Sāsanārakkha

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A Meaningful **Kathina**

An unexpected carnival-like atmosphere in the air alongside centuries-old tradition on SBS's Kathina Day

By Wong Lai Ngee

There was certainly an air of excitement at Wat Chetawan, the meeting point for all the BGF members and friends making a trip to Taiping for the *kathina* celebrations in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary. Curiosity was in the air. "Where is Sasanarakkha-ah? Is it on Maxwell Hills? Where is Taiping? How far is Taiping?" These were some of the questions which were soon answered.

• TURN TO PAGE 14

Vacancies: Sasana-heirs Wanted 2 VEN AGGACITTA

Robed Exploiters 5 VEN KUMARA

Silent Night, Holy Night 12 VEN SUJATO

The Human Element 18 DOREEN LIM

Dhamma Therapy 21 MOKKHESINI

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"Bhante, can you please send us one good monk to stay for the *vassa* in our centre?" I was asked this question more than once last year.

"What!" I exclaimed. "We don't even have enough monks to be trained here. How on earth can we send you any?"

Yes, please be reminded that we are barely two years old. The first two new buildings in SBS were completed only in mid-2001, with just one trainee monk who had barely three *vassas*. By mid-2002 there was a total of thirteen buildings; two were our legacy from the original land-owner, while the rest were new buildings: seven kutis, one Abbot's Office, one Sima Hall, one Dhamma Workers' Quarters, and one block of washrooms for the public. In July 2002, one postulant started his training, which will take a minimum of one year before he can be considered for *samanera* ordination.

We are all aware that traditional herbal medicine will generally take longer to cure a sickness in comparison with modern western medicine with its undesirable side effects. Time is the price we have to pay for thoroughness and wholesomeness. This same principle applies in Sasana work. For quality products, one must be patient and selective.

As responsible Buddhists, we must remember the numerous precautions taken by our Lord Buddha to prevent the adulteration and decline of his dispensation. Two such injunctions clearly illustrate this.

1. A newly ordained monk must stay under the tutelage of a competent teacher for at least five years to master fundamental principles of the Dhamma-vinaya before he can be independent.

   Vinaya Mahāvagga, Mahākhandhaka 103

2. A teacher must have a minimum seniority of ten years' standing in addition to mastery of monastic law and regulations, and competence in training his pupils in the theory and practice of morality, concentration and insight development.

   Vinaya Mahāvagga, Mahākhandhaka 85

Junior and senior monks have come and gone in this space of time. Now we only have one junior monk and one postulant who are prepared to persevere in our training programme. Why is the response so poor compared to the phenomenally successful novitiate programmes conducted in other centres? Let me share with you my perception of the situation.

Many young Malaysians have been drawn to don the robes because of their interest in meditation. As they are ordained in meditation centres (mostly abroad), they grow up in meditative environments where the study and practice of other aspects of the Dhamma-vinaya are not actively encouraged. When they return home after a few months or years, most are not prepared to participate in the course of training offered at SBS for various reasons.

Perhaps some may not wish to be tied down to a particular residence or routine different from what they have been used to. Others may not appreciate the importance of having holistic training in the Dhamma-vinaya. The terrain and discipline may appear to be formidable to many. Some may prefer to start their own centres with the ever-ready support of generous devotees. And so on and so forth.

There may be exceptions, but if my perception is reasonably accurate, then it may not be an easy task to convince young monks with such backgrounds of the importance of holistic monastic training.

A better option may be to start from scratch, instilling into the minds of postulants the importance of holistic monastic training for the future of the Sasana, for the long-term welfare and happiness of oneself and others. In this respect, we have received several enquiries from middle-aged men and youngsters in their early twenties. The former group's main concern and hesitation is the relinquishing of personal property—animate and inanimate, while the major obstacle faced by the latter is parental objection.

"Parents who object [unreasonably] to their sons' [wholesome] intention to renounce are actually creating unwholesome kamma for themselves," said Ajahn Brahmavamso during the recent Global Conference on Buddhism 2002 held in Shah Alam. And they don't know what they are missing, as the following story shows.

> Legend tells us that Emperor Asoka was inspired to become a Buddhist on his first encounter with a seven-year old *samanera* called Nigrodha. Initially impressed by the young *arahant*'s composure and restrained deportment as he strolled past his palace grounds on alms round, Asoka quickly deepened his faith in the Triple Gem. He supported the Sasana abundantly with magnificent stupas, monasteries, monuments and other requisites for the Sangha.
>
> After a *mahādāna* one day, Asoka was exhilarated to be told by the Sangha that he was the greatest sponsor of requisites (*paccayadāyaka*); there was none to equal him even during the Buddha's lifetime.
>
> "Am I then the heir to the Sasana (*sāsanassa dāyāda*), Bhante?"

"Not by this much, Great King," answered the venerable Elder Moggaliputta Tissa on the Sangha's behalf, "is one an heir to the Sasana; but he is considered a sponsor of requisites or a supporter (*upaṭṭhāka*). Great King, even if one were to offer a mountain of requisites extending from the earth until the Brahma world one would not be considered an heir to the Sasana."

"How then, Bhante, is one an heir to the Sasana?"

"Great King, anyone who allows his or her own son to become a monk is called an heir to the Sasana."

Asoka thought, "After having given so much I am still not an heir to the Sasana." Desirous of becoming one, he looked around and saw Prince Mahinda standing nearby. "Even though I intend to make him crown-prince, it's better for him to renounce," he thought. Then he asked the prince, "Can you become a monk?"

"I shall become a monk, Your Highness," answered Mahinda happily. "Let me renounce and let Your Highness become an heir to the Sasana."

Looking at the tremendous response to the many novitiate programmes that were held in Buddhist temples, hermitages and centres throughout the country last year, we can be quite sure that there was no shortage of proud heirs and heiresses to the Sasana—temporarily anyway. But what we really need are *permanent* Sasana-heirs and heiresses.

Dear parents, you must be the luckiest persons around if your son has any inclination to become a monk. Emperor Asoka had to request his son Prince Mahinda to renounce the worldly life so that he could become a Sasana-heir. Please don't miss the rare opportunity to become a Sasana-heir or heiress if your son asks your permission to be ordained a monk! SBS

Sasana-heirs-to-be...

Listen to what Ven Kumara's parents have to say about their reactions when he first announced his intention to become a monk.

"I was very disappointed, after having invested so much on his education," said Mr Liew Hee Nam.

"For me it was more physical. I felt sad that he wouldn't be near us anymore, that I couldn't hug him again," said Mrs Liew as she dabbed her eyes.

But they did not change their minds overnight. Frequent exposure to Dhamma talks and discussions cleared many misconceptions about monkhood.

"My parents and relatives also objected. They thought that monks were lazy people living off the generosity of the faithful; that monkhood was a form of escapism for those who had been jilted or had failed in life," Mr Liew explained.

Mrs Liew smiled and nodded. "It took time for us to understand the nobility of monkhood and accept the fact that it was not right for us to obstruct the future and happiness he wanted. For we knew that he would be very unhappy if we did not give him permission to become a monk."

"And he could blame us for that later," added Mr Liew.

Four years have passed since Ven Kumara donned the robes. In the process of responding to their son's decision to become a monk, Mr & Mrs Liew have become more knowledgeable and active Buddhists. No wonder the ancient Elders called them Heirs to the Sasana! SBS

Editorial

Procrastination is a bad habit which many of us find hard to shake off, even as Buddhists for whom the present moment is of utmost importance.

"There's always tomorrow" is the thought that comes to mind ever so often, although it is not formed in as many words. Someone by the name of Parkinson had the wisdom to express this profound insight succinctly:

Parkinson's Law — *Work expands to fill time left for its completion.*

In trying to persuade people to keep deadlines for the submission of articles for 'Sasanarakkha', we find that this law holds true ever so often, as in one of the lighter moments with someone who had been 'commissioned' two months beforehand to write an article for us:

Me : Hello, you know why I'm calling?
Him : Oh yes. Article.
Me : Can we have it at the end of the month?
Him : Yes, of course.
Me : Good. It's this weekend.
Him : Huh? How can? It's only a few days!

Nevertheless he managed to give us the article written from the heart.

That's one funny bone to chew on.

We would like to express our gratitude to all who have contributed articles to make this issue possible. To those who were given impossibly short notice to come up with articles on the retreat but who rose to the occasion and did the impossible, we salute you. Thank you all, for making time in your tight schedules to accommodate our requests.

—Editor

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We've Got Mail

✉ We really enjoyed ourselves and everyone in Bus 4 was really happy and looking forward to the next Kathina in 2003. Sadhu to everyone in Taiping for their service in propagating the Buddha-Sasana. May the blessings of the Triple Gem be with you.

A group has indicated their interest in sponsoring Kathina in year 2004. They are mostly meditators around the Klang Valley. Is it possible to book the sponsorship? Then they can start collecting funds from next year onwards from people all over Malaysia.

All the best and *sadhu* again for a job well done.

Cecelia Lim

Editor's note: The Management Committee will decide on this issue of sponsorship and keep our supporters informed.

✉ The *kathina* trip was smooth and enjoyable. I just want to highlight one thing though. When descending the hill in the Ford 4WD, I really felt worried about the passengers'safety because the driver was driving at a speed which to me can easily end in fatal accidents. I believe many others in the 4WD shared the same anxiety.

Ong See Liang

Transport Dept.: Our heartfelt apologies for the excess zeal with which our driver sent you down the hill. We have passed on your message to him. Thank you for bringing this to our notice.

✉ Here's a brief note to congratulate all of you on the very successful staging of the *kathina* celebrations on Sunday at SBS. I was very impressed by the proceedings. It was uncluttered, yet meaningful. Being held in such marvelous surroundings, it certainly made my journey all the way from Singapore all that more worthwhile.

I'd also like to record my thanks to all of you for being such good hosts, particularly Mr KS Goh who took time off from his obviously busy schedule on Saturday to show us around. Clearly he's very proud of what's been achieved so far at the Sanctuary (and rightly so!). You all can be proud of it and I say this with utmost sincerity. The impact of such a sanctuary in this region also reflects far-sightedness.

My friends from the Buddhist Fellowship (Singapore) look forward to the day when you'll welcome the laity to a retreat at the Sanctuary.

Thank you again. My best wishes also to Ven Aggacitta Bhikkhu who has obviously inspired all of you with his drive and passion.

Piyaratne

Editor's note: We did hold a retreat for lay people in December for volunteer helpers of SBS. You can read the write-ups on it in this issue.

✉ We had a very meaningful and enjoyable trip to Taiping! We appreciate and cherish the moments stepping on the clay and cooking for *dana* when most people were still meeting their "*chow gong*".

It's good to let our members, who are exposed only to Mahayana to come closer and know more about Theravada

Lee Mei Qing

Editor's note: Mei Qing was one of the members of the group that visited us and had a good time compacting clay as part of the efforts to solve the *sima* pond leakage (refer to UNFOLDMENT entry for 23 June).

We thank you for finding the time to write as well as give us constructive suggestions. We would like to hear from more of you, so do keep in touch with us at the following:

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Robed **Exploiters**

Kumāra Bhikkhu

In the previous issue of Sasanarakkha *we featured an article which touched briefly on the subject of con-men dressed in robes. Now read on for a more in-depth look at the same problem.*

It has been quite some time since Malaysians began to see shaven-headed men garbed in Theravada robes, females in Thai *maechi* clothing, and some in Mahayana robes going around with alms-bowls to collect money from the public. Some of them offer supposedly blessed strings and rosaries in return.

Some are said to be working for syndicates who provide them with tools of the trade and necessary instructions.

Out of ignorance and desire for merits or pure generosity, a great number of Malaysian Chinese, and some Indians too, have been exploited by these individuals.

The Buddhist response to this has been quite varied. While some give with no questions asked, others look upon them with disgust, particularly informed Buddhists who know what a member of the Sangha should and should not do. Some Buddhists are particularly embarrassed when questioned by non-Buddhist friends, and are at a loss in answering.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

This question is an important one if we want to be clear about the issue in order to effectively seek solutions that work. Otherwise, all our efforts to solve the problem will be geared in the wrong direction.

Very often, we label them as "bogus monks". While this may be correct in most cases, to call them thus can also be inaccurate.

Some of them are known to be real monks who are Thais, Cambodians or even Malaysians. Those from Thailand can even produce identification cards to show that they are registered monks. In fact, I was told that among a group of "monks" who were caught in Kedah begging for money, one had been a real monk for years.

So, **suppose you were to see someone whom you regard as a real monk collecting money at a night market, would you not be just as uneasy—if not more so—as you would be if he were bogus?**

Recently (13–25 November 2002), I conducted an informal survey through email to test this hypothesis. The results from part of the survey reveal a clear picture. Among the questions asked were these two:

- Would you be bothered/irked if a "monk" who is **regarded to be genuine** were to go to a market in the evening with his bowl and accepts money?
- Would you be bothered/irked if a "monk" who is **unknown** were to go to a market in the evening with his bowl and accepts money?

I have chosen to use the word "unknown", instead of "bogus" because it is virtually impossible to ascertain if a "monk" on the street is real or not. Anyway, here are the results:

"Monk" who is...	Irked/bothered	Not irked/bothered	Total
regarded to be genuine accepting money in a market in the evening	73	4	77
unknown accepting money in a market in the evening	72	5	77

A detailed report shows that *all* the 72 respondents who said that they were irked/bothered to see an unknown "monk" accepting money in a market, were *also* irked/bothered if the "monk" were regarded as genuine.

Going by the above analysis of the survey, **the respondents** who were concerned in such a situation **were not really concerned whether the "monk" was bogus.** This, I believe, is true for Malaysian Buddhists at large as well.

For this reason, **identifying the issue as a "bogus monk" problem, for all practical purposes, misses the point.** A more crucial consideration is that this also tends to mislead efforts to curb it.

Therefore, we need a more accurate label. At this point, I can't think of a better one than "robed (Sasana) exploiters".

WHY BUDDHISTS SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

In the same survey, only about 5% of the respondents say they were not bothered at all but the rest said that they were bothered. Quite a number added comments saying that Buddhists should do something about it.

Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda Mahathera has often referred to these robed exploiters as "a public nuisance"—with good reasons, I think.

Buddhism Misrepresented

A major concern of the Buddhist community over the issue is the eventual **negative public opinion of the Sangha** generated by these exploiters.

From the scriptures, we know that the Buddha did not permit such behaviour from members of the Sangha.

However, most people tend to generalise. Thus, these offenders will tarnish the image of the genuine Sangha.

What the Buddha allowed, and even encouraged, was for monks and nuns to live as "alms-food eaters". Such Buddhist renunciants choose not to accept invitations to meals at homes of families, but depend on food obtained by "going for alms". Besides food, they may also accept other things that are suitable, but never money.

Our respected mahathera, **Ven Dhammananda was reported to have said that monks who begged for money were violating the Buddhist code of ethics.** (The Star, October 14, 2002) They violate the rule all the same if they give "holy" strings, rosaries, or any kind of things in return.

This, however, is not known to many Malaysians. By continuing to give money to these exploiters, they are actually encouraging and indirectly perpetuating such gross misrepresentation of what Buddhist renunciants do, and what Buddhism is about.

Faith Misplaced, Charity Misused

Some of those who have been giving money to these exploiters may eventually come to find out what they really do with the money. When that happens, it can be most disheartening to the givers. If they do not know of monks or nuns who are better behaved, it can result in long-term disillusionment with members of the Sangha in particular and Buddhism in general.

In an article "Preying on believers' generosity" in The Star, (Monday, October 14, 2002), an Indian lady who had been giving money to a monk, purportedly for a temple in Thailand, found him ...

> smoking in a back alley using his alms bowl as an ashtray. "I was so angry, I wanted to hit him," said Rajeswary. **"All this while when I thought I was doing something good, he was spending my money on cigarettes and who knows what else."**

Once a Burmese man, who was in the Subang Jaya Buddhist Association for a short-term monkhood, told me a rather unforgettable story. One day he saw a "monk" with a pimp at the reception counter of a hotel. Later on, the pimp left while the the "monk" went to the elevator with a heavily made-up woman.

Admittedly, we cannot be absolutely certain of what happened after that, but it is hard not to think the worst.

Therefore, it is not difficult to see that this *is* an issue which we should get our act together to solve.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Now, let us concentrate on solutions to this rather unhealthy phenomenon in Malaysia.

Quite a few ideas have surfaced in recent years. I gather that there has also been some serious brainstorming to seek solutions, and even actual attempts. How effective are these possible solutions? Let us look into them.

Sangha Member Identification Card

At least one Malaysian Buddhist organisation publicised its effort to introduce some sort of identification card for Sangha members so that people can verify their authenticity.

As mentioned earlier in this article, whether the "monk" is genuine or bogus has no relevance to the real issue at hand. Bearing that in mind, if we introduce such an identification card, how can it help curb the problem?

While the advocators may have good motives in embarking on such a move as a possible solution, it is a misled one. **This is a good example how a misleading identification of the problem can mislead efforts to curb it.**

Moreover, in the actual experience of countries where Sangha membership is acknowledged by the government through the issuance of special identification cards, it has not improved the behaviour of Sangha members. **What effect then can we expect this practice to have on those who are not even true members?** If carried out, **this idea may also entail a host of problems**, such as forged cards and need for card renewal.

With due respect to those who are working towards this as a solution, I think instead of solving a problem, it would only create more problems.

At any rate, this idea (as far as I know) never really took off; and, considering the reasons

SBS monastics walking down for alms food.

mentioned, **I think Malaysian Buddhists should not waste their precious resources on this unlikely solution.**

Have them all Arrested!

Quite a number of Buddhists are exceedingly disgusted with such misrepresentations of the Buddha Sasana. As they consider it to be utterly wrong, they feel that the exploiters should be arrested. I personally know of certain Buddhist friends who have seriously contemplated and even attempted to do just that.

Some have tried working on the issue with the Malaysian Police Department and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) to have these offenders arrested. However, there seems to be a few problems, mainly: **On what grounds can we have them arrested?**

- *Exploiting Buddhist faith.* There are no national laws on that.
- *Begging.* There *is* a law on that. But what about legitimate monks legitimately gathering alms-food? Is there then an exemption in our national laws to protect them?

Furthermore, **the police seem to have limited power over these exploiters**, even if they are willing to co-operate with Buddhists to nab only the offending ones.

- **If they are foreigners** (Thai, Laotian, Cambodian, etc.), they can be arrested and deported for abusing the permission granted to enter the country, but they can easily return.
- **If they are Malaysian citizens**, at most we could have them arrested for begging—a minor offence in the eyes of our laws. A relatively small fine can easily be paid (possibly by the syndicate they work with) and they are free to get back to their "jobs".

Therefore, even with all the sincere help that we might get from the police and the MCA to have all these errant people arrested, **it does not look like a workable solution.**

Educate People through Mass Communication

There have been some earnest efforts by some established Buddhist organisations to inform the public that they should not put money into alms-bowls, that Buddhist monks do not go for alms-round after noon, and of other relevant Buddhist monastic rules.

Among the tools of mass communication used were leaflets and posters. I have no idea how far it reached the targeted audience, but I believe the distribution was somewhat confined to regions where the publishing organisations were located, such as Penang and Klang Valley.

In Taiping where I stay, devotees from the Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, brought some leaflets which did not go far beyond the hands of our society members who are already very much aware of the matter. A check with Lee Yu Ban, an active Buddhist member, revealed a similar pattern in the Klang Valley.

As to why these materials have not been properly channelled to places where the education is necessary (instead of among Buddhist temples and centres) is to me quite puzzling. How can we expect that to bring about the desired effect?

There have been quite a few newspaper articles about the matter as well. It is good to see that the press is also keen to do its part in educating the public.

I do think that **efforts to educate the public are heading in the right direction**. However, since there are still many robed exploiters doing good business in many places in Malaysia, **we know that the efforts still fall short of being successful.**

The idea of proper monastic conduct—that is contrary to what these exploiters are presenting—should be deeply impressed into the public psyche. **Buddhist organisations and the media should keep up this effort** and see to it that there is enough resonance among the public on the matter.

Lee Yu Ban, who has been in crusade against robed exploiters, has **some good ideas**:

- **Print fairly large sized posters on the scam.** (I would like to add that they should be eye-catching too.)
- **Send them in sufficient numbers to all Buddhist and Chinese temples and organisations** in the country, with a request that they be prominently displayed. This must be done before Wesak so that it will be seen by the large throngs of 'once-a-year Buddhists'.
- For added results, **have these posters also sent to coffee shops, restaurants, etc.**

I think these proposals are viable and deserve consideration by Buddhist organisations.

Same Method, Different Approach

The method is there, but **perhaps we should reconsider our approach.**

The strategy that I have seen appears to be twofold: to tell people

- not to give money to "bogus monks" begging in public, and
- to report to the police or other relevant authorities of such activities.

My disagreement with that kind of approach is that it appears (to me at least) to have an underlying motivation of anger. It appears somewhat unkind, somewhat "un-Buddhistic".

I was told that once someone expressed his irritation over these "bogus monks" to Ven Suvanno Mahathero, and guess what the response was?

"Good lah! Last time when I went for *pindapat*, nobody gave me anything!" *[Note: Ven Suvanno is known to be the pioneer in pindapata practice in Malaysia.]*

Truly, **giving is a virtue that is hard to fault.** On the other hand, according to the Buddha, **to discourage giving has negative results:**

> ... whoever prevents another from giving a gift... creates an obstruction to the merit of the giver, an obstruction to the recipient's gains, and prior to that he undermines and harms his own self.
>
> ... even if a person throws the rinsing of a bowl or a cup into a village pool or pond, thinking, 'May whatever animals living here feed on this,' that would be a source of merit, to say nothing of what is given to human beings. But I do say that what is given to a virtuous person is of great fruit, and not so much what is given to an unvirtuous person...
>
> *[Extracted from Vaccha Sutta (AN III.58), tr. Thanissaro Bhikkhu]*

Many people like to offer alms to Sangha members. A person in Buddhist robes collecting money in a market may actually be a thief of the Sasana, for he disguises as a Buddhist renunciant to deceive the faithful. Still, what is given to him is a "source of merit".

So, are we in a dilemma? Not necessarily.

What we can do is this: **Instead of telling people *not* to give, we can tell them *what* to give.** We can encourage people to give food or other things that are useful and allowed by the Buddha for his ordained disciples.

"Good lah! Last time when I went for pindapat, *nobody gave me anything!"*

—Ven Suvanno Mahathero

Regardless of who that robed person is, the giver gains merit and can rejoice over his giving. Furthermore, the receiver gets something to eat. And we who encourage righteous giving gain merits too for encouraging an act of good.

Even if he refuses it you would still earn some good merits for making the effort to give. I must give credit to Ven. Kusala for this marvelous idea!

So, perhaps we could try another round of mass effort to educate the public. This time, instead of an unfriendly approach, why not try a friendlier one?

Give them food, or other things allowed by the Buddha. If they refuse it, you can eat it yourself, and still earn merits.

If you would rather not give, that is fine. But there is no need to work yourself up over it. For all we know, they might have been shoved by oppressive circumstances into such an unacceptable way of making a living. If they were as fortunate as most of us are—materially and spiritually—what need is there for them to get involved in this?

At any rate, we as Buddhists should know that expressing our anger is not the way. Experienced teachers know that a far-reaching method to change a student's bad behaviour is to express pity, and not anger. Perhaps this applies here too.

So, **let us take a kinder approach.** If the Buddha were still around, I think he would approve of it.

To those who are making efforts to educate people through mass communication, may I suggest that you consult those who are better informed about the Buddhist doctrines and discipline first before having the material publicised? It would certainly help to make the information more accurately, properly and effectively conveyed.

Genuine Alms-round

Having presented some possible solutions that have yet to be proven efficacious, let me now relate to you a proven one.

For some months, Ven Kusala stayed here in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary near Taiping as a visiting monk. Although we had arranged pindapata, he preferred to go to markets and food stalls. This is considered a "high-class" *dhutanga* (ascetic practice). A monk observing such a *dhutanga* practice would simply go with the alms-bowl with no prior arrangements to places where people inhabit and stand silently at suitable places with the purpose of getting food.

Before Ven Kusala began doing this, it was already common in Taiping to see "bogus monks" going around markets for money. So, in the beginning, people offered money, which he promptly declined. He would tell them that he was there to accept food only.

As days went by, he became quite well known among the people around. Later, some of our devotees asked him if he would like to go to markets where "bogus monks" were seen. To their delight, he agreed. So, on each Sunday, they would drive him to different markets in Taiping alternately, and this went on for the rest of the months he stayed here.

One Sunday, instead of going to Taiping Insight Meditation Society for dana, I went to a wet market for pindapata. My bowl was simply far too small to contain the food that I received. So, I had to repeatedly transfer food into my bag.

A lady at a stall requested that I waited while she prepared a few packets of *tau-fu-fa*. As she was about to give it to me, a man came over with some cash in hand, apparently wanting to hand it to me. The lady was quick to say (in Hokkien), "*Ee boh siew looi eh; siew chiak eh nya.*" (He doesn't accept money; he accepts food only.)

Genuine monks only accept food and allowable requisites with their alms bowls.

I was glad. People there seem to have been quite well educated about proper pindapata. It is simply amazing what persistence in what is right can do, isn't it?

Imagine a robed exploiter trying to make a living in such a place. He would certainly get more food than money—if any.

I asked a devotee sometime later whether he still heard of bogus monks. He thought hard about it and then said (in Hokkien), "*Bar loo siang kah see boh har meek thnia tiok liao er... Ee'ang eh seng li hor Bhante Kusala phak phai khee liao lah!*" (Hardly ever hear it now... Their business has been ruined by Ven Kusala!)

Although we cannot be 100 percent certain of that, **why else would all robed exploiters suddenly cease operations in Taiping after a monk started to go for his daily alms-round there?**

Just some weeks ago, for the purpose of the article, I asked another devotee the same question. Again, he said he had not heard of it anymore. I should add that it has been many months since Ven Kusala left here for Myanmar. Effective, isn't it?

So that was the wonderful success story, and a *proven* method of getting rid of robed exploiters. In fact, it did not even start with that purpose in mind. All Ven Kusala did was practise an ancient *dhutanga* custom, which was praised by the Buddha. **Praise the Lord!**

The circumstances surrounding the writing of this article have allowed me less time than I would have liked. On quite a few matters mentioned above, I was not able to carry out a more thorough fact-finding. So, there may be some lack of information and possibly some erroneous assumptions. If you spot any of them, I would be happy to hear from you. I also welcome any other useful comments on the matter. You may send them to *rexploit@evinaya.cjb.net*.

Long live the good Dhamma! SBS

Thanks to your generous support, construction under Phase 1 and Phase 2 has been completed. With your continuing support, we are now ready for another go. As this newsletter goes to the printers, tenders are being called for

PHASE 3 DEVELOPMENT

- **Sangha Central Facilities**
  incorporating pantry, sewing room, storeroom, laundry and robe-dyeing area, washrooms, kappiya's room, terraces for viewing activities in Sima Hall
- **Library**
- **Classroom**
- **Publication & Meeting Rooms**
  with attached public washrooms
- **Administration Building**
  with multi-purpose hall on upper level, and public washrooms below

Construction is expected to commence in early March 2003 and completed before Kathina 2003. Except for the Admin Building, all the other structures will be located near the Sima pond.

Please send your donations by cheque or bank draft made payable to **TIMS (SBS Project Fund)**, with the donor's name written on the reverse side. You could also pay directly into this fund by banking your donation into the following bank or any of its branches:

Maybank Berhad
A/c No: **50 8300 104239**
Branch: **Kamunting, Perak, Taiping**

Please send us the pay-in slip if you bank in directly.

SANGHA speaks

Dear Friends...

AJAHN KARUNIKO who visited SBS in December shares with us his thoughts on dana and mental health; metta and insight; and above all reminds us of the need to be patient.

7 December 2002

Dear friends of SBS,

Following a recent visit to Sasanarakkha I was asked to write a few words. The beautiful environment brought back memories of my stay in Bodhinyanarama Monastery, New Zealand. Bodhinyanarama is also on a hillside green with vegetation and small trees. The elevated view from the kuti, its wooden walking meditation veranda and even the large glass sliding door were all reminiscent of the New Zealand monastery. I like high up places where one can look down on the town below. It symbolises the monk's aspiration to rise above the world and its vicissitudes of praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, happiness and suffering.

Looking around the monastery, I was impressed with how much has been done in the two years since the monastery was started, a testimony to the faith and support of the Malaysian Buddhist community. The buildings also reflect the thought and care that have gone into their construction.

I was pleased to see that Venerable Aggacitta keeps the good Buddhist monk's tradition of going out with the bowl to collect alms food, and I say this despite the experience of pain in the soles of my feet. We too go on pindapata rounds in England, though not everyday, but in the colder English climate we wear sandals so my feet are not accustomed to hard stony roads. I empathised with Venerable Kumara's sentiments in the article he wrote for "Eastern Horizon" concerning his visit to Wat Pah Nanachat, especially the word "OUCH!" When I later mentioned this experience to someone, I was asked if I had to walk a long way. I replied that it seemed quite long when nearly every step is painful. I am reminded of that verse in the Dhammapada, "Long is the journey to one who is weary" or in my case, "Long is the journey for one who has sore feet". But even more so the Buddha says in these verses, "Long is *samsara* for the fool who does not comprehend the Good Dhamma".

However, the soreness of the feet was soon forgotten and replaced by a sense of *mudita* when, at the end of the pindapata, I saw all the good people who had turned out to offer food on that morning. It's a source of joy for me to see people doing wholesome things. I must also admit to an enhanced sense of gladness at seeing the children offering things on these occasions. I see in the West these days the extent to which children are victims of the advertising industry that encourages the attitude 'I want', and are not so exposed to

situations and influences that encourage generosity. In my youth I was very much in the 'me and mine' mode, thinking mostly of what I want and my pleasures. The result of this was my being quite depressed in my early twenties. One of the symptoms of depression can be a kind of excessive self obsession. It's sad, but not surprising to read that depression and mental illness are on the increase in the West despite the high standard of living and technological progress. So, the chance for young people to grow up in an atmosphere of generosity, consideration of others, and Dhamma practice will be a substantial contribution to their ensuing mental health and well being. This is why I feel glad on these occasions and I also hope that the contact with the Sangha, who exemplify a noble and virtuous life, will influence the young in wholesome ways so that they may grow experiencing a sense of well being.

I was also pleased to know that Venerable Aggacitta emphasises the practice of *metta bhavana* along with Vipassana. I have seen how some people who get into purely Vipassana practice quite intensively can get, in my opinion, a bit too introverted, insensitive, and dysfunctional. They can think only about 'me and my practice'. So the metta practice can also give rise to a quality of heart that is light and pleasant and supportive of insight practice. So during my stay at SBS we finished the evening chanting with sending metta to all types of beings.

I would also like to express appreciation for Venerable Aggacitta's contribution. Having been involved in setting up monasteries in England and New Zealand, I know there is a lot of work. The Abbot especially has many responsibilities and decisions to make, some of which may not please everybody.

In this respect, I would like to relate an incident from the life of the Buddha. On one occasion the Buddha left Kosambi as the monks continued to quarrel despite the Buddha's admonishment. The Buddha then came across the Venerable Anuruddha who was practising meditation in a park with two other monks. When the Buddha asked them how they practised they all responded thus: "I give up what I am minded to do, to do what is beneficial for my brothers in the Holy Life".

It's a mature practitioner who is willing to give up his own idea to promote the harmony of the group. The Buddha also teaches in the "Metta Sutta" that one who is intent on cultivating *metta* does not hold onto fixed views. I can see from past experience how clinging to views has resulted in some negative mind states, particularly ill or righteous indignation. However if we have views but do not cling to them then the quality of *metta* is not impaired.

So I think SBS is fortunate to have Ven. Aggacitta as Abbot. He is well practised, experienced and in my opinion a good example of a well behaved monk. He is also willing to train other monks. May SBS continue to flourish but may I also recommend the quality of patience for those times when things do not happen as quickly as we would like. The Buddha said the fragrance of virtue is supreme as it goes against the wind in all directions. So may the virtuous practice of those at Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary serve to inspire and support the Malaysian Buddhists in their practice. And wouldn't it be wonderful if with the quality of virtuous practice even the durians began to give off a nice fragrance!

With metta and appreciation to the Sangha and friends of SBS,

Karuniko Bhikkhu

A Christmas Retreat at SBS

Ajahn Sujato shares with us some reflections on the role of intensive lay retreats within Buddhism

Ten o'clock Sunday night. The phone rings—it's Ven. Aggacitta. There's a problem. SBS was planning to hold a retreat the following week, and had invited a Burmese Sayadaw to teach. But he had been given only a 6-day entry visa to Malaysia.

"That's terrible! A world full of vice, corruption, and terror, and they won't let a monk come to talk about peace." Having stayed in Malaysia for over a year, I'm aware of the problems. I might add that as an Australian I've never personally experienced difficulties coming in to Malaysia. It seems that, despite the posturing of the politicians, Australians and Malaysians remain close friends on both the personal and official levels.

Anyway, the upshot was this: Ven Aggacitta wanted me to conduct the retreat. I admit I was a bit reluctant. I'd never taught a retreat before, and I'm sure a more experienced teacher could do a better job. But there seemed little choice, so of course I was glad to help out the best I could.

The retreat was for 10 days at Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary. I had the privilege of using the wonderful facilities that have been so swiftly put in place since I last visited the site about two years ago. The air was cool, the surroundings natural, and the views panoramic.

Although Ven Aggacitta was away on private retreat, Ven Kumara and the lay community of SBS did a wonderful job of welcoming me and making my stay most enjoyable. The place has not been designed for retreats, however, so the yogis—a dozen or so—had to put up with some crowding and inconvenience—a good test of patience!

This retreat was offered as a gesture of gratitude for those who have given so much of their time and effort into building up and supporting SBS. So most of the yogis were local, although some came from elsewhere, even one from Australia. As usual, the yogis had various kinds of experience and meditation background. Most were in their 40s and 50s, middle class, and urban. Almost all were women—I'm told this is normal. But I did wonder, why they had to come to the monk's monastery to practise? When will we see in Malaysia a Sasanarakkhini for nuns?

Despite the fact that the yogis came from a fairly uniform social background, during the interviews I was struck by the diversity of their inner life. Some were full of emotions, anguish, and torments; some were down-to-earth and straightforward; some liked to think and intellectualise; and some had minds that were bright and clear. So I tried, as best as I could, to give each person the space to grow in his or her own way.

I did not insist that everyone should follow my system of meditation. If they were content with how they had been practising, I tried to encourage and support that. I don't think it's a good thing to chop and change one's style of meditation too much.

I was mainly teaching a method of developing metta that I learnt from a teacher in Bangkok called Ajahn Maha Chatchai and which I have been practising for about ten years. Metta is a great way of bringing joy into one's meditation and one's life. Let's face it—the more fun your meditation is, the more you're going to do it.

This method offers a practical, step by step approach to stabilizing and maturing the joy of metta. We develop the feeling of loving-kindness starting at home base: oneself. We learn to steep and suffuse pure, gentle, soft loving-kindness through the whole body. As the metta becomes strong enough we develop metta for, in turn, a loved person, a neutral person, and a disliked person. Eventually, when the very powerful and bright nimitta of love manifests, we can spread out universal love to the whole world. Developed in this way, metta does not just uplift the heart, but also enables the mind to coalesce in deep concentration.

I was pleased to notice that all of the yogis, as the well-earned fruit of their diligence, seemed

to settle and grow into this practice as the retreat went on. They learned to appreciate the difference between the trashy thrills of worldly happiness and the subtle peace of spiritual happiness.

I also tried to broaden the focus of the teachings to situate meditation within the larger context of mental culture. So in most of the talks I dealt with the 37 "Wings to Enlightenment". This is the most important and comprehensive framework for practice found in the early *suttas*. Later it became a central conception of the path in all schools of Buddhism, including both Theravada and Mahayana. Here we find a balanced, rational approach to practice which is both pragmatic and profound, and which resists simplistic, one-sided reductionism.

One aspect of the yogi's meditation experiences arrested my attention. I was surprised by the extent to which many of the yogis seemed to equate meditation with pain. When I asked how their meditation was, I heard a litany of complaints about sore knees, sore backs, and goodness knows what else. That's not your meditation, I wanted to say, that's just attachment. Don't listen to all the fools in your body yelling 'Hey mate! Look at ME!' Listen to the silent sage. If you are really mindful and unattached, why can't you withdraw your attention from that agitation and focus on peace? Where does wisdom grow, in sound or in silence?

I wonder whether I might be permitted to share a few reflections here about the role of retreats within Buddhism as a whole. The intensive lay retreat has become such a prominent feature of modern Buddhism that we sometimes forget that it is a recent innovation. The time-honored form for lay practice was to undertake the eight precepts once a week, go to the monastery when possible, and spend the day meditating and listening to Dhamma.

Only in the 20th Century was the lay retreat invented and popularised. Looking around at the various places where Buddhism has become established since that time, I come to the surprising conclusion that I do not know of any place that strongly emphasises lay retreats where the monastic Sangha has flourished.

Here are a few examples. (I apologise if the following list seems to excessively emphasize the Ajahn Chah monasteries—this is the tradition I was born and grew up in.) In Thailand, there have been several centers catering for English-speaking yogis. Wat Ram Poeng in Chieng Mai and Wat Suan Mokh in Chaiya have for a decade or more been regularly offering lay retreats to hundreds of yogis each year. Despite attempts, they have never developed an English-speaking Sangha. I have recently heard that Wat Suan Mokh is closing its English teaching section after the departure of the senior monk Ajahn Santikaro. Wat Nanachat, in contrast, has never offered lay retreats—lay guests simply participate in the community schedule along with the monks. It has been the mainstay for ordination of English speaking monks for over 20 years, and currently has eleven *samaneras* and a number of *anagarikas* awaiting ordination.

In Australia, the first forest monastery was Wat Buddhadhamma outside of Sydney. This monastery regularly offered lay retreats, but after the disrobing of the founding abbot it was never able to attract a stable monastic presence. For several years it was managed by a lay committee. It has now closed down.

At Bodhinyana in Perth, however, the founding monks Ajahn Jagaro and Ajahn Brahmavamso resisted early attempts to develop the property as a lay retreat center. They wanted to make a monastery for monks. As is well known, they succeeded so well that Bodhinyana now rivals Wat Nanachat as the largest English speaking Sangha in the world. Lay retreats are conducted at venues outside the monastery. They have also made great strides in developing a parallel nun's monastery, which has a long waiting list of aspiring nuns. (I might note here that two of the four women at the nun's monastery are from Ipoh—if this nun-drain keeps going, there'll be *nuns* in Australia and *none* in Malaysia!)

In America, the longest running Theravada forest monastery has been Bhante Gunaratana's Bhavana Society. Although this has been very successful in running lay retreats, the number of long term ordinations remains small. Recently a new Ajahn Chah forest monastery called Abhayagiri opened in California. Usually one of the senior monks travels extensively conducting retreats, while the other senior monk focuses on training the monastic community. They have had so many applicants they had to turn some away due to lack of space.

There is a pattern here that we would do well to heed. It suggests that a monastic residence is usually not compatible with a retreat center. Monks like to live with monks. Of course, the retreat we have just completed is somewhat of an exception. But I would be concerned if we were to compromise the original ideals of SBS—a forest monastery for training a monastic Sangha.

Please note: I am not here questioning the value of lay retreats. Having just had the privilege of leading a group of dedicated and sincere meditators, it is only too clear how much the retreat offers ordinary people the chance to develop their minds to a level rarely possible in their workaday existence. It is a question of balance.

As I finish writing now it's early morning. The hills are soft and green, and the whooping of the gibbons has faded away. Soon the kind devotees will bring *dana*. I feel very thankful that I have been able to devote my life to the Dhamma, and also thankful if I can share what I know, however little, with others. SBS

I was surprised by the extent to which many of the yogis seemed to equate meditation with pain.

A Meaningful Kathina

• FROM PAGE 1

The crowd was well spread out; hence it did not look too crowded. Each person found his own spot.

Before the break of dawn on Kathina Day, all were in high spirits ready to go up the SBS hill. The assembly point was inside a cemetery but waiting there in the wee hours of the morning did not faze the group at all. Nonetheless, they did rush to hop into the 4WDs to ride up the hill. Looking back, with such a large group, I feel more care should have been taken to ensure the elderly and children got onto the trucks safely. The younger ones too must be more considerate. Well, we have lessons to learn about managing big crowds. Fortunately, there were no untoward incidents.

Some of us decided to walk up the hill to SBS and the experience was, to me, the most meaningful. It kind of reminded me that the journey is as important as the destination. As we walked along in the dark with only our torches to light the way, we were delighted to be greeted, at the foot of the hill, with oil lamps lighted along both sides of the road up. Siew Eng exclaimed, "It's like a stairway to heaven or enlightenment! It's beautiful." Yin Hoong said, "I thought we were early but it looks like someone else was earlier!" We took our time walking up, enjoying the cool breeze and listening to the rustling of the trees. We heard the sound of flowing streams nearby – and at once we made the connection with the SBS theme song, *Guardian of the Sasana* ("...where the spring water flows...")! For city people like us, this was refreshing and we felt our senses nourished!

With the oil lamps welcoming us the first half of the walk up, everyone felt good. But for the next half of the climb, there were no more oil lamps and that was when the challenge began. Whoa, the slopes were steep. They kind of reminded me about overcoming obstacles in life and the need for effort, determination and persistence!

We started climbing up slowly, taking each step and breath mindfully. Soon, we felt hot and sweaty. One member said, "This is one meaningful Kathina!" The physical effort combined with the sights and sounds were nothing like her past *kathina* experiences. Upon reaching our destination, we looked down onto the valley and the Sima Hall bathed in light was an illuminating and uplifting sight! Hah...the fruit of our perseverance! Absorbing the sight of the hills around us and breathing in the cool fresh air were invigorating experiences.

Soon, dawn broke and the ceremonies got underway. We watched the ceremonies inside the Sima Hall from the banks of the *sima* pond and took part in other ceremonies outside. We helped ourselves to the breakfast goodies provided by the *kathina* organising committee of SBS. All the devotees lined up along both sides of Jalan Sima, the road leading up to the Sima Hall, to symbolically offer requisites to the Sangha, by touching the trays of requisites which were being carried down the road to the Sima to be offered to the Sangha. Then it was time for *pindapata*, and we filed past the monks, offering rice. Stalls selling souvenirs and a performance by BGF's I-Gemz with Dato' Dr Victor Wee himself singing the SBS theme song to launch its CD lent an air of festivity to the event. Before we had lunch, we listened to a Dhamma talk delivered by the Abbot.

The crowd was well spread out; hence it did not look too crowded. Each person found his own spot. The kids played at the small springs while the older ones sat on benches or on the grassy slopes to get a better view of what was happening in the Sima Hall where the monks were busy cutting and sewing robes following age-old traditions. There was a carnival-like atmosphere at SBS—something I had never expected. The *kathina* committee had definitely worked hard, despite constraints, to provide all with ample food, water and other facilities. SBS to me is rather peaceful. Many commented that it's a place conducive to meditation (of course minus the crowd!).

Though we would have liked to stay longer and explore the place, we had to "catch" our bus at noon. Hence, we went down the hill by 4WDs. It was a quick trip (kind of reminded me of how fast one's practice can disappear if one neglects it!) compared to the climb up. As I was leaving, I felt a tinge of sadness at the disturbance we had caused to the peaceful and clean environment of SBS. Hopefully the merits contributed will outweigh the unwholesome effects we had brought. To the SBS committee, thank you for your generosity and for giving us the opportunity to experience Kathina at SBS. SBS

Sewing Robe, **Spreading Kathina**

By Tan Joo Lan

While Kathina Day may be a festive morning ceremony for many, it is a busy day and night for the participating monks. Tan Joo Lan brings to you on paper the monkish side of the story.

We waited under a plastic canopy near the sima pond to eavesdrop on the briefing for, and rehearsal by, the participating monks for the ceremony. Summoned to the water sima by the "tok-tok" of the wooden gong, seven monks went through the steps in the receiving of the *kathina* cloth for the Sangha and awarding it to the qualified *bhikkhu*. Ven Aggacitta (Abbot of SBS), Ven Cattamalo, Ven Samyamo, Ven Guttapala, Ven Kumara, Ven Vivekananda and Ven Gavesi were all Malaysian monks from Penang, Taiping and Johor.

Notes on the various steps of how to measure, cut and sew the cloth were studied and discussed. These seven monks would be joined by two others from Johor, Ven. Jinadatta and Ven. Jotidhamma, later that evening. According to Ven. Aggacitta, the Vinaya states that at least five monks are required to form a quorum to legitimise the receiving of the *kathina* cloth by the Sangha on Kathina Day. This year's quorum was nine: three monks who had spent their *vassa* at SBS, plus six others who were invited.

After the deluge of the night before, the morning of 10 November dawned dry and fine. The offering of the *kathina* cloth by the sponsor, Buddhist Gem Fellowship (BGF), to the Sangha was on schedule. After speeches by the representative of BGF and the guest-of-honour, Dato' Ong Ka Chuan, the monks began their task of awarding the *kathina* cloth to the qualified *bhikkhu* and the making of the cloth into a robe.

In the Sima Hall, Ven Kumara recited the relevant Pali text to award the *kathina* cloth. With the unanimous agreement of the Sangha, the cloth was handed to Ven Aggacitta. The monks then began measuring, marking out and cutting the cloth for the sewing of the robe. It must also be dyed and spread out to dry. This task must be completed within a day, i.e. by dawn of the next morning.

This tradition of cutting the cloth, and sewing, dyeing and spreading it out to dry was brought to SBS by Ven Aggacitta at SBS's first Kathina Ceremony in 2001. The awarding of the *kathina* cloth is still followed to remind the Sangha of the virtues of harmony and humility. That the Sangha can come together and cooperate to sew the *kathina* robe within a day demonstrates harmony.

Their sewing of the robe also serves to remind the Sangha of their humble roots, which most monks have forgotten because they are held in such high esteem by devotees nowadays. By reviving the tradition of making robes they are reminded of

- their ancient practice
- their gratitude to devotees for their support
- the fact that they have renounced to devote their time to learn, practise and teach the Dhamma
- their commitment to the *vinaya* tradition of conducting Sangha affairs.

For most of the participating monks on 10 November, it was the first time they had experienced sewing a robe as a communal activity. They valued the experience of working together in harmony towards a single task.

"Most monks I know want to only meditate to hasten their path towards enlightenment. I feel that they should also make it a point to learn the *vinaya*, now possible with Ven Aggacitta teaching in SBS," said Ven Guttapala.

It was already 10.30pm by the time the robe was sewed, dyed and dried. The finale of the ceremony was the spreading of the *kathina*, followed by the distribution of offerings among the monks present.

Ven Aggacitta wrapped up the event by expressing his gratitude to devotees for their hard work and support. He then led them in the sharing of merits with all beings. SBS

A Bout of Hiccups

along the long road to development

No major building works were carried out during the second half of 2002. We carried out minor projects such as paving of paths, making short cuts and rectifying some building defects. Our two main concerns during this period were the building of a shrine to house the Four Guardian Devas, which is still ongoing, as well as solving the leakage of the *sima* pond. Development experienced a bout of hiccups when the *Sima* pond began to leak. We bring you two perspectives on this.

Sima Pond Saga

The difficulties of constructing the Sima pond on hilly and rocky terrain brought unforeseen "watery" problems. Looi Sow Fei investigates.

We were jubilant that the pond was completed in time for Kathina 2001. After that day, however, the water level slowly receded. It seems that the rocky nature of the area and the gradient were the culprits.

A number of people gave their views on how to address the leakage problem. Ever mindful that we have been entrusted with donations from the public, we preferred a cost-saving method.

Dr Soo Kian Sin, our consultant geo-technical engineer, recommended that we clear the pond of sand and mud in order to seal the bed and sides with a layer of fine clay.

We had two sponsors for clay. We mined 405 bags of clay from Toh Chai Quan, a local developer's land bank, while Asia Pottery donated several lorry-loads of clay. Tan Guan Soon, interim General Administrator at that time, supervised the work of laying and compacting the clay on the pond bed. All this took place within a period of about seven weeks—from the end of February until June. Volunteers did most of the work.

However, all the months of "clay play" were to no avail. The leakage was not arrested. Dr Soo then suggested that a layer of geo-membrane be laid to seal the pond. After a lot of discussion and consideration, this method was shelved. The columns supporting the sima hall above the pond, and the protruding *nimitta* stones there would get in the way of the geo-membrane. Furthermore, from an aesthetic viewpoint, it was unacceptable.

Finally, we decided to concretise the whole pond basin and to camouflage the concrete above the water level by building an undulating line of artificial rocks around the rim of the pond.

Dr Soo agreed, and on 12 and 13 September, he visited SBS to work out the technical details for us. First, we had to scrape off all the mud that had been plastered onto the bed over the past few months as well as to pick up loose rocks. Then the slopes of the pond basin were trimmed. The sima pond now has an enlarged bed bottom of about 5,000 square feet. The slopes had to be covered with canvas to prevent erosion as the rainy season had started.

On 1 October, the workers started the concretising works. The whole south slope was successfully covered on that fine day, with workers doing OT until 9.30pm. The north slope was a different story. Work started on 8 October but due to heavy rain, which caused underground seepage into the pond from several parts of the slope, it was completed only on 10 October.

Construction was interrupted by intermittent showers and thunderstorms until 22 October when workers worked until 10pm to finish laying concrete on 60% of the bed. The next day, they worked until 7pm to complete the job.

On 1 November, ten days before Kathina Day, the floodgates were opened to let the water flow gradually into the sima pond. Kathina Eve, 9 November, saw the sima pond brimming with water in time for the next day's ceremonies.

But the saga of the sima pond has yet to end. The joints of old and new concrete surfaces wait to be sealed with Sika water plug, while the artificial rocks are still under construction. We hope that the saga will follow the Year of the Horse to its end.

Many thanks to all those who helped with so much dedication in this saga, from the consultants to the clay miners. SBS

I, the Sima Pond

By Goh Keat Soon

From rippling brook to a Sima Pond—read about the trials and tribulations of the pond from a very human angle.

A couple of years ago, I was merely a simple brook no bigger than a foot in width. The water would run merrily down the whole length of me, providing a drink or two to the dogs and wild animals that came along. Sometimes a human or two would also stop by for a rest and wash their tired legs or just to listen to the calming ripple of the waters. All these are but memories now. Little did I know what was in store for me when a group of Buddhists took over the land I meander through.

Well, I thought that life would go on as usual since changes in land ownership should not affect me in any way. A brook will always be a brook, right? How wrong I was! I realised this when one day a tall and skinny monk, a big fat man and a short little fella came and started measuring the land around me, with talk about how they were going to deepen and widen me. There were rocks and huge boulders all over the place and it really frightened me when they said that they were going to blast the rocks away. Only then did I know that they were going to upgrade me into a pond. I was at my wits' end.

Thoughts raced through my mind one after the other. "How can they do this to me? I am happy as I am. Don't blow me to smithereens. Is there a way I can let them know that I prefer to remain the way I am? I don't know how to talk to humans. But then, why am I so afraid? Other brooks gradually become streams, but I am going to become a pond! I should be glad, shouldn't I? It's a double promotion. I'll be home to lively fishes and graceful weeds."

Ah, that would be something to look forward to. So I accepted the fact that I was going to become a pond. As the days passed more people came to look at me. They call themselves "the SBSMC members". Through their discussions and talks, I realised that they were going to construct a building to sit above me when I became a pond.

Worries again. "Goodness gracious! What else do they have in store for me? Can I hold the weight of that building? How will I look? I must listen to more of their talk to understand my fate. As these SBSMC people talked, the word "SIMA" came up again and again. Now what on earth is this *sima*?"

Slowly but surely, I came to know what "*sima*" meant and I dare say that I was looking forward to the day when I became a Sima Pond. They even brought in a guy called YB Ho to break ground in honour of me. I shall be most honoured to be a Sima Pond.

First things first—the day soon came when they brought in dynamite to blast the rocks. Prior to that, they had the backhoe dig away most of the soil around me. The blasting was indeed frightening. I felt like my stomach was being blasted away. These humans had no idea how painful it was. I had to endure this torture for a few days. I would definitely have collapsed and died if not for the thought that I would eventually become a Sima Pond. This thought helped me to keep my spirits up. When everything was over, I found a big hole around me.

Doubts played about in my mind. "How can I be a pond when I have only three sides? Where is the fourth side of me? Am I going to be a pond or not?" Shortly after that workers were brought in to build a dam on my open side. The dam was to be my fourth side.

"Wait, what are they up to now? Why are they drawing squares all over me? Goodness! Where did they get so many monks from? These monks are moving from square to square chanting for a couple of days. I don't know what the chants mean but they sound very soothing and nice."

I realised later that the exercise was to cleanse the area of former Simas and to establish a new Sima.

When that was finished, they started to build the Sima Hall right in the middle of me. It took some months, but when it was finished it was just magnificent. Soon they started to fill me up with water. I was brimming over with water and with pride.

This group of Buddhists celebrated their first Kathina at the end of 2001 with guests from so many other Buddhist Chapters that I must say this "Water Sima" became an instant celebrity—with me being an integral part of it. Everyone sang praises of our beauty and took photographs to remind them of our splendour. "Thank you, SBSMC people, for making me what I am."

But then the glory was short-lived. Slowly but surely my water started draining away. The rock blasting had caused cracks below me and it was growing bigger by the day due to the weight of my water. "Come on, SBSMC people, do something."

I can vaguely remember their coming to look at me several times, talking about how to heal my injured belly. One day, they brought several bags of clay and started lining me with it. Many people came down and stomped all over me. It was so painful and degrading. How would you like it if people were to stomp all over you? When this didn't work, they brought in more clay and started stomping on me again. This also failed and in the end they decided to fortify me with concrete.

Why didn't they think of this earlier instead of subjecting me to such indignity? So once again the tractor was brought in to remove all the clay and scrape my sides to widen me. Then the professionals were brought in to concretise me. They took three weeks to paste concrete all over me. At the end of that they filled me up with water. Hah! I felt glorious again. Just imagine, they took almost a year to restore my glory!

It was almost time again for their robe offering ceremony. So once again I was decked out with plants and flowers to enhance my splendour. On Kathina Day 2002, I must admit that I was even better looking than the year before.

I pray and hope I will remain like this for the rest of my life: a most beautiful Sima Pond, a perfect foil for a Sima Hall. On Kathina Day 2003, you are all invited to witness the ethereal sight of the lighted Sima Hall mirrored on my surface just before the break of dawn—we take your breath away! Sadhu to all who have made me what I am today. SBS

The Human Element:
Living Assets of SBS *By Doreen Lim*

It is the people within an organisation who keep it growing from strength to strength. Our Human Resource Manager tells you how she tries to adhere to this adage.

The human element of an organisation contributes to its eventual and continued success. Here at SBS, the Management Committee recognises this and has established human resource policies: one for its monastic community and the other governing its employees.

MONASTICS

SBS has a responsibility towards its resident monastics by providing quality support and training so that they can grow and obtain a sense of satisfaction in their practice of the Dhamma-vinaya. Towards this end, a curriculum has been designed to cover five components: *Vinaya* (monastic law and discipline), *Dhutanga* (ascetic practices), *Meditation*, *Pali*, and *Dhamma Propagation*. A monk is expected to follow at least the first three, with Pali and Propagation being optional, while Dhutanga can be waived in special cases. More information on entrance requirements is given in a prospectus which can be obtained from the Administrative Office upon request.

Ven Kumara, who was ordained at the Subang Jaya Buddhist Association, is the first trainee *bhikkhu* of SBS. He joined in January 2001. In May 2002, Ong Chin Cheong of Kuala Lumpur applied for residency and was accepted. He is undergoing a year of probation before he can be confirmed for *samanera* (novice monk) ordination.

Ongoing attempts are being made to attract young men to become postulants and to encourage young monks to participate in the training at SBS. Ven Saranankara, Abbot of Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple, Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, and Ven U Rewata of the Subang Jaya Buddhist Association, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, have consented to recommend participants of their novitiate programmes who are interested to train in SBS. The Management Committee of SBS is also investigating into the possibility of starting novitiate programmes after the completion of Phase 3 development to help source for monastics.

EMPLOYEES

Another important human element is the paid staff, both part-time and full-time. Being a responsible employer, SBS would like to provide these *living assets* with good working conditions, fair employment practices, and opportunities for spiritual development in the Dhamma. To uphold these principles, an HR policy (for laity) has been established. Its implementation is expected to:

- attract, select, develop and retain the quantity and quality of staff SBS requires to meet its present and future needs
- provide equal opportunities to employees to use their capabilities to the fullest
- establish and maintain constructive and harmonious management-staff relationships
- establish conditions of employment, employment benefits and working conditions to help achieve the above objectives so that SBS can meet its social, legal and spiritual responsibilities towards its employees.

Presently, SBS has 4 paid full-time workers: Cheong Thoong Leong (general administrator), Tan Hock Lam (field assistant), Chi Hui Fong (administrative assistant—the pioneer member of our staff, having joined us in July 2001) and Kumar (general worker-cum-gardener). Besides receiving the blessings of the Triple Gem and spiritual guidance, they also get medical benefits, free lodging in SBS (for non-locals and males only), lots of fresh air and a conducive environment for meditation, insurance coverage, hardship allowance, contributions towards the Employees' Provident Fund, and flexible working hours. SBS also observes 12 gazetted public holidays.

VOLUNTARY DHAMMA WORKERS

SBS may not be what it is today if not for this group of living assets. Many local and out-of-town devotees have been faithfully volunteering their services covering areas such as *dana*, housekeeping, orchard maintenance, garden and landscape, transport, health, website, and publication. They come unnoticed like elves working in the dead of night. When you find yourself surrounded by beautiful flora on your next visit to SBS, you can be certain that the garden and landscape team has been hard at work nearly 365 days of the year, weather permitting.

Last but not least, mention ought to be made of the Management Committee who manages SBS under the guidance and advice of the Spiritual Director, who is also the Abbot of the Sanctuary. The MC meets once a month in the presence of the Spiritual Director. It consists of a Chairperson, two Vice Chairpersons, two Administrative Managers, two Finance Managers, two Development Managers and a Public Relations Manager. Presently, the post of AM2 and FM2 are still vacant. Anyone interested to assist? Do give us a call if you or someone you know is keen to lend a helping hand.

The MC is fortunate to have Lim Tai Eng as VC2 since August 2002 after Ong Thean Kin resigned the previous month. Incidentally, the new VC2 is also the state representative for Perlis. Bro Lim's inclusion in the MC truly reflects the image of SBS as a national project managed by Buddhists from various parts of the country. Right now the exco comprises Buddhists from Kangar, Penang, Taiping, Ipoh and Petaling Jaya.

THE PLACE

Having worked with Ven Aggacitta for the past 4 years, I notice that he

- makes decisions without prejudice
- inspires loyalty and maintains authority
- encourages the best in people
- believes in achieving success without sacrificing happiness

I am confident that under his wise leadership and guidance, SBS will grow from strength to strength and be the place for the Sangha to grow and uphold the Dhamma.

As Confucius, the great sage, said:

"The best people foster the good in others, not the bad. The worst people foster the bad in others, not the good."

I believe that if we master this statement, we can safely dispense with a thousand books on leadership and management.

So let's all continue to render whatever assistance we can. Remember, *SUCCESS IS CONSTANCY TO PURPOSE!* SBS

SUBLIME Inspiration

How the song Guardian of the Sasana was written

By Dato' Dr Victor Wee

Sublime inspiration born of earnest aspirations has brought us a gift from the heavens.

When Ven Aggacitta Bhikkhu asked me to write a theme song for Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary that would be used for the VCD about SBS, I thought that he was pulling my leg. However, his eyes told me otherwise. I had not written music for many years. My last composition, the *Light in the Darkness*, was produced in 1993 with the Wayfarers.

Since the goal of SBS was lofty, the music for it must also express that wonderful, sublime quality. Could I write a song to measure up to that ideal? For some time, I toyed with a few melodies but could not come up with anything noteworthy. Meanwhile, the VCD that was being produced by Tan Joo Lan was moving on the fast track to be in time for the fund raising dinner in Penang.

The thought of writing this special song surfaced in my mind again and again until it grew into a strong aspiration. I had planted a strong wish: that I write a beautiful song for the Sanctuary, and that this song be so uplifting and inspiring that it could touch people deeply in their hearts and bring them to the Dhamma. For a few days nothing happened, but I kept on renewing my aspiration.

Then very strangely, while driving on the highway to work one morning, a short musical motif flashed through my mind. I ran the short musical phrase in my mind a couple of times, and the more times it was repeated the more appealing it sounded. The tune was better than anything I had come up with in my earlier attempts. Meanwhile, inspiration was welling up in my heart and I knew that I was on the threshold of something special.

Subsequently, when I was about 10 minutes from office, the whole melody came, every note of it from beginning to end, as if someone was singing in my head. "Yes, this is IT!" I said to myself, as I kept humming the tune so as not to lose it. When I reached my office, I headed for my room right away to jot down the notes of the song. It was really amazing. The music was done, and there was nothing to add. It came as a gift from the heavens channelled through me to you.

The next stage was to get the lyrics written. At that time, I was fortunate enough to meet Florence Tan, a new BGF member who, I discovered, had a way with words and could write poems. I asked Florence if she could try her hand at writing the lyrics for this song and she agreed. One evening, she came to the BGF Centre with a cassette tape recorder and I came with the guitar to record the tune. She said that she liked the tune and would try her best to work on it.

The next morning, I received an email from Florence. She had already written three lovely verses for the song. We discussed the third verse and the starting line of the song. Ven Aggacitta also had some suggestions. With that, the third verse was expanded into two verses, and the entire song was done.

The *Guardian of the Sasana* CD was launched on 10 November 2002, on Kathina Day at SBS. I sang the Trio version with Daniel and Pamela. Also performing in the morning event was the I-GemZ, an up and coming musical group from BGF, who presented some of their compositions. SBS

STRAIGHT from the heart

For the Good of the Many

By Sheila Hale

A veteran Australian meditator visited in July 2002 and found in SBS a golden opportunity to train monks, study Dhamma and practise meditation with an inspiring and very competent teacher in a most suitable place

It was back in 1984 that I first heard of Ven Aggacitta. I was meditating under the guidance of Sayadaw U Pandita at the Mahasi Sasana Yeiktha, who had recently returned from IMS at Barre, Massachusetts with a set of beautifully translated tapes of his Dhamma talks given at his three-month retreat there. Each evening I would slowly and mindfully creep into his *kuti* and listen to one of the tapes. They were tremendously inspiring and encouraging. I was particularly grateful for the precise, meticulous and clear English of the translator, Ven Aggacitta. In fact, my husband and I entertained hopes of practising with him and were disappointed (but also impressed and supportive) of his apparent decision to retire to the forest to practise and study in seclusion.

Over the years, I would have the opportunity to occasionally listen to some of the tapes and would wonder how the Venerable monk was faring. At other times, when practising with Sayadaws who spoke little English and whose translators' English was sometimes difficult to understand and follow, I recalled those tapes and how clear the Dhamma teachings shone through. So, recently when I heard that this same venerable had returned to Malaysia and was establishing a training centre here, I was very pleased.

Having read only a couple of the earlier newsletters, I was really expecting a rough building site. So when we arrived at a beautifully landscaped area with *kutis* and buildings dotted around, I was quite astounded. I even wondered if some of the distant buildings might belong to neighbours.

From the site office, I looked down the valley where the Sima Hall was situated and thought to myself, "How will I make it back up again?" But being an intrepid Tasmanian bushwalker (albeit very out of shape), I set off downhill—mindfully and slowly. The quietness of the atmosphere was magnificent. I wondered how and with what these concrete roads were made. Steep but not slippery, they beckoned me on and on. As I crossed the little rock bridge over a lily pond, I admired the Sima Hall and its lovely stupa roof. Picturing a well-filled pond under and around it, I could even see the lotuses that will one day bloom there. I glanced across to the group of *kutis* on an upper slope and wondered how so many had sprung up like mushrooms.

The insistent barking of three dogs on the higher slope prompted me to choose caution and discretion above bravery. I decided to check out a lower *kuti*. As I have spent time at and visited several Dhamma centres and monasteries in Australia and also been involved in establishing one (even to the extent of mixing concrete and helping to build the *kutis*), it was with a knowing eye that I surveyed the design and structure of that beautiful building. Words simply cannot express how impressed I was. Often when meditating in *kutis* in Australia, I had imagined one that so deftly combined practicality and aesthetics. It is obvious the *kutis* are perfectly suited to the climate and our vipassana form of practice. They blend in with the environment and harmonise with one another rather than shouting out to be noticed.

The sound of the rushing waterfall in the distance stilled and focused the mind, while a cool breeze whispered "sit". Assuming the Burmese sitting posture, I closed my eyes and entered a peace and lightness far from the hustle and bustle of airports, traffic and worldly life.

Eventually and reluctantly I opened my eyes, surveyed the *kuti* once again and the thought arose, "If this time I had been born a male..." but there is no point in dwelling on what is not.

As I made the walk back up the hill, I steeled myself for a hot and difficult climb, mindfully of course. Yet before I knew it, I was back at the site office, neither hot nor bothered and not even out of breath. Perhaps the magic of the place sustained me, or perhaps it was neither as long nor as difficult a climb as I had anticipated. At any rate, any monk who chooses to live here will certainly maintain good health and fitness of the body. Certainly, he will have the opportunity to purify and free the mind.

Following a track, I found the toilet block discreetly tucked away in the jungle and was able to admire some rather large and impressive native trees, again reminding me of the giants which have just managed to escape the loggers in Tasmania.

My next stop on a higher slope was the open deck Buddha shrine from where lovely views of Taiping town greeted me. I returned to the site office. Meeting Ven Aggacitta at last, I paid my respects and gave him a brief account of my amazed appreciation and very positive reaction to the new Sangha training centre.

The following day, during the Dhamma talk at the Sunday *dana* lunch in TIMS, I was most impressed with the Venerable's informal teaching style. It incorporated interaction with us as well as a mixture of English and the Hokkien dialect interspersed with laughter. There was a genuine feeling of all working together to improve interactions and establish inner as well as outer harmony. The monks and young men here in Malaysia are certainly being offered an absolutely golden opportunity to train as monks, study Dhamma and practise meditation with an inspiring and very competent teacher in a most suitable place. I hope they come to realise how precious and unique this opportunity is and to avail themselves of it. Then they can go out into the world to teach and practise "for the good of the many". SBS

DHAMMA Therapy

By Mokkhesini

Dhamma therapy need not be seen only as a miracle cure for an illness. The gradual healing and reshaping of minds and hearts through regular exposure to the Dhamma is just as therapeutic and miraculous.

It has always been my hobby to read articles on positive thinking because they always make me feel good and uplifted. So as a practising Buddhist, listening to Dhamma talks is my hobby too, as they are never negative. Besides improving my limited Dhamma knowledge, Dhamma talks help me to be more tolerant, forgiving and compassionate. Listening to dhamma talks also "recharges my battery" and strengthens my faith in the Triple Gem.

I talked to several people who regularly attend Sunday *dana* in TIMS. Like me, they too have benefited a lot from the talks which the members of the SBS Sangha take turns to deliver. These talks are a regular feature of the Sunday *dana* and have uplifted the lives of the devotees who attend it.

A devotee who seldom misses Sunday *dana* recently faced a personal problem, which would have made her very miserable if not for the talks that she was regularly exposed to each Sunday. Basically she is a very emotional person who cries very easily, but surprisingly did not break down in her recent crisis. Whenever she felt depressed, the Dhamma would pop up in her mind to remind her that "suffering is inevitable but being miserable is optional". Immediately she could feel her heart opening up and the miserable feeling dissipating. I suppose daily meditation helped her to be more aware of her mental states also, enabling her to get out of depression before she became really miserable.

The Dhamma talks help devotees to differentiate between wholesome and unwholesome deeds. It also helps them improve relationships with family and friends. One devotee acknowledges that she is no longer as hot-tempered as before, being more tolerant now so there is more harmony in the family. Whenever she has an argument with her sister, she tries to radiate metta to her afterwards. Another devotee, Ms Chee, echoes this sentiment. "I try to follow the Buddha's teaching, am more tolerant and have less anger than before. Also, I do more good deeds now and have learnt the proper way to do *dana*."

Ah Seng remarked, "Although I like the talks, I would still go for *dana* even if there were no talks. But I feel that *dana*, chanting and Dhamma talks together make the occasion more complete." The talks help him to improve his Dhamma knowledge and also enable him to better understand the little that he already knows. After listening to the talks, he likes to share them with his friends and family members.

Mrs Lim likes the chanting which she finds very soothing. "At home I practise *metta* chanting which helps me to relax and lower my blood pressure." She also likes to listen to the talks because they improve her Dhamma knowledge, and this understanding makes her less worry-prone now.

Every Sunday devotees renew their commitment to keep their precepts. For Mr Lim, listening to the Dhamma talks also reminds him to keep his precepts. So too with Ms Chen who also gets new inspiration to face problems, stress and challenges in life. It has also helped her to cultivate non-attachment.

Mrs Tong has been exposed to the Dhamma since childhood and she is familiar with many of the stories, but still the Sunday talks serve to discourage her from unwholesome acts of which she is still guilty of doing. After a Dhamma talk she would resolve to do better. As Ven Kumara said in a recent talk, Angulimala needed to be reminded by the Buddha to stop killing although he knew that killing was wrong. Regular Dhamma talks serve as constant reminders to keep our precepts.

Performing *dana* is a cornerstone of Buddhist practice. Mr Lee has benefited from the talks on *dana* and the merits of doing *dana*. He says, "*Dana* cannot be measured with money. I hope that more non-members will come for the talks."

The Sunday Dhamma talks help Mrs Yong to improve her limited Dhamma knowledge, and make her more compassionate. "I used to pour water on ants to make them go away but now I just remove the piece of food together with the ants." Her attitude towards people has also changed; she is more tolerant now. She is glad to have a chance to listen, learn and grow in the Dhamma.

Devotees have a few suggestions though. Some feel that we should have the opportunity to ask questions, not necessarily about the talk, but rather on practical, Dhamma-related issues. Mrs Tong encounters hordes of mosquitoes whenever she goes up to her storeroom. "Is it all right to just stun them by smacking them in the air?" is one question she would like to put forward.

Yet other devotees would like to listen to talks on specific topics, such as about the planes of existence with relevance to daily life. Some would like to have a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Pali verses chanted each Sunday because many chant without really knowing what they chant. Yet another request is to listen to stories or events that are of great significance which happened during or after the lifetime of the Buddha.

The regular talks have improved the quality of life of the devotees who attend Sunday *dana*, helping them to live more meaningful and happy lives. As Aunty Lim says, "The talks are very inspiring, and very relevant in my daily life."

In an address to members of TIMS, Ven. Aggacitta said: "I hope more TIMS members will attend the Dhamma talks—many of which come directly from the scriptures—because they are very edifying. Sometimes it is difficult to unite a group of people if they do not come together often and if they do not listen to the Dhamma." SBS

Things have been unfolding at a quick pace since the idea of setting up a local monk-training centre crystallised. We'd like to share with you the beautiful and exciting process of our development and offer you the opportunity to participate in our inspired, collective efforts.

17 June Landscaping efforts begin in the area of the automatic gate as Lim Poh Eng and "Kueh Kak" Leong begin work on a rock garden.

19 June SBS caretaker, Ko Kyi, leaves us after being here for two years. We wish him all the best in his future undertakings.

23 June Seven members from the Youth Club of Persatuan Agama Buddhist Seberang Perai Tengah are here for a visit. They have come at a most opportune moment—just as we needed willing feet to dance and stomp on the clay. They soon get to work together with ten members of the Buddhist Society of Sek. Men. Kebangsaan Sri Kota. Members of the Taiping Buddhist Association, members of TIMS as well as other supporters also join in the "dance session".

27 June Sayadaw U Nandasiddhi is here with members of Citta Sukha Meditation Centre (Kulai, Johor) led by its chairman, Lim Bon Cheng.

29 June Wai Seng Moh brings up the signpost that will be put up at a strategic spot well before the entrance gate. The signpost, which reads: *AWAS! PINTU DI HADAPAN, PUSING BALIK*, is intended to warn vehicles of a closed gate across the steep, narrow approach road to SBS.

8 July Ven Kumara goes to Persatuan Agama Buddha Seberang Perai Tengah to give a Dhamma talk.

10 July Ling Ting Hook, who has been a dedicated worker in SBS for the past two and a half months as our field assistant, leaves us for another job nearer his hometown. We wish him all the best in his new job.

12 July The new reinforced concrete road at the foothill is completed.

13 July Ven Tikkhanyano, Ven Phra Sumet, Ven Phra Veet, Ven Dhammapala together with a *samanera* and a *kappiya* arrive at noon for a day's stay.

19 July Ven Guttapala arrives to spend his vassa here.

22 July Wai Seng Moh donates his computer for use at the site office. *Sadhu!*

The monastics begin a new schedule of study with daily classes from 5.50pm. to 8.15pm. which is followed by chanting and evening service. They then have a session of *qigong* practice to maintain and promote physical health.

25 July The SBS Sangha enter *vassa* today after their evening service. The monastics for this *vassa* are Ven Aggacitta, Ven Guttapala, Ven Kumara and postulant Ong Chin Cheong.

27 July Dr Soo Kian Sin is here to check on the leakage in the sima pond that has thus far defeated all our efforts to rectify it. He brings with him KL Khor and another friend, Lee Soon Hing, a grouting expert, to survey the site and to propose a solution to the problem. They propose that the sides of the pond be first smoothened with a mixture of soil and fine clay. Then either bituminous or geo-membrane sheets will be laid over the sides, to be followed by another layer of fine clay reinforced with chicken wire mesh mixed with soil or cement.

There's a flurry of activity in the site office as furniture is shifted in. The SBS office, which all this while has been housed temporarily in TIMS, will be shifted up here with effect from Monday.

28 July Fifty odd volunteers comprising members of the Simpang Buddhist Society, Taiping Buddhist Society, Tzu Chi Group as well as TIMS members and friends are here to clean up the sides of the sima pond and plaster them with clay in a renewed effort to arrest the seepage.

Clay Play

A group of young volunteers relive childhood memories as they gleefully dance and stomp on clay.

by Tan Mei Hua
Translated by Yap Keow Kean

We woke up early on our second day in Taiping and set off for SBS once again to work on the task that had been delegated to us. The day before we had been told that we would be doing *dana* with our leg power—compacting mud on the bed of the sima pond.

To prepare the clay for us to work on, water was hosed onto the clay to soften it. Our task was to stamp the clay into a flat and solid layer on the pond bed.

Soon we were joined by a group of youth members from the Youth Section of TIMS. Together we stomped with exuberance and abandon, thoroughly enjoying ourselves. Forgotten childhood memories of playing with mud and sand were invoked as we relived the delights of such childish play, and time flew.

All too soon we had to stop our 'play' as it was time to wash up and leave SBS for dana in TIMS. It was with great reluctance that we did so. But then again offering food was another form of *dana* that we cherished. SBS

Today is the first day of robe-sewing classes for the monastics, which will be held on a daily basis in preparation for the kathina ceremony on 10 November 2002.

1 Aug Ven Dhammavaro visits us accompanied by a group of devotees from the Simpang Buddhist Society.

3 Aug Sewing class in full swing for the monastics as the "apprentice tailors" each work out the dimensions of the various panels of their own robes that has to be cut and then sewn together.

4 Aug A group of volunteers comprising 30-odd people carry out another round of plastering the sides of the sima pond with fine clay in the ongoing effort to stop the leakage.

"Kueh Kak" Seng and Ah Lek work on the laying of stone steps to the Buddha Shrine. The rocks were taken from a construction site in Kamunting with the ready permission of the owner, Ooi Eng Huat.

5 Aug The "apprentice tailors" have worked out the measurements of their robes and get down to the task of cutting out the panels. They work on discarded white cloths used to wrap urns containing ashes of the dead. The cloths were brought here from the local Wat Bodhiyaram.

7 Aug Having cut out measured pieces of cloth, the students begin the actual sewing of their own lower robes.

13 Aug "Kueh Kak" Seng begins to construct stone steps for the starting point of the *pindapata* trail near the sima.

19 Aug Prem Kumar of Klang is here for a short stay as an 8-preceptor.

21 Aug Lim Hee Chay, an SBSMC member in the finance department, is here on a visit together with a friend.

29 Aug Cliften Nathaniel, a manager of Kimonn Enterprise (a supplier of geomembrane), is here to inspect the problem of leakage at the sima pond and to recommend a suitable strategy using geomembrane to solve the problem.

30 Aug Chiu Sheng Bin and Tan Heng Ghee are here on their second visit this year to look into the progress of our landscaping efforts as well as the health of the durian trees. They are accompanied by Ong Guan Leong, a retired planter. Sheng Bin brings with him some more plants for SBS including two Australian bottlebrush seedlings which he brought back from Lumbini a year ago.

2 Sept SBS monastics devote some time in making dye for the robes that they have sewn. They cut the stump of a dead *nangka* tree to extract dye from the yellow pith.

6-8 Sept Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS) Youth Group from Brickfields Mahavihara, KL visits SBS.

9 Sept Pevin Yeoh joins us as a volunteer Dhamma worker for a week. He helps Bro Cheong to determine the boundary for the Sangha Central Facilities, which is in our phase 3 construction plans.

13 Sept Dr Soo Kian Sin arrives to finalise construction details for concretising the sima pond to arrest the leakage.

15 Sept Members of TIMS and their friends spend a fine morning at Khemarama collecting jering shells which will be used to make dye for use on kathina day.

16 Sept Ng Kian Chong brings six solar lamps which he brought back from New Zealand, two of which are sponsored by Alex Lim's family.

22 Sept Ven Kumara gives part one of a talk in Hokkien based on *Mahakammavibhanga Sutta* (*MN 136*) at TIMS. This is part of the weekly routine of SBS monastics. They have their *pindapata* at TIMS on Sundays, followed by a short Dhamma talk before sharing merits with all beings.

SBS monastics boil *jering* shells to make dark brown dye for dyeing robes. The dried *jering* shells have been soaked for 2 nights to promote extraction of the pigments.

The SBS Management Committee holds its monthly meeting today at TIMS. Bro Lim Tai Eng has come all the way from Kangar, Perlis, to accept the vacant post of Vice Chairman 2 (VC2) and to attend his first meeting as exco member. *Sadhu* to Bro Lim, who has been serving as our Perlis state representative since the first MC was formed, for his dedication. A civil engineer by profession,

Loads of Fun

By Wee Li Foong (with extracts by Quek Mei Joon and Ng Pek Kum)

Making organic fertiliser, tickling leeches and sweeping roads, are part of the SBS Experience for a youth group.

Our very first Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS) Youth Group outing to SBS from 6 – 8 September 2002 was superb and a worthwhile experience indeed! The journey up to SBS was one of the toughest experiences I had ever undergone! After 45 minutes of practically dragging myself slowly up the slopes to SBS, I finally spotted the tiny SBS administrative office. I was sweating profusely and panting all the way. When all were safely at this checkpoint, we were briefed on the 3 main tasks which we were to carry out; namely dismantling fencing, preparing enzymes and sweeping roads. A few girls volunteered for the preparation of enzymes while the stronger ones gladly took on the challenge of tackling the fencing.

Being tired and weary from the journey up, I decided to settle for the less strenuous but unexciting task of road sweeping. Our group comprised girls and a lone male, Bro Koh Eng Tin. We were provided gloves and we took turns to sweep the roads, as there were not enough brooms to go around. We worked quickly and enthusiastically. Bro Koh kept the mood lively with his easy chatter.

Let's now hear from the enzyme team and the fencing team.

Quek Mei Joon:

I was wondering why we were asked to spray Baygon on our shoes before we entered the forest. It was to keep away my worst nightmare

—leeches! Eeeeeaikss! I should have volunteered to sweep roads! Anyway, after spraying my shoes thoroughly and forgetting about leeches, I joined the rest and marched along the slippery trail into the jungle. We formed a human chain along the slope to bring down slowly the heavy mesh of green metal fence. I could not imagine how difficult it was for the tough boys and Sumitra Chye to be at the top, along the forest edge dismantling the fence, and rolling it up in sections before passing the rolls down the human chain with extreme caution. Su Lyn, Tin Tiong and I were at the other end of the chain, waiting anxiously for the rolls to be lifted onto our shoulders to be transported down.

Despite the Baygon, some of the guys (me too) did a lot of *dana* donating blood! For me, there was more fun than fatigue. Many of us were drenched in sweat and panting away with bright red faces. Not only did a sense of satisfaction fill the air but there were smiles and good humour everywhere in spite of getting our hands and shirts dirty working so hard. Can I ever forget Sol Ching trying to tickle the leech he had caught? We tried to remind ourselves of *panatipata* when catching the leeches. I observed that this *gotong-royong* had instilled team spirit and fellowship among our young and not-so-old members.

Ng Pek Kum:

Five of us chose to prepare enzymes. We were each given a pair of gloves to wear. Then Sister Chen briefed us on what we needed to do. First, pour water into the container. Then in goes some brown sugar. Stir well. Next, mix in the organic vegetable waste comprising cabbages, leaves, etc. These three ingredients had to be mixed in the proportion of 10:1:3 respectively.

At first, it was quite hard to fill up a container. But after the first one, things went smoothly. As we were doing our job we chatted with one another, sang some Buddhist hymns and talked about the enzymes. According to Sister Chen, in three months' time the resulting ferment will produce a fertiliser which is organic. This will be used in the organic vegetable and herb garden in SBS. She encouraged us to do it back home.

In no time we had filled up three containers with the stuff. Still, we had a lot more to go. The most troublesome part was to put the vegetables into the tanks that had very small mouths. It was pretty hard to stuff the vegetables in. But with enthusiasm and teamwork we did it.

At 3 pm, we were all back under the canopy sitting in rows awaiting Ven Aggacitta's arrival for his Dhamma talk. The minute he arrived, everyone observed silence and waited for him to begin his talk. We were all amazed and truly inspired by him. It was an eye-opening talk indeed, especially when Bhante used the clear-cut description of the sky to describe the Buddha's teaching.

In a nutshell, the experience in SBS had been a fulfilling and exciting one. The beauty and tranquillity up there are beyond one's imagination. It has to be personally experienced.

Long live Sasanarakkha—guardian of the Sasana! SBS

Bro Lim will now oversee the Development Sub-committee in his capacity as VC2.

24 Sept Postulant Ong breaks his three-day fast this morning. He commenced his fast on Saturday, 21 September, in an experiment to observe his body-mind states while subsisting on water and other fluids.

The monastics continue to boil dye, this time using a concoction of *bakau* (mangrove) bark, *belian* (Sarawak ironwood) sawdust and *jering* shells.

25 Sept Ven Guttapala and postulant Ong dye their robes with the natural dye which they have prepared.

27 Sept Law Hwee Meng donates a tripod stand for the Nikon digital camera at SBS. This will come in useful when zoom and night shots are taken.

28 Sept A tapered cylindrical base for the stupa crowning the Four Guardian Kings' Shrine is brought back from a timber factory. The owner, Ah Huat, has fashioned the base out of a merbau block donated by Lim Ewe Seng, an ardent SBS supporter. The shrine will soon be built next to the open-air Buddha Shrine to house the porcelain figurines of the Four Guardian Kings donated to SBS more than a year ago.

30 Sept Work begins today to concretise the sima pond. All previous cost-saving efforts to arrest the pond leakage problem have proven futile. This is our last resort, estimated to cost around RM40K.

4 Oct Construction of the Deva Shrine begins today. Situated on the slope leading up to the Buddha Shrine, it is being built to house the images of the Four Great Kings: Dhatarattha, Virulhaka, Virupakkha and Vessavana. The ceramic images are originally multi-coloured, but they will be sprayed with bronze coloured paint before they are placed on the shrine.

12 Oct Phurba Phang from Melaka arrives to try out life as a postulant in SBS.

15 Oct Obhasa Tee ends his stay here after serving as a part-time volunteer for over six months. He acknowledges his thanks and gratitude to all at SBS for the wonderful opportunity to rekindle his flagging Dhamma practice. *Sadhu* and thank you too.

20 Oct Today brings another special event to SBS. A ceremony to gild the Buddha image in the open air Shrine is held. [See back page.]

The Management Committee holds another monthly meeting.

21 Oct Today is Mahapavarana or Great Invitation Day, which marks the end of the three-month rainy season retreat for monks.

SBS monks perform the ceremony by formally inviting each other to mutually criticise their misdeeds. Ven Aggacitta ended the ceremony with a discourse based on *Rahula Sutta* from *Sutta Nipata*.

23 Oct The task of concretising the sima pond bed is finally completed. Let's pray that there will be no more leakage.

25 Oct On the eve of his departure, Phurba Phang shares his knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism with SBS monastics during the regular *vinaya* class in the evening.

26 Oct A heavy thunderstorm in the afternoon causes the lightning surge protector in the Dhamma Workers' Quarters to explode and ignite the power distribution board. The plastic switches and wiring are burnt to cinders, charring the timber wall and fluorescent lamp above. We are most fortunate that the whole building is not burnt down!

30 Oct Jade Saw, consultant architect for SBS, is here with a group of architects to discuss the buildings in Phase 3 construction, particularly the Sangha Central Facilities and Administration Building.

1 Nov The newly concretised sima pond is baptised as the floodgate opens to let in the water. Luckily, it is the rainy season and by kathina day, the pond should be brimming over with spring water.

2 Nov A lorry-load of plants, donated by Khoo Seong Liang of Tapak Semaian Perwira, Kuala Lumpur arrives in SBS. The decorative plants will be used to brighten up the sanctuary for kathina day.

7 Nov Ker Eng Hock donates a drying machine, which will be very useful for drying the *kathina* robe on kathina day.

8 Nov Law Hwee Meng comes to install the sand filter that he is donating to us.

The altar for the Buddha image in the Sima Hall, designed by Koi Kean Chye and sponsored by friends of SBS, is delivered in the evening.

9 Nov The sima pond is brimming with water on kathina eve.

The members of the Sangha gather in the Sima Hall in the afternoon for a briefing on the robe making process.

Tan Joo Lan and her video team are here to record the kathina day ceremonies and they start by recording the briefing in the Sima Hall.

10 Nov SBS Kathina Day [See front page.]

17 Nov Taiping Bodhi Langka Ram (Sri Lankan Temple) "borrows" Sasanarakkha Sima to perform the formal Sangha act of awarding the Kathina cloth to a qualified bhikkhu who spent the vassa in the temple.

SBS monastics go to TIMS for the weekly Sunday dana. Ven Kumara gives Part 1 of a Dhamma talk on the *Angulimala Sutta*.

24 Nov Ven Kumara continues with Part 2 of *Angulimala Sutta* after the weekly Sunday dana at TIMS.

26 Nov Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera and Dhammaramsi Thera from Sri Lanka pay us a visit. The Mahathera is a well-known meditation teacher and dhamma speaker in Sri Lanka. Ven Aggacitta takes the opportunity to discuss and compare the Mahasi and Pa Auk methods of meditation.

28 Nov Ven Aggacitta has another round of fruitful discussion with Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera. This time it is a discussion on the vinaya, sutta and meditation in Law Hwee Meng's new house, where the Sri Lankan monks have been invited to stay.

The Management Committee employs a new Field Assistant. He is Tan Hock Lam, a 45 year-old Taipingite who has an impressive resume for the job.

29 Nov Dr. Mehm Tin Mon, an Abhidhamma scholar from Myanmar who has just finished conducting an Abhidhamma course in SJBA and is in Taiping to give a talk in TIMS, pays SBS a visit in the afternoon.

1 Dec Ajahn Karuniko is here for a short stay, until Dec 3.

3 Dec Law Hwee Meng brings and installs a water dispenser which he has donated to SBS.

4 Dec Dhamma worker, Wang Li Jeng, arrives to offer her services. She helps out with the clerical work. [See page 27.]

Consecration Ceremony of ***Four Great Kings Shrine***

16 March 2003

"Sir, may the Blessed One learn the Atanatiya Paritta for the pleasing of [unsympathetic yakkhas], for the guarding, protection, freedom from harm and comfortable living of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, upasakas and upasikas." The Blessed One consented with silence.

—Yakkha King Vessavana
in Atanatiya Sutta, DN32

Highlights
Offering alms to the Sangha
Dhamma talk on Atanatiya Sutta
Blessings of Atanatiya Paritta and other parittas
Sharing of Merits

All are welcome!
Please contact us for further information and confirmation.

7 Dec Dr Soo is here to do a baseline assessment with the help of Wai Seng Moh and Tan Hock Lam.

11 Dec Ajahn Brahmavamso and Ajahn Karuniko arrive today and stay overnight with us.

12 Dec Ven Sujato and Ven Paññanando are here for an overnight visit. Ven Aggacitta discusses with Ven Sujato the coming 10-day retreat to be held in SBS. A monk who is experienced in various methods of meditation, he will be conducting the retreat and will guide yogis in their preferred methods.

Ajahn Nom and Phra Attateepo arrive for a few days' visit. Ajahn Nom is the assistant Abbot of Ajahn Kanha's monastery.

15 Dec The SBS Management Committee holds its monthly meeting.

The monastics go to TIMS for Sunday dana. Ven Kumara delivers the last episode of the *Angulimala Sutta*.

Seow Gin Geng and the Chia family make donations of RM1000 for each of the following: Sangha dayaka Fund, Library, and Multipurpose Hall.

19 Dec Ven Aggacitta goes to Bodhiyarama Hermitage in Kuala Kubu Bahru for his personal retreat. He will be there until the end of the month.

20 Dec Ajahn Sujato arrives to conduct the 10-day retreat which begins today. The retreat is held for SBS helpers as a gesture of appreciation for their voluntary services.

23 Dec Two Dhamma workers, Amatananda Thang Wai Tat and Tan Swee Ping arrive to volunteer their services to help out in the retreat.

Mr Ng, a reflexologist, does dana in treating Ajahn Sujato for a leg problem.

27 Dec Ajahn Dhammarato arrives for a short stay until 29 December. TIMS invites him to spend his next *vassa* in Khemarama. He goes to have a look at this *kuti* on a nearby hill.

29 Dec This is the last day of the 10-day retreat. We are grateful to Ajahn Sujato for teaching our yogis. He leaves with Ajahn Dhammarato for Penang. SBS

SBS holds a retreat 'very near to Heaven' for its helpers amidst the sights and sounds of nature. We bring you two accounts of this—one from a yogi and the other from a member of the organising team.

Yogis Reap the Fruits of Good Karma

By the Retreat Manager, Andrew Kang

A 10-day retreat was held for SBS helpers as a gesture of appreciation for their voluntary services. However a number of yogis from afar who applied to join in were not turned down. There was a total of 14 yogis.

We were fortunate to have Ajahn Sujato conduct the retreat and guide the yogis who were given the freedom to follow their own styles of meditation.

Retreat preparations began two weeks earlier as SBS hadn't the facilities for retreats. Two canopies were erected over the open deck of the Buddha Shrine to protect the yogis from rain and sun when they meditate. Another two canopies were set up about 500 metres down the slope for yogis to do their walking meditation. Yet another one was set up nearby for meals to be held. Wiring, lights and fans as well as washing up basins were also installed. Preparations were made for the yogis to be housed in the Abbot's Office, Bodhi Kuti and the Dhamma Workers' Quarters. Everything was in place by noon on 19 Dec.

During the retreat proper, the helpers had to make several trips a day up and down the hill using the SBS 4WDs to ferry breakfast and lunch as well as to bring the helpers up for the evening Dhamma Talk.

Karma works in wondrous ways. A good number of the yogis are very staunch members of the Dana Department of SBS. The sumptuous 7-course restaurant style lunches complete with soup and desserts (even sharksfin was served) which were sponsored by Ah Phak (a loyal SBS supporter) and his friends, were the fruits of the yogis' good karma.

We would like to thank all those who have worked hard to make sure the retreat was carried out without any hitches despite the constraints we faced, including that of almost not being able to get a teacher. Of course, without the yogis' participation, we would not have had the chance to serve. Then again, the retreat would not have been possible if Ven Aggacitta, the Abbot, had not given us the 'go-ahead'. SBS

A Retreat Below the Stars

By a Yogi, Lim Lay Suan

SBS is so conducive for calming and purifying of the mind. The air is crisp and fresh. The environment is peaceful with little kutis scattered among durian trees The view at night is beautiful and fantastic. On a clear night, you can see the bountiful stars and brightly lit moon as if you are very near to heaven. Looking down you can see part of Taiping town brightly lit, just like a *nimitta*.

In the early morning we have our group sitting at the opendeck in front of the golden Buddha image. It is so quiet, cool and peaceful, with musical sounds of insects and birds. After a downpour, one can hear the waterfall roaring fiercely down the hill. Once in a while the sounds of a durian dropping, the prayers from the mosque below and a passing train would impinge on the senses. On clear days when the sun is out you can see colourful butterflies courting and bees flitting from flower to flower sucking nectar. Candlelight Dhamma talks were held in the evenings.

A big *sadhu* to the donors and sponsors of the retreat for the sumptuous meals served.

I must confess that it took me 3 days to overcome my greed and to settle my mind. Considering that I am not an SBS helper, I feel I am the luckiest and most fortunate yogi to be given this opportunity to be here to purify my mind under Ajahn Sujato who is a good teacher. I am so glad that I have finally overcome the obstacles that hindered my progress. I offer a big *sadhu* to my teacher who taught me to love myself and to express love again through Metta Meditation.

Another big *sadhu* goes to Lay Hoon and Andrew who organised the retreat as well as to the other helpers who made it a success.

I would like all beings to rejoice with us on this happy occasion. May all be well and happy. SBS

Voices from Within SBS Workers share their thoughts

A Most Interesting Experience

By Wang Li Jeng

As part of her experience in SBS, a volunteer dhamma worker realises the Dhamma and finds solitude and tranquility.

I had wanted to visit SBS since its establishment. Since I had long holidays in November and December I contacted Cecilia Lim, the SBS Selangor representative, to tell her about my intention to visit SBS as a volunteer dhamma worker. Not long after, I found myself in SBS.

Some very kind members of TIMS provided me with accommodation. First, I was welcomed to Sis Lay Hoon's house and when she left for a retreat, Bro Andrew Kang and Sis Poh Liang shared with me the comforts of their home. I am most grateful to them.

My first few days in SBS were quite free and I felt like I was on holiday. Some tiny bugs were not too kind to me though. Sis Hui Fong, the administrative assistant, is an expert in driving the Kembara up the steep gradients of SBS roads.

After a few days of holiday, I finally settled down to some work. I was asked to help standardise the Manual of Operations of the various departments of the SBS Management Committee. I did not have any previous experience with this but was glad that I could contribute in a small way. I do hope that what I have done has been of some help. Ven Aggacitta was quite concerned and provided me with guidance.

During my stay in SBS, the day would normally start with the morning *pindapata*. The devotees would gather at the great pavilion of the Hokkien Cemetery while waiting for the monks to walk down from the hill to the area to receive the *pindapata* food.

There was also an interesting incident one day when someone misplaced her key. We searched all over the place, even the most unlikely places, for it but to no avail. I finally suggested that she radiate *metta* and transfer merits to beings around. She sat down and started to transfer merits and in less than a minute I heard her crying out, "I found it". We were so overjoyed! The key was in her pocket! It was really amazing! Could it be the beings around needed merits? So knowing that we would transfer the merits to them, they tried to confuse our minds so that we could not find the keys.

I remember during the Buddha's time, there were some monks who went into the forest to meditate but could not meditate well. They later sought advice from the Buddha. The Buddha told them to radiate *metta* to beings around. They did accordingly and finally they could meditate well again. The Dhamma that we learn is so lofty, and I really feel so priviledged to be able to learn and practise the Dhamma.

The scenery around SBS is really picturesque. For people like me who do not have much chance to see such scenery, I was really impressed. Sometimes I would just gaze at the beautiful green scenery. In SBS there is not only quietude, but the sound from the nearby waterfalls also brings a feeling of solitude and tranquility. I think SBS is really a good place to practise meditation. SBS

From Accountant to General Administrator

By Cheong Thoong Leong

Our general administrator, who has been with us for six months now, finds intrinsic blessings that are inherent in the job.

When I was in KL, I received from SBS an advertisement for the post of General Administrator, posted to those on SBS's mailing list. That was the second day of 2002 and I called up SBS to enquire further. I was told that Ven. Aggacitta was in Petaling Jaya. Subsequently I had a chat with Bhante and was invited to stay in SBS to get a feel of the environment, which I did. I found the environment excellent and very conducive for meditation practice. Six months later I resigned from my accounting job in Petaling Jaya and landed in SBS to take up the position of a general administrator in the Administrative Department of the Management Committee of SBS.

I experienced a drastic change in my living environment: from a hectic city life to a forest style of living. There are also a good number of opportunities to encounter many kinds of hard-to-find insects, spiders, scorpions, birds, reptiles and various types of animals that we don't usually see in the city. I felt a very different person after my first three months of stay in SBS, picking up different skills along the way: from that of site supervisor, purchaser, to administrator.

Bro Ling Ting Hook was there when I first stepped into SBS. Many thanks to him for helping to initiate me into the many tasks I now have to handle. A few piecemeal construction projects are at present being carried out here. This is where I'm gaining experience in site supervision work.

Many thanks also to Ven. Aggacitta for his guidance in not only work-related matters but also in Dhamma matters. It is mentioned in the scriptures that association with the wise is essential in one's spiritual journey and I have just that in SBS. I feel blessed for being able to associate with many Dhamma practitioners in SBS. My hope is that more Buddhists will come forward to serve the Sasana in one way or another so that it will flourish for a long time to come. SBS

Gilding the Buddha

• FROM BACK PAGE

> Since ancient times, gold is generally regarded as the purest metal known to mankind. For that reason, the scriptures often extol our Lord Buddha in terms of gold. In the *Vinaya Pitaka*, gold is defined as "The Master's Complexion". Psychics also tell us that enlightened or highly developed beings have golden auras."

The gilding of the Buddha image at SBS coincided with our visit. Coincidentally, that day was also exactly one year after the Buddha statue was brought to SBS from Penang.

My trip allowed me to see first hand the work of SBS and the positive influence it is bringing to the Buddhist community in Malaysia. I treasure the efforts of Bhante and the volunteers in making the Sanctuary a great success. This noble and virtuous idea of Ven Aggacitta in setting up the Buddhist Sanctuary will benefit all Buddhists in Malaysia.

This was my first trip to SBS and I cherish the experience. I will make it a point to return to SBS for the *kathina* celebrations. SBS

Gilding the Buddha

On 20 October 2002, a ceremony to gild the Buddha image seated in the open-air shrine brings a radiance to the image seated on a rocky outcrop. It coincided with the visit of two busloads of devotees from Penang, one of whom shares with you her impressions of that day.

By Lee Shik Kee

For most of us it was our first trip to SBS and needless to say we were all excited.

A few 4WDs greeted us as we arrived at the foothill of SBS. The ride up the Sanctuary was exhilarating. The view from the hill was magnificent and I was overwhelmed by the beautiful sunrise partially hidden by undulating hills. The fresh and cool breeze blowing in the early hours of the morning was so invigorating and refreshing.

I was deeply impressed with the efforts of the volunteers in the upkeep of the Sanctuary. I saw several groups of people busily gardening and performing housekeeping chores. The volunteers were organised and went about their chores happily.

We were led to an open deck which extended from an open air Buddha shrine. A small crowd had already gathered there. Seated in respectful silence, their eyes were focused on the activity at the shrine.

A few men were perched on the rocky outcrop where the Buddha statue was seated. Unperturbed by the growing crowd of devotees who had assembled in the open deck in front of the shrine, they skilfully and mindfully gilded the Buddha statue, cast in Jogjakarta out of lava stone, with gold leaves. By then, the head and face of the Buddha was radiantly reflecting the glow of the mid-morning sun. The rest of the image was still in its natural rock colour. I joined the stream of devotees in offering gold leaves for the gilding of the Buddha statue that sat in serene composure in the natural setting of a rock outcrop.

After *pindapata* by the SBS monks, Ven Aggacitta gave a Dhamma talk in which he explained the reasons for the gilding of the Buddha statue:

"Being seated in an open air shrine, the statue is exposed to the elements. The rain causes moss and fungus to grow in the depressions. As the process of gilding involves painting an undercoat of orange paint on the statue prior to the application of gold leaves, chances of moss and fungus growing would be slim.

The lava statue, when it is dry, turns a very pale shade and thus blends into the rocks in the background. As a result, one's attention is not focused on it as an object of veneration. As the Buddha is an extraordinary and outstanding being, his statue should also reflect this distinction of contrast to its surroundings.

The Buddha is a very special being who is fully enlightened. To behold a golden image of our Blessed One, shining, unblemished and untainted among an outcrop of moss-covered boulders would evoke feelings of awe for the unadulterated purity of his attainment.

• TURN TO PAGE 27