Vesakha Day
Sunday 20th May 2000

The full moon day of May, Vesakha is an occasion of ultimate significance as it commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana (final passing away) of the Lord Buddha. On this full moon night the Buddha-to-be sat alone all night in the blissful silence and profound clarity of deep meditation. He saw the Dhamma, the Truth that is the nature of all, mind and universe. He was perfectly enlightened, released from all suffering, at peace – the Buddha!

The perfection of wisdom that He gained on that first Vesakha night was freely and lovingly made available to all. The Dhamma as taught by the Buddha transcends time, language and oceans, and is still available today, even here in Perth. The Dhamma, when practised, leads from confusion and suffering to happiness, harmony, compassion and peace.

The Vesakha Day celebrations will be held at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre on Sunday 10th May and all are invited to attend.

Programme for the Day

9:00am    Gathering at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre
9:30am    Group chanting, taking of the Three Refuges and the Five or Eight Precepts, auspicious chanting and a 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
4:00 – 6:00pm  Tea and biscuits, Meditation and Discussion
6:00 – 6:30pm  Traditional Sri Lankan Buddhist devotional songs
6:30 – 8:00pm  Evening Ceremony including chanting, Dhamma talk and circumambulation of the shrine
NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO
SAMMASAMBUDHASSA

THE MIDDLE WAY

The first teaching of the newly enlightened Buddha, even before the Four Noble Truths, was on the Middle Way. The realisation of Enlightenment, the Buddha declared, could only be reached by following this Middle Way which avoids two extremes.

Today, over 2500 years and many thousands of miles distant from the scene of the Buddha's first sermon, every Buddhist has heard the two words "middle way" but very few want to know what it means.

So many L-plate Buddhists construct their own middle way to please themselves. They move the goalposts that were the Buddha's two extremes, so that cherished attachments remain safely unchallenged. For example, some imagine that giving up alcohol is too extreme, arguing that the occasional glass of beer or wine is a middle way between reckless drunkenness and stuffy sobriety. Alternatively, that a balanced sex life is 'natural', whatever that means, and so must be a middle way which avoids the social extremes of sexual deviancy and prudish celibacy.

Moderation in all things, they assume, is the essence of the middle way. However, that middle way, in actual fact, leads only to moderate old age, suffering and death, and a moderate rebirth! It is the sort of middle path meant in the saying "he who walks the middle path, gets hit by traffic coming both ways". In reality, such is but a lazy, uncommitted, insipid kind of path, which accepts as its goal the average behaviour of a confused and troubled society. This is not the Middle Way of the Buddha. This is, to use the words of the late Maurice Walshe, the Muddle Way.

The clearest explanation by the Buddha on what He meant by the 'Middle Way' can be found in the Aranavibhanga Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya collection:

"One should not pursue sensual pleasure, which is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and unbeneﬁcial; and one should not pursue self-mortiﬁcation, which is painful, ignoble and unbeneﬁcial. So it was said. Moreover, with reference to what, was this said? The pursuit of the enjoyment of one whose pleasure is linked to sensual desires is a state beset by suffering, vexation, despair, and fever, and it is the wrong way. Disengagement from the pursuit of the enjoyment of one whose pleasure is linked to sensual desires is a state without suffering, vexation, despair, and fever, and it is the right way."
The pursuit of self-mortification is the wrong way. Disengagement from the pursuit of self-mortification is the right way. The Middle Way discovered by the Tathagata avoids both these extremes it leads to Nibbana."

(Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation in the middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, p.1080f.)

Thus, there is no getting around the fact that the Middle Way of the Buddha is a celibate way, a way that does not pursue sensual pleasures nor allow ascetic practices that harm the body. The Middle way is a 'toll way' where one has to relinquish a lot at the entrance lanes, but it is also the 'express-way' to Nibbana.

This Middle way, it should be noted, is not a Miserable Way. Indeed, the happiest, kindest and most balanced human beings that I have ever known have been the celibate monks and nuns living this Middle Way. When one gives up the pursuit of sensual pleasures, which mean the pleasures connected to the five senses, one opens the door to the pleasures of the sixth sense, the mind. These are the superior pleasures, the pleasures of the Middle Way and they are born of meditation. They are to be indulged in, not feared, according to the advice of the Buddha. They are the source of the energy and smiles of the wise and free.

Nor is the middle Way a Riddle way, beyond ordinary understanding. It is rational and available to those with commonsense. In the time of the Buddha, even 7-year-old novices and simple street sweepers achieved Full Enlightenment, so you don't need a degree to enter this way. In fact, too many degrees make one a sheep - BA! BA! - whereas one on the Middle Way does not follow the crowd. In addition, any who claim that the Truth is ineffable, beyond words, merely demonstrate thereby their ignorance of that Truth. The Buddha spent 45 years putting this Truth into words and, as mentioned above, even a seven-year-old could understand it.

Lastly, the Middle Way is not a Diddle way, which cheats the earnest devotee. You should never need to pay for these teachings. Also, if one follows this Way, wholeheartedly, without compromise and with adequate patience, then it leads to only one thing: that Happiness, that Freedom, that Peace that is Nibbana, guaranteed by the Buddha. Try it and see, you will not be 'diddled.'

So please know the difference between the Buddha's Middle Way which leads to Nibbana and, the muddle, miserable, riddle and diddle ways, which only lead you 'up the garden path', as they say.

Ajahn Brahm
Sangha News

I often refer to the monks here at Serpentine as “the good-time monks”! This is true, of course, because when one spends time doing good, one has a good time. Quietening the mind takes ‘da mental’ out of religious fundamentalism, leaving religious ‘fun-ism’ instead. (Since Buddhists believe that they’ve lived before, aren’t they all ‘born-again’ Buddhists?) It may be interesting to know that the old fashioned word for silent reflection is “to muse”, so it’s not wonder that our life is so a-musing. Monastic life isn’t bad, in all senses of that word. Indeed, the only vice that we tolerate here is in our workshop and the closest thing you’ll hear to sleaze is when we blow our nose. I must confess, though, that we monks are into sin! For ‘sin’ is the Thai Buddhist word for precepts and so our monks practice 227 sins every day. Moreover as one of these ‘sins’ is fasting outside of the morning period, one can honestly say that we monks live a fast life!

We must be doing some good since our numbers have been increasing. Three anagarikas (postulants) became novices in early January and two other novices became monks later in the same month. It was especially inspiring to see two middle-aged postulants, Jay (an ex-President of our Buddhist Society) and George, joining the Sangha. It was a case of the Middle Way for the Middle Aged! Novices Jotipanno and Cittipalo plunged into the way of Dhamma to become monks and washed their hands of all their money, making them a pair of ‘money launderers’ I suppose. May they all progress happily on the fast-lane (no evening meal) to Nibbana!

As part of the modern monastic lifestyle, we have now begun construction of the Anagarikas’ (postulant monks) Nightclub. It is really just a dormitory but since they will be spending every night there, why can’t I call it a nightclub? Their nightclub will be very exclusive, of course, because it will exclude everything which goes against their eight precepts and much more. The bouncer at the door will be a kangaroo, to ensure they keep the house rules. In fact, it will be a very simple building, just four small individual rooms each with a covered walking meditation path attached on which to step out! Complimentary drinks will be available at the rain water tanks provided, with ‘happy hour’ beginning at 4am every day. The house band will be Anna Pana and the four Satipatthana, more heavy mental than heavy metal, more monk than punk.

Making the most noise, though, are the clay trucks still thundering past our otherwise peaceful monastery. We managed to encourage our local Shire council to refuse the brick company’s licence on the grounds of road safety. But in January, the Minister for Local Government in our Liberal State Government overturned the Council’s decision and permitted the trucking. I know that some politicians are famous for mudslinging, but slinging mud-laden trucks down a dangerous narrow and steep road goes too far. We continue the fight.
On a more pleasant note, just over a millennium ago (i.e. December last year), we enjoyed a wonderful afternoon here in our monastery with seven of the Benedictine monks from Holy Trinity Abbey in New Norcia. We’ve got a bit of a thing going with these monks now, as we go to visit them and they come to visit us. A reporter from the Sunday Times attended this monk-fest and was taken aback at how effortlessly we got along. This was no awkward interfaith meeting but a totally relaxed gathering of friends full of mirth. We chatted all afternoon about monk-business and it was amazing how much we had in common. Like, for example, when their Abbot Placid began groaning about how his young monks always wanted to change things ….. I can relate to that! We were also very fortunate to host a visit in January from the vice-abbot of Chithurst Monastery in England, Ajahn Karuniko. Ajahn Karuniko is such a kind and pure hearted monk that I must start calling him deputy abbot, not vice abbot, lest he be misunderstood as an abbot of vice!

Which brings me back to the low state of affairs in my monastery where it is often hard to find even one upstanding monk – because they are all sitting down in meditation most of the time. And when they do stand up, they have been getting into rock and roll – arranging the boulders on the refurbished monastery dam spillways. Or else they are found indulging in the swinging lifestyle – on the end of an axe or pick usually. Yes its smashing being a monk. And monastic life is getting ever more cool, now that summer has ended.

Chilling out with a smile,

Ajahn Brahm
Precious Stones

At a Business School somewhere, the professor placed a glass jar on his desk. Then, in full view of all his students, he brought out a bag full of stones and placed them in the jar until no more would go in. He asked his students if the jar was now full, to which they answered “yes”.

From beneath the desk, the professor produced another bag full of small, gravelly stones, which he managed to shake into the spaces between the bigger stones in the jar. A second time, he asked his students whether the jar was now full. However, they were on to him by now and said “No!”

They were correct, of course, for the professor produced a bag of fine sand, which he managed to coax into the spaces between the stones and the gravel. “Is the jar full now?” he asked again. “Probably not, knowing you!” the students replied.

Smiling, the professor brought out from under the desk a small jar of water, which he emptied into the jar full of stones, gravel, and sand. “So what does this teach you?” he asked of his class.

“That no matter how busy your schedule, you can always fit something more in”, said one of the students! It was a business school, after all.

“No!” said the professor emphatically; “It shows that if you want to get the big stones in, you have to put them in first.”

So what are the “big stones” in your “jar”? What is more important to you in your life? Please make sure you schedule in the “precious stones” first, or you’ll never get them in.

With thanks to the member who gave me this story

Ajahn Brahm
DHAMMASARA NUNS' MONASTERY
Report given at the AGM of the Buddhist Society of WA

The past year has seen Dhammasara steadily becoming established in both physical terms and as a venue for the teaching and practice of the Dhamma. We are now well accepted by the local community and have friendly contact with the immediate neighbours.

After the Swan Shire gave formal approval for the use of the land as a Monastery in January 1999 we began our development of the property by connecting electricity to the site. This was completed in March. Then with funds donated specifically for the purpose we had three dams constructed under the supervision of Prem Mirihagalle for the monastery. The dams were finished in time to catch the winter rains and have held water ever since.

In our first year of residence we made a substantial start to our bush fire management plan. This plan, devised in conjunction with the Swan Shire, is a mandatory condition of our development approval. With the Help of the West Gidgegannup Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade and our own band of volunteer forest workers we conducted a controlled burn of part of the property and hand cleared other areas. We doubled the width of all our boundary firebreaks to the required six metres, and this year we will be installing an additional internal firebreak as required by the council.

We started the year holding the daily offering of the meal and the Dhamma teaching in a tent. By winter we were able to move into a well-appointed garden shed, which had been generously donated for the purpose and erected with volunteer labour. With further offerings of material and labour during the year the temporary camp has grown to include a storage shed, washing up tent and shelter for my caravan. In addition to local financial support for the project, donations have also been received from well-wishers in other parts of Australia, from Singapore, Malaysia, and USA.

Towards the end of 1999 we were able to pay off the remainder of the loan for the purchase of the land. A donor has offered to construct five kutis and the starting date for that work is March 25th. As well the Buddhist society itself is undertaking the construction of a three bedroom cottage which will serve as our Đana Sala and meeting hall and provide bathroom facilities until the construction of our main amenities block sometime in the future. The cottage will then be used as the meeting place for the resident monastics. We have received a donation of $50,000 towards the cost of this building, with more money pledged from other donors. However, it may be necessary for the Buddhist society to take out a loan to cover the shortfall in funds. With the construction of the five kutis and the cottage we will be in a position to invite the first women to come who wish to undertake monastic training. At present we have expressions of interest from women in Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Germany and USA. In the daily life of
Dhammasara there were several highlights during the year. The first was the visit of Sister Jitindriya from Amaravati in England in June for six weeks. Another was the celebration of Dhammasara's first anniversary on December 5th, when over two hundred and fifty people braved the heat and the flies to be present. My special thanks to the group that organised the event so successfully. The other highlight was the welcoming of the New Year with our first all night meditation.

During the year I have given regular teachings at Dhammaloka and also led two weekend retreats. In July I attended the opening of the Temple at Amaravati in England, and gave a Dhamma talk in Singapore on the way. The gathering in England was an opportunity to reinforce the ties that exist between the nuns' Sangha there and the developing Sangha at Dhammasara. We are expecting a visit from one of the nuns from England at the end of this year. Many people are contributing to the development of Dhammasara, and I would like to thank everyone who has supported the nuns' monastery in any way during the year; the donors, those who have offered Dana, especially the regulars, those who have participated at the busy bees, and those who have organised and contributed to the various fundraising events. Thank you to Ajahn Brahm and the Bhikkhu Sangha for their advice and encouragement during the past year. Also Binh and the committee for their consistent support of the project. My special thanks to Chris Banks and Jacky Lambert for their untiring support and assistance in every way.

Ajahn Vayama
DHAMMASARA NEWS

One of the inspiring aspects of helping to establish Dhammasara is the opportunity it gives me to witness how the project brings out the best in everyone. I am continually surprised by the generosity and selfless service of people, which often surfaces in the most unexpected circumstances.

Recently a small group of busy bee regulars gave up their weekend to participate in a training course in the safe use and proper maintenance of our new chainsaw. The chainsaw will make the task of clearing up the debris in the forest much easier. The volunteers, men and women, gave their time and energy with no expectation of personal gain, except the satisfaction of knowing their efforts will contribute to protecting the monastery and its inhabitants from bushfires. An unanticipated bonus for Dhammasara came at the end of the two days when Andrew, the professional trainer we had engaged at random and who is not a Buddhist, spontaneously decided to halve his fee so we could put the saved money towards the monastery building fund. He also offered several items of equipment to be used in conjunction with the chainsaw, from his own stock of tools. Then the two families who were offering the meal that day gave more than enough money so we could purchase the best quality protective clothing for the volunteers who will be using the chainsaw.

When we see or hear of such acts of generosity and goodwill, we take the opportunity to rejoice in the goodness of the action, or of the benefit to the one who received it, then even though we haven't directly received a gift ourselves, still our heart is uplifted too.

This ability to rejoice in the good fortune of others is the lovely state of Mudita, the third of the Brahma Viharas. The Buddha said if you want to remove discontent from the mind this is the state to cultivate. It also reminds us that our actions have the potential to influence those around us for their wellbeing or harm.

Our building program is about to get underway, with work on the first five kutis scheduled to begin on 25th March. These kutis are being offered by the one donor. Do you feel the Mudita rising in the mind? We have also drawn up plans for a building that will provide a meeting space and bathroom facilities for the kuti residents and those who will be coming every day to offer the meal. The plans will shortly be submitted to the local council for approval. This building will be funded by the Buddhist Society through donations. We are very grateful to those donors who have already pledged $70,000 towards the cost.

We hope that all these buildings will be completed in time for our second anniversary celebrations in December. Our first anniversary alms-giving ceremony held on 5th December 1999 was a great success. Over two hundred and fifty people braved the heat and the flies to be present and offer their support. Many were making their first expedition to the bush monastery. Ajahn Brahm and Ajahn
Nyana and three other bhikkhus were also present, and chanted Paritta to bless the monastery and all the visitors.

A group of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers had worked for several days to prepare the campsite and organise the facilities needed to accommodate such a large crowd. Another opportunity for Mudita! May many beings benefit from this wonderful opportunity to serve the Dhamma, and to cultivate the lovely qualities of mind that bring joy here and now, and which support the journey to the end of all suffering.

With Metta
Ajahn Vayama
President's Report

Barely five minutes had passed after the end of the Annual General Meeting of the Buddhist Society when I was informed that my first onerous task would be to write a report for the next newsletter. Well, now a whole week has gone by and I have almost figured out which key opens which door and how to operate the photocopier. I'm sure this is the easy part of the job and that I'm being eased into it gently by Ajahn Brahm! But I'm looking forward to the challenges ahead and hope that, with the support of the committee and all of our members, it will be a year of continued success for the Buddhist Society.

I would like to thank everyone from last year's committee for all the hard work and effort which they put in to keeping the society running smoothly and harmoniously. Our president of the last two years, Binh Anson, has left some very deep footsteps in which to follow. His presidency came at a very busy and sometimes difficult time for the society, and he was always a wonderful example of skillful speech and action. I hope you have a good rest, Binh, and I have your phone number so I'll be ringing for help whenever things go wrong! Our vice-president last year was Chris Banks, who is a long-time supporter of the society. Finally she has decided to take a break, but in her typical selfless fashion, she couldn't give it away altogether. Chris will continue to work behind the scenes on the nuns' monastery sub-committee. The other outgoing committee members are Sue Lee (secretary), Brian Haffenden (assistant secretary), Linda Fiera, Shirley and Cherry Jackson and Manel Fernando. Sally Lee also did a fantastic job as chief librarian. To each of these people, I extend my gratitude for all the hard work you put in.

This year's committee consists of James Pinakis (president), Sol Hanna (vice-president), Ann Roberts (secretary), Tanya Tan (assistant secretary), Carol Cahill (treasurer), Abigail Pope (assistant treasurer), Geoff Webb (librarian), Eddy Fernando, Glenda Ingwersen, Lynne Jackson, John Treasure, Don Werrakody and Bronwyn Murphy. With two ex-presidents on the committee and quite a few new faces, we will hopefully have a good mixture of experience and fresh ideas, which will make the committee work.

At the AGM, Binh gave a report outlining the main events of last year. I will summarise some of the key points here.

The two monasteries have continued to develop, demonstrating the tremendous level of support for the Sangha here in Western Australia. Sixteen Sangha members spent the Rains' Retreat at Bodhinyana. Ajahn Brahm conducted ordination ceremonies for three samaneras and two bhikkhupas during the year. The planning and development of the new Dhammadara nuns' monastery under Sister Ajahn Vayama continues to gain momentum. It's very exciting to be around at the beginning of such a unique and exciting project.
The regular activities of the society continue to be well attended. These include the Friday night talks, introductory and ongoing meditation classes and advanced Dhamma classes. To show that we are catering for our Buddhists of the future, we also conduct Dhamma classes for children and youth group meetings. Our programmes celebrating the major Buddhist events of Vesakha, the entry to the Rains Retreat and the offering of the Kathina cloth were also very well attended.

Several meditation retreats were organised during the year, including three weekend retreats and the annual nine-day retreat. We are deeply grateful to Ajahn Brahmavamso, Ajahn Vayama and Ajahn Cattamalo for their kind and valuable teachings in these retreats.

The library is one of the most popular resources that we offer to our members. In addition to having a large range of Buddhist texts for loan, we also sell a limited number of Buddhist books. Tapes of the various Dhamma talks are also available and continue to be in high demand. Sally Lee and a dedicated team of volunteers efficiently managed the library.

The Dhammadhala Centre has been well maintained by our dedicated caretakers: Jim and Yodying Taylor and Max. When Jim and Yodying left for Thailand and Max went back to Melbourne, we were fortunate to have Than Tun and Lynne Jackson as our new caretakers. A huge team of volunteers has also helped to keep the place clean and tidy, and to them we extend our thanks.

The other important occurrence at the AGM was the amendment of our constitution to appoint an Assistant Spiritual Director of the society. At the committee meeting following the AGM, Sister Ajahn Vayama was unanimously elected to this position. We are indeed privileged to have Sangha members of such good conduct and wisdom leading the society, and under their guidance we have little choice but to move closer to enlightenment.

In closing, I'd like to extend an invitation to everyone to stop and say hello to myself and all the other members of the committee. If you have any suggestions, or even complaints, then please feel free to speak up. We have quite a few ideas for projects for this year and these can only succeed with the support and efforts of our volunteers. So please take advantage of these opportunities to get involved. You'll meet a great bunch of people, not to mention all the merit you'll be making! By working together we can ensure that the teachings of the Buddha last a long time.

James Pinakis
President
Newsletter News

The newsletter in its present form has served us well for many years now. With the changing needs of the growing Buddhist community in Western Australia it was decided that it was time to change the format. A meeting was held on Sunday 12th March to discuss the future of the Newsletter and the form it should take.

A monthly community based Bulletin and a bi-annual Dhamma Journal will replace the Newsletter.

The monthly Bulletin will contain about four pages of up-to-date news and information about events and festivals during the coming month with reports on important news since the previous bulletin. Information and news is too slow to be disseminated to the community through the newsletter in its current tri-annual format.

The bi-annual journal will become a forum for Dhamma teachings given by respected meditation masters of the Theravada Buddhist tradition. By having the general news in the monthly Bulletin the journal will be able to publish longer more in-depth teachings and transcripts of Dhamma teachings given by the monks.

Some things, however, will remain the same. The Bulletin and the Journal will both still be for free distribution. They will be available at Dhammaloka as well as at both monasteries, and will be posted to all members who request distribution in this way. The Bulletin and Journal will also be available on the Buddhist Society’s web site.

Sol Hannah
for the committee

Due to other commitments I am unable to continue to compile and edit the newsletter. If anyone would like to gain the extra merit and sheer enjoyment this task brings please contact Sol Hannah. I will of course be around to help. I have enjoyed putting together the Newsletter and will miss being the first to read Ajahn Brahm’s articles and awful jokes, but all things must change.

Joyce Sinclair
Editor
Meditation Retreats 2000

April 20\textsuperscript{th} – 29\textsuperscript{th}
Nine-day retreat
Redemptorist Retreat House, North Perth

June 2\textsuperscript{nd} – 4\textsuperscript{th}
St. Joseph’s Retreat House, Safety Bay

November 17\textsuperscript{th} – 19\textsuperscript{th}
St. Joseph’s Retreat House, Safety Bay

Registration forms are available from the notice board at Dhammaloka four weeks prior to the start of each retreat.

In order to simplify registrations please forward FULL PAYMENT WITH THE REGISTRATION FORM.

As the retreats are always very popular, early registration is advisable. Applicants will only be notified if the retreat is already full.

Enquiries:
Bianca & Ron – 9299-7185

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REGULAR ACTIVITIES

DHAMMALOKA BUDDHIST CENTRE

Friday
7:00 – 7:20pm Chanting
7:30 – 8:00pm Guided sitting meditation
8:00 – 9:00pm A talk on Buddhism

Saturday
10:30am Food offering to the Sangha in the Community Hall
3:00 – 4:15pm Meditation – instruction and discussion conducted by one of our senior Sangha.
   A four-week Introduction to Meditation course begins on the first Saturday of each month.

Sunday
8:30 – 10:30am Sitting and walking meditation
10:30 am Food offering to the Sangha
4:30 – 5:30pm Dhamma Class for children on the 2nd & 4th Saturday of each month. For information Tel: Mrs Fernando – 9310-3654
3:00 – 4:00pm Dhamma Study class 2nd & 4th Sundays of each month
4:30 – 5:30pm Youth Group for 15-21 year olds, on the 3rd Sunday of each month

Wednesday
7:30 – 8:30pm Unguided meditation

LIBRARY HOURS

Friday 6:00 – 7:30pm & 9:00 – 10:00pm
Saturday 2:00 – 3:00pm & 4:00 – 5:00pm

SOUTH OF THE RIVER

Tuesday 7:00 – 9:00pm Meditation instruction
Meditation and Dhamma talk at Armadale-Kelmscott Hospital
Enquiries to Jim Hanna 9524-1098

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