supporters, as well as to the outgoing Committee, for the all help and support that has been given to ensure that the Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre and all the activities of the Society are able to run smoothly and provide the environment for the Dhamma to be taught.

The previous year will always be remembered as the time when we completed and opened the new Meditation Hall and other additions to the Centre. We now have a very unique complex which is being appreciated by a growing number of regular visitors who come to hear the Dhamma, use the library and enjoy the beautiful facilities we now have available.

Ron and Tere Storey have completed their time as Managers of the Centre after several years of selfless and tireless service. Their contribution has been greatly appreciated and we wish they much peace and happiness in their new home. Phil Gurney has now taken up the role of caretaker and we are confident he will continue to ensure that the facilities are well maintained and things will run smoothly. If you are able to make a contribution of time towards the cleaning and maintenance of the Centre, Phil would be happy to hear from you.

Several functions have been held successfully in recent months. Chinese New Year was again a wonderful occasion which was well attended and enjoyed by all. Our thanks to the many people who work together so well to provide the delicious food and enjoyable entertainment at this time. The funds raised have gone towards the mortgage payment of the new Meditation Hall.

With a community within the Buddhist Society which is diverse in ethnic origins, Multi-cultural week provided an opportunity for us to celebrate the richness of our society with a Multi-Cultural Day organised by our Grant-in-Aid Workers, Yodying and Karu. It was pleasing to see a large number of people attend to share cultural items, food and the enjoy the display of cultural entertainment. Thank you to all who participated and gave their time and talents to provide such an enjoyable day for us all.
We have been fortunate in recent weeks to have Ayya Khema visiting Dhammaloka and giving a Dhamma talk on two consecutive Friday nights. About thirty meditators were also able to benefit by her wonderful meditation instruction at a week long retreat held at Gnangara. The talks given by Ayya Khema at the Centre and also on the retreat were taped and are available for loan or purchase through the library. Ayya Khema expressed her highest regard for the Sangha here and the wonderful achievements accomplished on behalf of Theravada Buddhism. Her experience here has strengthened her optimism and confidence in the development of Buddhism in the West and in Australia in particular.

Ayya Khema

The visiting members of the Sangha who pass through Perth, together with the example of our fine resident Sangha, continue to provide the lay community with inspiration and a fine example of the benefits of diligent practice. Our gratitude is expressed to them all.

The Committee
MY MIND TO ME A KINGDOM IS

My mind to me a kingdom is
Such present joys therein I find,
That it excels all other bliss
That Earth affords or grows by kind;
Though much I want which most would have
Yet still my mind forbids to crave.

I see how plenty surfeits oft,
And hasty climbers soon doth fall;
I see that those that are aloft
Mishap doth threaten most of all;
They get with toil, they keep with fear:
Such cares my mind could never bear.

Content to live, this is my stay;
I seek no more that may suffice;
I press to bear no haughty sway;
Look, what I lack my mind supplies;
Lo, thus I triumph like a king;
Content with what my mind doth bring.

Some have too much, yet still do crave,
I little have, and seek no more.
They are but poor, though much they have,
And I am rich with little store:
They poor, I rich: they beg, I give;
They lack, I leave: they pine, I live.
I laugh not at another's loss;
I grudge not at another's gain;
No worldly waves my mind can toss;
My state at one doth still remain:
I fear no foe, I fawn no friend;
I loathe no life, nor dread my end.

Some weigh their pleasures by their lust,
Their wisdom by their rage of will;
Their treasure is their only trust;
A crooked craft their store of skill;
But all pleasure that I find
Is to maintain a quiet mind.

My wealth is health and perfect ease;
My conscience clear my chief defence.
I neither seek by bribes to please,
Nor by deceit to breed offence:
Thus do I live, thus will I die;
Would all did so well as I.

Sir Edward Dyer (1550 - 1607)
SE ASIA NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

**Sunday 10 April**

In Thailand and Laos this festival is called “Songkran” and in Cambodia “Chaul Chnam Thmey”, but most Westerners know it as the “Water Festival” for at that time there occurs a lot of good-humoured throwing of water. However, there is a more serious side to this festival as it is a time to show gratitude and respect to one’s parents and teachers.

Also, as on most other important occasions for Buddhists, it is a time for going to the Buddhist Centre to reaffirm one’s confidence to the Triple Gem and share the merit of one’s life with others. New Year celebrations will be held on Sunday 10 April at Dhammadloka Buddhist Centre, Nollamara. The program will be:

- **9.30am** Gathering at the Dhammadloka
- **10.00am** Taking the 5 Precepts and 3 Refuges with auspicious chanting
- **10.30am** Offering of food to the monks
  - Sharing of the meal with all lay people present
- **12.00noon** Ritual washing of the Buddha Rupa
  - Blessing from the Sangha
- **12.30pm** Dhamma talk
FUND RAISING DINNER

Saturday 30 April

A Thai dinner will be held in the Community Hall at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre on Saturday 30 April, 1994, beginning at 6pm.

Tickets will be available at the Centre ($10 adults, $6 children). All proceeds are to go towards the running costs of the Centre.

POSON DAY

Saturday 25 June

Poson Day is the celebration of the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka. A special 8 precept day will be held on Saturday 25 June at Dhammaloka. The programme for the day will be:

9.00am  Taking of the 8 precepts
10.30am  Offering of dana to the monks
12.00noon  Dhamma talk
Afternoon  Meditation and Discussion
6.00pm  Puja
At present, the Buddhist Society of W.A. employes Mrs Yodying Taylor (Thai) and Dr Mahanama Karunarata (Sri Lankan) as the Grant-in-Aid social welfare and community development workers. The positions are funded by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs with the aim to facilitate access and equity to existing services available among the ethnic and mainstream members of the Buddhist community.

Their working hours are from Monday to Friday. Yodying will be at the Dhammadala Buddhist Centre from Monday to Wednesday morning while Karu will be there from Wednesday afternoon to Friday. Their services are open to all and include:

- information and referral services
- community development by working with the community and their organisations
- advocacy.

Please approach them to find out more of their roles and services. Contact telephone and fax number is (09) 344 4220.
# Regular Activities

**Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre Nollamara**

**Friday**
- 7.00 - 7.20pm: Chanting
- 7.30 - 8.00pm: Guided sitting meditation
- 8.00 - 9.00pm: A talk on Buddhism by one of the senior monks

**Saturday**
- 10.30am: Food offering to the Sangha
- 2.30 - 3.00pm: Instruction for new meditators
- 3.00 - 4.00pm: Meditation and discussion

**Sunday**
- 8.30 - 9.15am: Sitting meditation
- 9.15 - 9.45am: Walking meditation and interviews
- 9.45 - 10.30am: Sitting meditation
- 10.30am: Food offering to the Sangha
- 12.00 - 1.30pm: Dhamma school for children is on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month.

**Wednesday**
- 7.30 - 8.30am: Unguided meditation followed by an informal discussion

**Thursday**
- 9.30 - 11.00am: Yoga, relaxation & meditation (beginners welcome)

**South of the River**

**Tuesday**
- 7.00 - 9.00pm: Meditation Instruction
  - Meditation and Dhamma talk
  - Armadale-Kelmscott Hospital
  - Enquiries to Dave Reed, 399 1411

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**Addresses**

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18 - 20 Nanson Way  
Nollamara WA 6061  
Tel: 345 1711

Bodhinyana Monastery  
Lot 1 Kingsbury Drive  
Serpentine WA 6205  
Tel: 525 2420

Buddhist Community Services  
Social Worker  
Tel: 344 4220