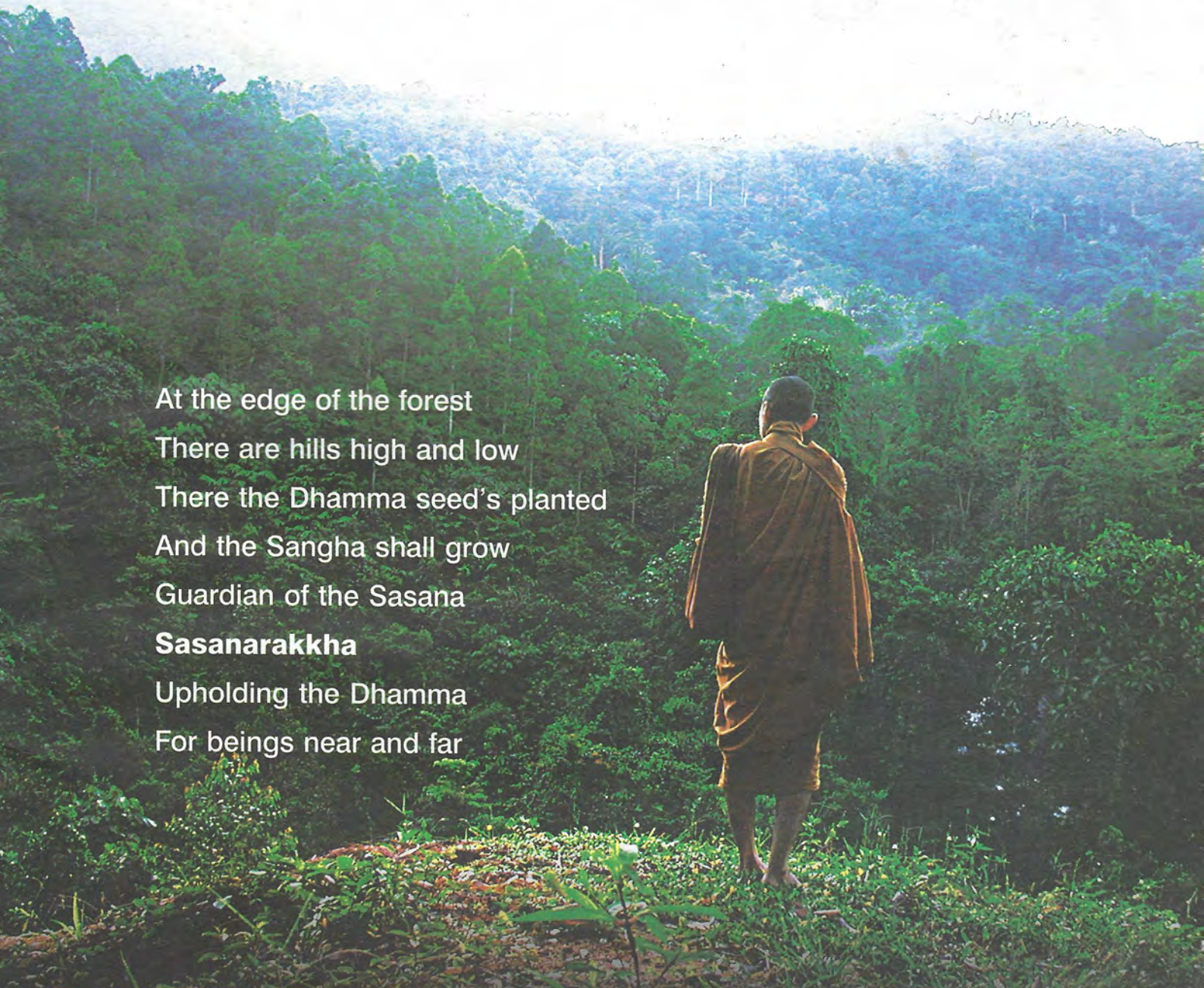
Sāsanārakkha

✣ NEWSLETTER OF SASANARAKKHA BUDDHIST SANCTUARY a special project of Taiping Insight Meditation Society ✣ RESTRICTED CIRCULATION ONLY ✣ Issue 8 ✣ Jun 2003 ✣

LONG TERM **GOAL**, SHORT TERM NEEDS

ALL THE **PRESIDENT'S MEN**

OFFERINGS TO **HONOUR** THE **DEAD**



At the edge of the forest
There are hills high and low
There the Dhamma seed's planted
And the Sangha shall grow
Guardian of the Sasana
Sasanarakkha
Upholding the Dhamma
For beings near and far

✣ Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary c/o 28 & 30 (1st floor), Jln Medan Taiping 4, Medan Taiping, 34000 Taiping, PERAK ✣ T. 05-8084429 ✣ F. 05-8084423 ✣ W. http://www.sasanarakkha.org ✣ E. office@sasanarakkha.org ✣

Editorial

Of Promises to Keep

By year-end, the communal facilities for the training of aspiring monastics will be in place. They include a classroom, a library, a publication & meeting room and a special structure built into a hillslope with space for sewing, laundry, storage, and treatment of alms bowls. A total of seven bathrooms will also be built.

As we can read from the Abbot's address, "secluded spots among brooks and valleys" next to the forest edge have been exclusively reserved for monastic trainees. Kutis there promise seclusion and self-sufficient solitude—an ideal setting for meditation and study, for the training of future bearers of the Dhamma.

A competent teacher is hard to come by, but we have such a one here in the Abbot. He's well versed in the theory and practice of the Dhamma-vinaya, literate in Pali, the original language of the scriptures, yet open-minded and progressive within reasonable Theravadin orthodoxy. He is willing to offer holistic training in the Dhamma-vinaya that promises to equip monks with the skills necessary for them to become properly independent—an independence advocated by the scriptures that will benefit themselves and others, especially the Buddhist community.

Here is the perfect combination for a "monk factory": conducive environment, a competent teacher and excellent facilities. But one very important component seems to be in short supply—aspiring monastics!

The Abbot has also hinted at yet another promise in his address—to lay yogis. If by year-end, aspiring monastic trainees do not take up the places reserved for them, then we cannot have a 'dog in the manger' attitude. What aspiring monastics are not eager to make use of may have to be shared by lay yogis—at least temporarily. You can bet your bottom dollar that these eager beavers are just waiting for the chance!

A devotee was heard to comment: "The monks here (in SBS) are really well-looked after, as compared to those I have personally seen in other countries of South-East Asia." This is yet another promise.

Editor

Sasanarakkha News Team for this issue

Editor-in-chief Looi Sow Fei

Sub-editors Ven Kumara, Ang Siew Mun, Doreen Lim, Lim Teik Leong

Proofreaders Judy Chuah, Lim Kim See, Maxine Cheong, Sam (IBDA)

Photo credits Cheong Thoong Leong, Chi Hui Fong, Lim Chin Oo, Law Hwee Meng, Ong Chin Cheong, Lim Lay Hoon, Tan Hock Lam, Wai Seng Moh

Contributors Ven Aggacitta, Ven Varadhammo, Ven Kumara, Doreen Lim, Lim Lay Hoon, Lim Lay Poh, Lim Tai Eng, Looi Sow Fei, Su Leng, Vivecaka, Xiufei

Layout & Design Sukhi Hotu (Hor Tuck Loon)

Printer Setia Kawan, Selangor

I would like to ask if it's possible for a layperson to go to SBS and just stay a month to do her own retreat, assuming she is prepared to meet all expenses incurred. My cousin is currently looking for a place to go for a month's retreat in Malaysia (instead of going to other countries for retreats). She is practising breath meditation and I'm not sure if it's acceptable in SBS.

Lainee

It is most kind of you to give us information about activities held in SBS. My friends and I would like to know if it is possible to request for a meditation retreat to be held in May as we have a long holiday starting in May. We are really looking forward to being taught by good teachers and are inspired to know that the environment is so conducive for meditation. Hope to hear from you soon.

Pei Wen

I am from Selangor and came to know about SBS through your newsletter recently. I was initially planning for a meditation retreat in MBMC, Penang from 12 to 16 May. Could I go to SBS instead? I am keen to visit and stay for a retreat if possible. I wonder if you could kindly provide me with more information on meditation retreats and whether or not a walk-in *yogi* could be accepted. Thank you.

Kittima Toh, *Selangor*

Editor's comment: I'm sorry to say that currently SBS does not have suitable facilities for personal retreats for the laity. The retreat you read about in the newsletter was specially organised at the end of last year, mainly for SBS volunteer helpers. As there is no proper meditation hall yet, yogis had to meditate in the open deck Buddha shrine; where we set up canopies for shade from sun and rain. Even the "kitchen" and "dining areas" were makeshift.

Right now priority is in developing central facilities for the monastics which are targeted for completion by the end of 2003. Construction work on the multi-purpose hall and guest lodges, which are meant for the laity, will be carried out only after the said Sangha central facilities are ready. Besides, it will also have to depend on the availability of funds.

I would like to refer to an article in SASANARAKKHA #7 written by Ven Sujato, "Silent Night, Holy Night." In the article, the venerable expressed his hope that SBS would not end up as being another meditation centre.

I must say that I fully support his view. We should let SBS stay as a monk-training centre, according to the aspiration of Ven Aggacitta. That is what's lacking in Malaysia. Already there are too many meditation centres in the country and most of them are greatly under-utilised. What benefit can there be in making SBS into another one?

Some years ago, I was standing next to a man looking with interest at a colour poster of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary. One of the first things he said was "Can lay people go there to meditate ah?" I tried to explain to him that it is a monk-training centre and that we already have too many meditation centres as it is. I expected him to see my point but instead, he quickly lost interest. Till now I still do not understand why but I suspect that there are many like him.

We Malaysian Buddhists should understand that the SBS project is crucial to the growth of the *Sasana* in Malaysia. What is Buddhism without properly trained monks? Although I can see that lay people too can play an important role teaching the Dhamma (including meditation), they can never replace the Sangha, which is founded by the Buddha and has managed to pass on the Buddha's teachings for thousands of years. Why do I say so? Lay people have more duties to attend to and understandably would not have as much time as monks have, to share the Dhamma. If we depend on lay people as bearers of the Dhamma, we can expect the *Sasana* to end within a few decades.

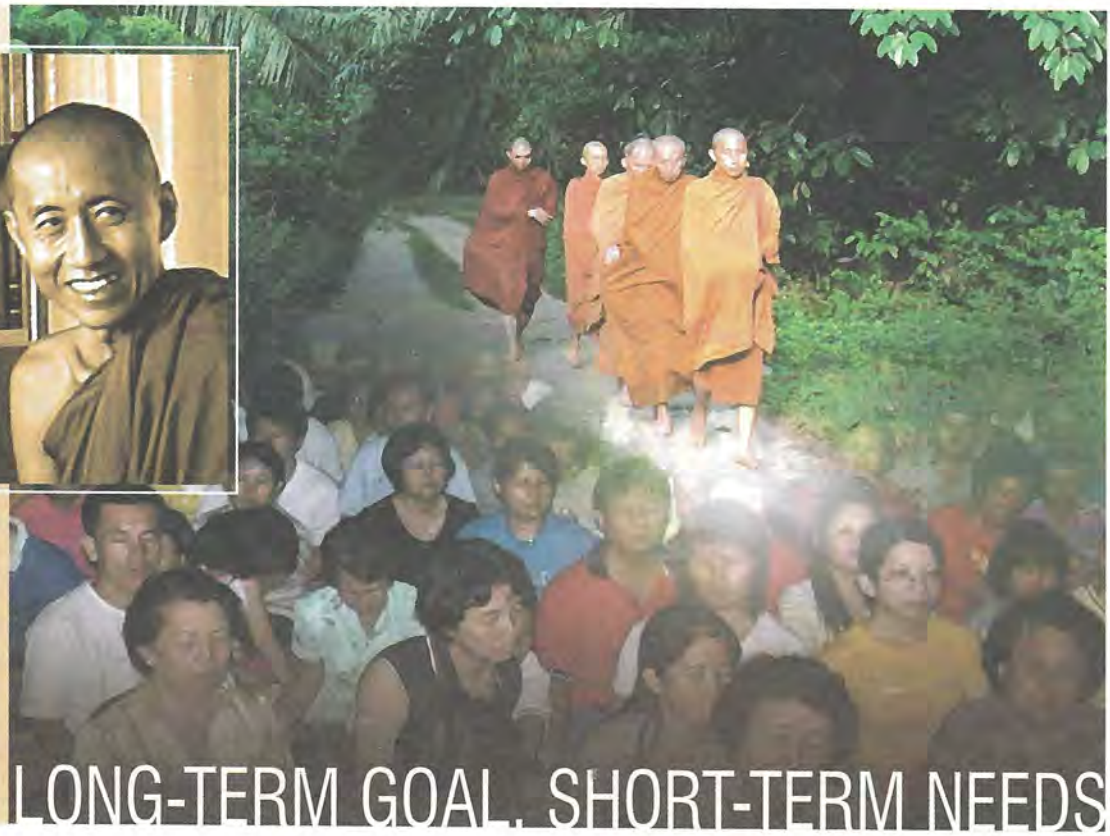
If we concentrate our resources more on lay *yogis* than on monks (which I think we already *are* doing now), we are but investing in a scheme of low-returns and, I suppose, merits too. They are both commendable investments, no doubt, but we should weigh their potential and put our limited resources in the right places.

Some may argue that SBS can be both a monk-training centre as well as a meditation centre. However, we should face the fact that a meditation centre is not a good place for training monks. Just take a look at any of our meditation centres and you'll see that the *yogis* are mostly women. In some centres, they even meditate in the same place as the monks do. This is not a healthy thing. We cannot expect monks to be saints as soon as they put on the robes. Spiritual practice is difficult and complicated enough. Why make it more so? The Buddha, on many occasions, warned the monks about proximity with women and even made rules on it. I think proximity with women is the greatest cause of monks disrobing. So, let's help our monks by taking those instructions of the Buddha seriously.

So, I too join Ven Sujato in wishing that SBS will not become another meditation centre but stay as a true monk-training centre for a long time to come. May the *Sasana(rakkha)* live long!

Vivecaka

Editor's comment: Please read "Abbot's Address" in this issue for a response on the subject. SBS



ABBOT'S Address

LONG-TERM GOAL, SHORT-TERM NEEDS

According to the scriptures, history and logic, the *Sasana* can only flourish if the members of the Sangha are sufficiently qualified in learning (*pariyatti*), practice (*patipatti*) and realisation (*pativedha*)—qualities that can best be cultivated when there is a mutually supportive and rewarding Sangha-laity relationship.

When the founders of SBS set the long-term goal of producing properly trained monks to perpetuate the *Sasana*, they also understood the short-term needs of its community of lay supporters. This is reflected in its Objects and By-laws, where a subsidiary object [OBS 2 1.0(e)] is:

> *to establish and operate a retreat centre as a means of providing community service to promote spiritual, mental and physical health.*

This has also been considered in the Master Plan for SBS. The resident trainees are housed in *kutis* located in the more secluded spots among the brooks and valleys around the *Sima* Hall and communal facilities under Phase 3 construction. Bordering these *kutis* are forests and a beautiful stream where adventurous monastics can retreat to for greater connection with Mother Nature. When development of these areas are completed, they will be reserved for monastics only.

Near the main entrance gate of the sanctuary are located public and semi-public structures and buildings such as the Administrative Building, Dhamma Workers' Quarters, Buddha Shrine, *Deva* Shrine, Abbot's Office, Retreat Teacher's *kuti* and *Mahathera's* kuti. Other buildings and facilities under Phase 4 development will also be built in this zone: a Multi-purpose Hall, Guest Lodges and a Health Lodge.

The retreat centre will be utilising these facilities, which have been deliberately located away from the private monastic areas among the valleys below. We hope to out-source the management of the retreat centre to Buddhist professionals, who will arrange for competent teachers from various traditions to conduct courses throughout the year, or whenever in demand. In this way, the long-term goal of monk-training can be pursued independently and simultaneously with the short-term goal of community service. This has been our strategy since the beginning.

To date, however, local response to participate in the training programme at SBS has been poor, despite the availability of *kutis* for monastic trainees. Out of the seven newly completed *kutis*, only four are regularly occupied. The reasons may be varied, but one of them could be the on-going noise and activity of Phase 3 construction, which is also the main reason why we are not striving to recruit resident monastics for this *vassa*.

More foreigners have expressed interest in joining us, but being wary of the difficulties of getting visa extensions for them to complete their course of monastic training, we have had to turn them down. Nevertheless, many conscientious foreign monastics have stayed as visiting monks in the sanctuary since its inception.

In order to recruit potential monastic trainees for the sanctuary, I have often been urged by well-meaning Buddhist leaders to conduct short-term noviciate programs. Judging by the popularity of such programs nationwide, they feel that having one might just do the trick, or at least sow the seeds for the future. So, it looks like with the completion of Phase 3 by the end of 2003, we shall have to embark on another first: a two-week introduction to monkhood program. Eligible young men can then have a taste of the simplicity and quietude of *Dhamma-vinaya* study, meditation and monastic life "at the edge of the forest where the spring water flows". Since this will be our maiden attempt, the intake will also be modest—perhaps not more than ten. So, if you are an adventurous young man who is physically fit, can effectively communicate in English, and is willing to try out an alternative lifestyle, be on the lookout for further details!

Some of our supporters have been clamouring for meditation retreats to be conducted here. So far, we have had good reason to decline because of the lack of proper facilities. Come end of 2003, however, such short-term needs of the laity may have to be addressed, especially if the number of monastic trainees for fulfilling our long-term goal does not increase.

In other words, what has been reserved exclusively for monastics may have to be temporarily shared with lay *yogis* until there is a significant change in circumstances. After all, our supporters do have a right to utilise the under-utilised facilities they have helped to sponsor and maintain. SBS

SANGHA speaks

FAQ's about a monk

Prompted by the Abbot to write something for the benefit of those contemplating monkhood, Ven Kumara decides to share his answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ's) about his journey before and after becoming a monk.

Having been a monk for four years, I've been asked various questions related to my becoming a monk. Some of these questions have been asked so many times that I sometimes wish I could gather all those who are curious to know and tell them all at one go.

So, is that why I'm writing this article? The idea *did* spring from that, but there are better reasons. You'll see as you read some of the top questions and my responses to them.

FAQ1 How did you decide to become a monk?

In a way, the decision came suddenly; yet, it was the result of a gradual build-up — somewhat like a *vipassana* insight, if you like. When I was just a young boy, I was fascinated with reports of kids going for short-term noviciate programs. A past life tendency, perhaps? But due to lack of contact with Buddhist temples, I never joined any.

My interest in Buddhism was revived about 15 years later, when I was in varsity. With the help of my Buddhist society friends, I was drawn into Buddhism and quickly agreed to join a week-long *vipassana* meditation retreat conducted by Ven Sujiva in Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi.

The participants underwent a pre-retreat meditation crash course at Buddhist Wisdom Centre in Petaling Jaya. One of the facilitators, Tan Soo Pin, said something that I can still remember quite vividly:

> If you want to be a serious *yogi* (meditator), you have only four options in life:
> 1. Become a monk
> 2. Stay unmarried
> 3. Get married to a *yogi*
> 4. Get married to someone who can be made to become a *yogi*
>
> That's it. No fifth option.

Does that sound a bit too serious for you? Anyway, at that time, I was thoroughly inspired. There can be no other options for me. Period. Yet, the desire to renounce did not crystallise.

I went to the retreat highly motivated and practised quite diligently. Near the end of the retreat, I thought, "Wow! This is *the* most worthwhile week I've ever spent in my whole life!" My faith in the Triple Gem took a silent yet significant leap forward.

Some thoughts of renunciation did occur then, such as doing away with the extravagances in life. I was so engulfed in those thoughts that I could hardly meditate. Hor Tuck Loon, who was then a Dhamma worker there, became a victim of my desire to share my noble thoughts. I later came to know that it's common for a beginner to be sucked into that sort of thing. All the same, I knew then that my life had taken a fundamental turn. What wasn't clear to me was where it was leading.

Meeting practising monks was perhaps the greatest influence on my decision to renounce. Ven Sujiva, who was my main meditation teacher, praised life as a renunciant and encouraged me to renounce. It seems he says that to most *yogis* he interviews.

I also met some other good monks like Ven Suvanno, Ven Visuddhacara (who has just disrobed), and Ven Nagasena, and was attracted to the way they lived. Sure, it would mean no movies, no music, no eating whenever I like, no girls, etc. But, it would also mean no wife and kids to deal with, no income tax, no house and car to pay for, no debts and bills to settle, no money to worry about, no shopping for clothes... What a great life!

Although I had never got myself fully entangled with the usual worldly burdens yet, there were enough examples around, such as my own parents, to give me a good picture. I didn't like it. I found it too wearisome. So, the notion of being free from all that, and having all the time to do Dhamma-related things, was something that I found extremely attractive.

The eventual decision to renounce came quite unexpectedly, when I was somewhere in the middle of my final year of studies. Although I had chosen a course on education, thinking that being a teacher was what I wanted, there was still a nagging sense of uncertainty.

I managed to find and downloaded a career guidance software from the Internet. It had an interactive questionnaire, which I worked through to find out the most suitable job for me. I hoped that it would just tell me that I should be a teacher and settle the matter. I was getting rather sick of the indecisiveness.

What was the result? I can't remember. Certainly not a monk, though. Whatever it was, I don't recall being satisfied. So I wandered elsewhere in the program and chanced upon a passage that said something like this:

> *Imagine if you were to live your life as events led you. You then approached the end of your life, and began to reflect on how you had lived. Now consider: How would you wish you had lived your life instead?*

Immediately, this thought occurred: "I'd wish I had lived my life as a monk... and worked towards enlightenment." I was quite surprised at my own response.

"I'd wish I had lived as a monk." Those words echoed in my mind. I was utterly amazed. It was like some sort of sudden realisation. *(Satori?)*

"That's what I want to do with my life: be a monk." Nothing else seemed worthy; nothing else made sense. There was not an iota of indecisiveness in my mind. I had sold my 'soul' to the Triple Gem!

So, that was how I decided to become a monk. Strange, isn't it? Who could have thought that a career guidance software downloaded from the Internet would become my final divine messenger?

FAQ2 Didn't your parents object?

They objected. Oh, yes, they did. In fact, when my mother learned of my intention, she cried cats and dogs; and when my father found out why she was crying, he scolded me for making her cry.

At that time, I hadn't even asked for permission yet, but there were clear indications that it was definitely not the right time. So I suggested, "Okay, okay! Let's just leave this aside. Let's not talk about it for now, okay?" Feeling like I was in hot soup, I was more than willing to abandon the issue — for the time being at least.

As their faith in the Triple Gem was still weak then, I knew they would not be able to take it well, but I had to start somewhere. It was a difficult period that we simply had to go through.

FAQ3 How did you get your parents' permission?

Like most monks and aspiring monks, parental consent proved to be the most elusive condition to fulfil.

Let me explain this first. When a person wants to join the monastic order, a member of the Sangha assembly will ask him whether his parents have consented. If he did not have their consent and answered accordingly, and the monks in the assembly ordained him nonetheless, each of those monks commits a *Vinaya* offence. If he said 'yes' instead, he would be lying.

In either case, his ordination would not be impeccable. As I personally have never liked such

a situation, I waited. During that period, I tried to make use of every opportune moment to gradually influence my parents to have a more positive view of monkhood. The stamp of approval finally came — about one and a half years after I had first revealed my intention to them.

We were in the midst of economic recession in 1998 and my father was getting himself deeper into a financial mess. I was in the kitchen together with my mother and we talked about our situation. It somehow felt like the right time, and so I said, "Mum, if I continue to live my life as it is, I'd regret not having become a monk."

"If you don't feel happy as a lay person," she said, "we shouldn't stop you."

For a while, I wasn't sure what to say; then I thanked her.

"Although I let you go," she added, "I do it with a heavy heart."

"I know."

Later, when my father came to know about it, he didn't object. It seemed almost as if they had anticipated my asking, and had decided to give their consent. Aren't they great?

After my ordination, my parents became better Buddhists and more active in the temple: attending Dhamma talks, joining a meditation course, providing services, etc. I knew things would turn out fine.

FAQ4 How would a person know that he is ready to renounce?

When I was first asked this question, I didn't know how to answer. Other monks that I checked with were equally at a loss. The fact is we never asked ourselves that question. *When you want to renounce, you renounce lah!* What's there to be ready about?

We eventually agreed upon this answer: If a person asks that question, he is *not* ready.

FAQ5 Are you allowed to disrobe later?

Sure. There's no lifelong vow in becoming a monk.

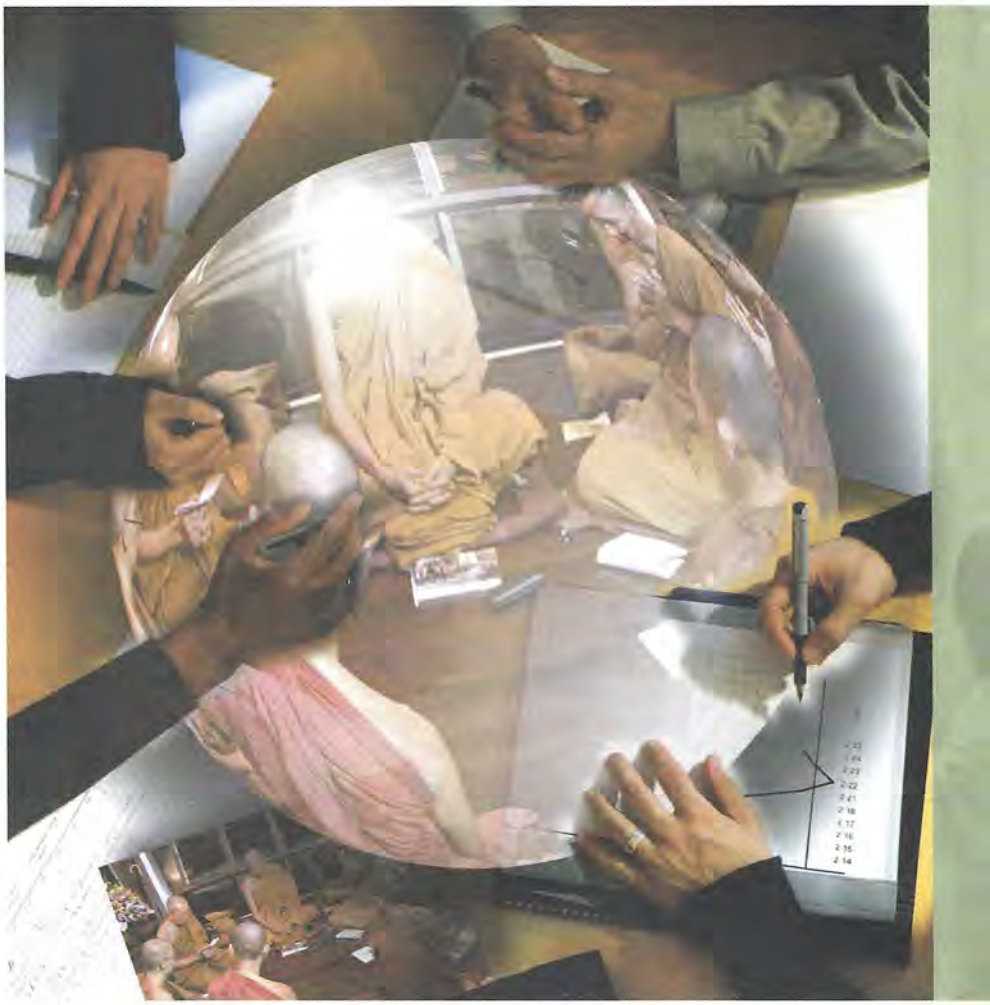
FAQ6 Do you intend to disrobe later (or be a monk for life)?

Choy! How can you ask that question?

Seriously, although I did enter monkhood with no thought of disrobing later, I can't be sure how I will think in the future. Perhaps I can only say that, at present, I can't find any reason to return to lay life. What's so great about it anyway?

Conclusion

To those who are on the verge of monkhood, I hope this article can somehow give a few nudges towards the wonderful life. As for the rest, may it plant little seeds in their minds — no matter how tiny they may be! SBS



Though Ven Aggacitta had invited me to SBS a few times, I had to politely decline his kind invitations. Recently though, when Ven Guttapala requested me to accompany him to SBS, I finally made the trip.

I had been to and passed by Taiping many times during my various trips down south but had never visited Taiping Lake Gardens. The trip to SBS gave me a chance to visit it and roam around Taiping town since our guide, Ven Guttapala, had forgotten the way leading to SBS from the Lake Gardens. Anyway, after making a few rounds and checking a few cemeteries, we managed to locate the *Hokkien Thiong*.

When Ven Aggacitta spoke to us about SBS, he said SBS belongs to TIMS. Though monks are allowed to use the place, it is not Sangha property.

As a monk, I have stayed in many Buddhist societies' premises as well as monasteries. Staying in a society's premises is different from staying in a monastery. A monastery is usually managed by a monk or an abbot. After practising the Dhamma and *Vinaya* for many years and living under the guidance of other senior monks, the abbot knows the nuances of a *bhikkhu's* life. A monk does not become an *arahant* immediately upon being ordained. Most wise abbots know that it takes years and sometimes many lifetimes to eradicate greed, hatred and delusion. A *bhikkhu's* training is a gradual process and takes years to perfect. With this understanding, an abbot has only loving-kindness and compassion for his disciples.

Conflicts in monasteries are usually (though not always) caused by overzealous new monks trying to act like *arahants*. These monks would usually mellow or eventually disrobe before reaching 10 *vassas*. *Theras* know that the training is individual and that ignorance of this leads one to judge.

> *"I am the owner of my kamma (deeds), heir to my kamma, born of my kamma, related to my kamma, abide supported by my kamma: whatever kamma I shall do good or evil, of that I shall be the heir."*
>
> (Buddha, *Anguttara Nikaya Sutta* 5.57.)

There were cases where even when the society was started by a monk, it was eventually taken over by the lay community for registration purposes, i.e. the laity would form the general committee that ran the society. This is evident in Penang where societies or associations were founded by monks but eventually the management was taken over by lay people.

We may argue that it does not matter who manages these societies or associations. After

The question of ownership of facilities meant for Sangha use was discussed in a previous issue of the newsletter. Now, it has come up again. **Ven Varadhammo** spent a couple of weeks in SBS and expresses his thoughts on this.

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

all, these lay people have great respect for the Sangha and they will look after the needs of the Sangha or monks. Furthermore, the committee members normally respect and obey the monk who started the society. But problems may arise. A founding monk may die or disrobe. What then if the committee members begin to exercise their authority and start to 'implement' rules or regulations according to their inclination towards certain traditions? There have been cases where the committee members, for reasons of their own, allow only certain monks (whom they like or perhaps respect) to stay at the premises. For example, certain societies allow only *vipassana* and not *anapanasati* practitioners. There are also preferences for Burmese or Thais, locals or foreigners, preaching or non-preaching monks, etc.

There is a remark among monks that there are lay people who initially come to learn Dhamma but end up controlling the Sangha. It's like a saying by the Buddha:

> *"…. like a maiden who is led to her father-in-law's house; when, upon seeing him, would be filled with respect and fear. But after some time, because of familiarity, she would start ordering her parents-in-law about instead."*

Recently, the following incident happened to a *bhikkhu* friend of mine in Singapore. One of the wealthy committee members of a certain Buddhist society queried the *bhikkhu* staying at 'his' monastery without an invitation. This shows how arrogant and rude some people can become. If monks cannot stay in monasteries when they travel, should they stay in hotels instead?

In the Buddha's time, there were Anathapindika and many others who donated or built monasteries for the Sangha. But these devotees did not interfere or get involved in the management of the monasteries. Hopefully we will have many Anandapindikas now and in future.

I only wish for the well being of the Sangha. *Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!* SBS

Editor's Comment

Thank you, *Bhante*, for your concern for the Sangha in SBS, and for elucidating the basis of this concern.

In SASANARAKKHA #6, Ven Aggacitta presented the other side of this same coin in the Abbot's Address entitled "Will the Owner Please Own Up?"

He explained that when SBS was in the initial process of conceptualisation, the issue of ownership was carefully deliberated upon by its founder members. There were three main reasons for the decision to favour laity over Sangha ownership. Firstly, if it were Sangha property, then any 'Tom, Dick or Harry' monk had right of residence and therefore, control on the quality of the resident Sangha would be difficult. Secondly, if it were Sangha property or that of any individual monk, canvassing for or accepting donations in any way contrary to *Vinaya* rules would render it impure. Thirdly, if it belonged to an individual monk, he could do whatever he wanted to. So, ownership by the laity would

- facilitate Sangha quality control
- ensure the purity of sponsored materials
- foster a balanced Sangha-laity management.

To safeguard the interests of the Sangha, the Abbot is also the Spiritual Director of the SBS Management Committee and his approval is *necessary* to sanction any committee resolution. Furthermore, the SBS Sangha is entitled to allowable requisites obtainable from the SBS Sanghadayaka Fund, which is used exclusively for supporting the resident monks. The authority to approve any request for allowable requisites lies with the Abbot or Sangha, and not the laity. SBS

DHAMMA talk

Since mid-November 2002, SBS monastics have been giving regular Dhamma talks after the offering of food in TIMS on Sundays, and elsewhere on special occasions.

DhammaTalks

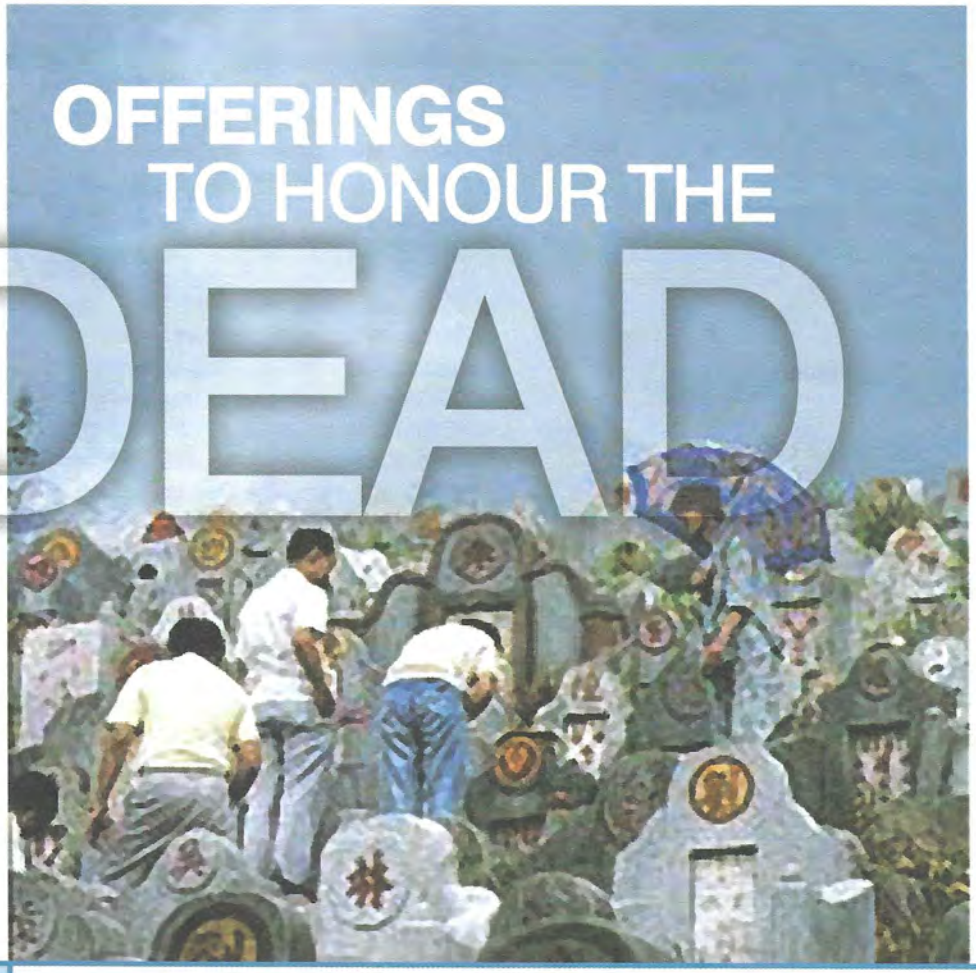
In SASANARAKKHA #7, the article *Dhamma Therapy* told us of the positive response from people who attended these talks.

Beginning with this issue, SASANARAKKHA brings you the titles of these talks as well as a brief synopsis of each. These talks are posted regularly on our website <http://www.sasanarakkha.org> so that you can easily access any one that may interest you.

In this issue, we have also included the talk, "Offerings to Honour the Dead", given on 6 April 2003, as an article (refer next page).

Topic/Speaker/Date	Synopsis
2002 ***Angulimala Sutta*** Ven Kumara, 17, 24, 15 Nov	The story of Angulimala. Found in the *sutta* is a *paritta* verse chanted for pregnant women to ward off problems during gestation and delivery.
Buddhist Practice in Chithurst, England Ven Ajahn Karuniko, 01 Dec	An English senior monk of the Ajahn Chah tradition gives an idea of how Theravada Buddhism is practised in Chithurst, England.
2003 ***Dhammika Sutta,*** Ven Kumara, 05 Jan	On the qualities of a good disciple–ordained and lay–of the Buddha.
Eight Worldly Dhammas Ven Aggacitta, 12 Jan	The ups and downs of life or the eight worldly conditions.
Q&A Ven Aggacitta, 19 Jan	Discussion of three questions on: the first precept, meditation and bogus monks.
Taking Refuge and Precepts before *Dana*; House-warming Dana; *Mangala Sutta* Ven Aggacitta, 26 Jan	A talk on why we take refuge in the Triple Gem and the five precepts before offering *dana*; the significance of house-warming *dana*; three blessings of the *Mangala Sutta*: not mixing with the foolish, mixing with the wise and honouring those worthy of honour.
Mangala Sutta, Ven Aggacitta, 01 Feb	The blessings of suitable dwelling, past merits and improving oneself.
Mangala Sutta, Ven Kumara, 02 Feb	The blessings of knowledge, skills, discipline and well-spoken speech.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 08 Feb	The blessings of caring for one's parents and supporting one's wife and children.
Q&A Ven Aggacitta, 09 Feb	Discussion of three questions on: 1) the proper way of showing respect, 2) whether one must do the 5-point prostration whenever one meets a monk and, 3) how often and from whom should one ask for forgiveness.
Duties and Responsibilities of Husband and Wife Ven Kumara, 14 Feb	A talk on the duties and responsibilities of a husband and a wife given during house *dana*, on the wedding eve of a couple.
Q&A; *Mangala Sutta* Ven Varadhammo Ven Aggacitta, 16 Feb	Ven Varadhammo, a visiting member of the Sangha answers two questions: 1) why *devas* no longer come to the human realm as they did in the past and, 2) whether the *kamma* of one generation can be inherited by the next. Ven Aggacitta continues with the blessing of being organised in one's work.
Mangala Sutta, Ven Kumara, 23 Feb	The blessing of giving (*dana*).
Buddhist Practice Ven Aggacitta, 27 Feb	A special talk on *dana*, *sila* and *bhavana* during house *dana* on the death anniversary of a devotee's husband
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 02 Mar	The blessings of righteous living, supporting relatives and blameless work.
Mangala Sutta, Ven Aggacitta, 09 Mar	The blessing of abstinence from bad conduct.
***Atanatiya* Protection** Ven Aggacitta, 16 Mar	A special talk given during the Consecration Ceremony of the Four Great Kings Shrine on *Atanatiya Paritta* that all Buddhists can learn, in order to protect themselves from being harassed by evil spirits.
Buddhism in Indonesia Ven Thitayañño, 30 Mar	The state of Buddhism in Indonesia by a visiting Indonesian monk.
Offerings to Honour the Dead Ven Aggacitta, 06 Apr	Ven Aggacitta checks the *suttas* to see if the custom of making offerings to departed relatives is in accordance with the Buddha's teaching.
Q & A Ven Kumara, 13 Apr	Answering two questions: 1) Why are there differences in the practice of taking refuge in the Triple Gem between the Theravada and Mahayana traditions? 2) Is it true that if children pray for their elders to live longer, then their lives will be shortened, as compensation?
Q & A; *Mangala Sutta* Ven Aggacitta, 20 Apr	Answering two questions: 1) What should I do if my family is not supportive of my spending time doing voluntary work for SBS? 2) How do I influence children to have an open mind to learn the Dhamma? Ven Aggacita continues with the blessing of diligence.
Mangala Sutta, Ven Kumara, 27 Apr	The blessing of respect.
Q & A Ven Aggacitta, 04, 11 May	A couple did not desire to have a baby and the wife was on the pill. She still conceived. They then aborted the foetus. Can this bring bad *kamma* to them? How do they counteract this bad *kamma*?
Wesak Day Celebrations Ven Kumara, 15 May	The right way to celebrate Wesak.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 18 May	The blessings of humility and contentment.
Mangala Sutta, Ven Kumara, 25 May	The blessing of gratitude.
Pathama-Saranani-Sakka Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 01 Jun	Does a *sotapanna* drink alcohol? Ven Aggacitta examines this question with reference to the *Pathama-Saranani-Sakka Sutta* from the *Samyutta Nikaya*.
Mangala Sutta, Ven Kumara, 08 Jun	The blessing of the timely hearing of the Dhamma.

OFFERINGS TO HONOUR THE DEAD



By Ven Aggacitta

There are different views on the custom of making food offerings at the graves of their departed relatives during ***Cheng Beng***. Does this practice bring any benefits?

MAKING OFFERINGS TO DEPARTED RELATIVES

Some people say that Buddhists should not offer food to their departed relatives as it is not a Buddhist practice. Instead they should invite the Sangha, make offerings to the Sangha and then transfer merits to the departed relatives. Is this true? Let us investigate by scrutinising some relevant *suttas*.

Also an Ancient Indian Custom

The tradition of offering food at the graves of ancestors was practised even during the time of the Buddha. There is a story in the *Vinaya Pitaka (Pac 40)* of a *bhikkhu* who, being very austere in his practice, used only the shrouds of corpses for his robes and ate only food offerings found in the charnel ground, a sort of cemetery where corpses were left to decompose. Naturally, the food offered by relatives to the dead was good food, so he looked healthy.

Then rumours circulated that he might have consumed human flesh! When the Buddha heard the complaint, he set the rule that food must be offered to the monks before they could eat it. That is why monks have to wait for food to be offered to them before they can consume it, not because they are high and mighty and need to be served. So, during the Buddha's time, it was already an Indian custom to make food offerings to departed relatives.

Offerings Include Food and Drinks

The practice of making offerings to departed relatives is also discussed in *Sigalovada Sutta (DN 31)* in the section expounding the five responsibilities of children. The fifth responsibility is to continually make offerings to departed relatives.

Making offerings here could mean offering food to departed relatives. It is not explicitly mentioned in the *sutta* that they must invite the Sangha for *dana* and then transfer merits to the departed relatives, although this is suggested by the commentary. Hence, we cannot say unequivocally that offering food to the departed relatives is not a Buddhist practice.

The *Tirokutta Sutta (Khp 7)* describes the circumstances of departed ones with special reference to their living relatives. We recite this when invited for *dana* on the occasion of a family bereavement. The *sutta* states that living relatives should make offerings of food and drinks to the departed ones. In this same *sutta*, there is also a reference to offerings made to the Sangha.

In *Janussoni Sutta (AN 10.177)*, a brahmin named Janussoni asked the Buddha, "Master Gotama, we brahmins give *dana* and do things in full faith, thinking, 'May this *dana* reach our departed relatives. May the departed relatives make use of this *dana*.' Master Gotama, can this dana reach our departed relatives? Can the departed relatives make use of the *dana*?"

The Buddha's answer was: "If there is an opportunity, they can. If there is no opportunity, then they cannot." He then clarified thus:

- conditions of non-opportunity:
  - those who do evil and hold wrong views and are reborn as hell beings
  - those who do evil and hold wrong views and are reborn as animals
  - those who refrain from evil and hold right views and are reborn as humans
- condition of opportunity:
  - those who do evil and hold wrong views and are reborn in the realm of ghosts.
  - those who refrain from evil and hold right views and are reborn as *devas*

It is clear here that *dana* can only reach the deceased if he is reborn as a ghost.

In this *sutta*, we learn three important points:

- The *dana* given by the living to the deceased cannot reach him if he is born in hell, in the animal kingdom, in the human world or even in heaven.
- The *dana* can only reach the deceased if he is born in the realm of ghosts.
- *Dana* here has to **specifically mean offering food and drinks to the departed relatives,** since this *dana* cannot be received by a departed one reborn as a *deva*. It cannot mean transference of merit because this other type of *dana* can reach a departed relative born as a *deva*, who benefits by feeling honoured (as we shall see later).

> ... Hence, we cannot say unequivocally that offering food to the departed relatives is not a Buddhist practice.

Contemporary Findings

According to a parapsychology study in Myanmar carried out about twenty years ago, some children could remember their past lives as hungry ghosts. They remembered consuming filth such as sputum, faeces and urine. They were also able to eat discarded food but needed only a single grain of rice to be full.

When I was young, I often fell sick due to supernatural causes. I could not be cured (by Western medicine) until my mother went to the temple to consult the medium and then made offerings to the unseen beings at the roadside. This custom is practised in Myanmar too.

These and many other contemporary experiences seem to suggest that some ghosts or unseen beings can actually partake of food and drink. Some people even say that these unseen beings do so by "sucking" the *qi* (essence) of the offerings; that's why food that has already been offered tastes rather flat!

Offerings to Devas as well

In *Pattakamma Sutta (AN 4.61)* the Buddha said to Anathapindika that a noble disciple who acquired his income through righteous means should spend it by making five types of offerings. These are offerings to

- living relatives
- guests
- departed relatives
- the king (government)
- *devas*.

There is also a verse in *Ratana Sutta (Khp 6)* that urges deities to protect humans because they make offerings to them day and night.

So, whether or not one's offerings are appreciated or used by the recipient does not affect the validity of the wholesome *kamma* of doing *puja*.

The above references bring us to the following conclusion: **a Buddhist is actually encouraged by the Buddha to make offerings to departed relatives as well as to *devas*.**

Dedication of Offerings to *Devas*

In the story on the making of Pataliputta village found in *Mahaparinibbana Sutta (DN. 16)*, the Buddha advised people to offer *dana* to virtuous monks and dedicate the offering to the *devas* there. We do the same when we are invited for *dana* in a new house. These *devas*, being honoured and cherished, will honour and cherish the occupants of the house in return.

This shows that a smart person who invites virtuous and restrained Sangha members for *dana* and then dedicates the offering to the guardian *devas* in the dwelling can be protected and assisted by the *devas*. **So, dedicating one's merits to *devas* is also a practice encouraged by the Buddha.**

Why Make Offerings?

One may ask, "What's the point of making offerings to departed relatives or to *devas* if they can't eat the food?" Several points need to be considered here.

1. It would be difficult to know where a departed relative had been reborn. There is still a chance that he or she could have been reborn in the realm of ghosts (*pettivisaya*). In such a case, the departed relative could eat the offerings.
2. As the Buddha said in *Janussoni Sutta*, even if the departed relative was not born there, other ghosts who were related to one in previous lives could eat the offerings.
3. *Devas* may not be able to eat the food, but they will probably feel honoured by the offerings and reciprocate by giving protection and assistance.

People make offerings of food, drinks, flowers, incense, etc. to the Buddha image. Can the Buddha eat or appreciate the offerings? Obviously not. So, what's the point of doing such *puja* (worship)? I think it is the mental attitude that counts. Worshipping those who are worthy of worship and respect are lofty blessings listed in the *Mangala Sutta (Khp 5; Sn 2.4)*. So, whether or not one's offerings are appreciated or used by the recipient does not affect the validity of the wholesome *kamma* of doing *puja*.

SHARING OF MERITS

We should take note that the actual procedure of "transferring" or "sharing" merits is not mentioned in all the *suttas* I have referred to so far, nor in any other *sutta* in the Pali Canon that I am presently aware of. "Should dedicate the offering" (*dakkhi namādise*) seems to be the nearest hint found in the Pataliputta story (DN 16).

Conditions for Efficacy

According to the Commentary to *Tirokutta Sutta*, however, a few factors decide whether the merits thus dedicated can be received by the departed relative:

- The donor must think of the deceased and dedicate the *dana* to the deceased.
- The *dana* recipient must be virtuous.
- The deceased must rejoice in the dedication of merits (e.g. by saying, "*Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!*").

The commentary argues that the merits done by one cannot be transferred to another because the law of *kamma* states that beings are the owners of their own *kamma*. However, by rejoicing in another's meritorious deed, one is creating wholesome *kamma* for oneself. In the case of a departed one reborn as a deprived ghost, rejoicing in the *dana* dedicated to him can give immediate relief and other benefits, particularly if the *dana* recipient is virtuous.

A Buddhist son may choose to have a "pure Buddhist" funeral for his departed Taoist father. Now, even if the deceased was aware of the dedication of the *Sanghadana*, he might not be happy or rejoice because the funeral was not conducted in the Taoist tradition. So, according to the above conditions, he cannot receive the merits, can he?

On the other hand, if the funeral was conducted according to his personal preference, do you think he would be happy? If he rejoiced in his family's act of filial duty as recommended by the Buddha in *Sigalovada Sutta*, *Pattakamma Sutta* and *Tirokutta Sutta*, would he be creating wholesome *kamma* that could also give immediate benefits? Think about it.

Other Ways of Sharing Merits

Apart from the dedication of offerings to *devas* as mentioned in the *suttas*, and to departed ones as explained in the commentaries, there may also be other ways of sharing merits, as the experiences of contemporary Buddhists imply. There is one real-life story (see *The Story of Old Man Tiow* by Sichitra Ronruen) that happened in Thailand not too long ago. An irreligious old man was killed and landed in hell. But because of his son, who was a meditating monk, he came back to the human world for a new lease of life.

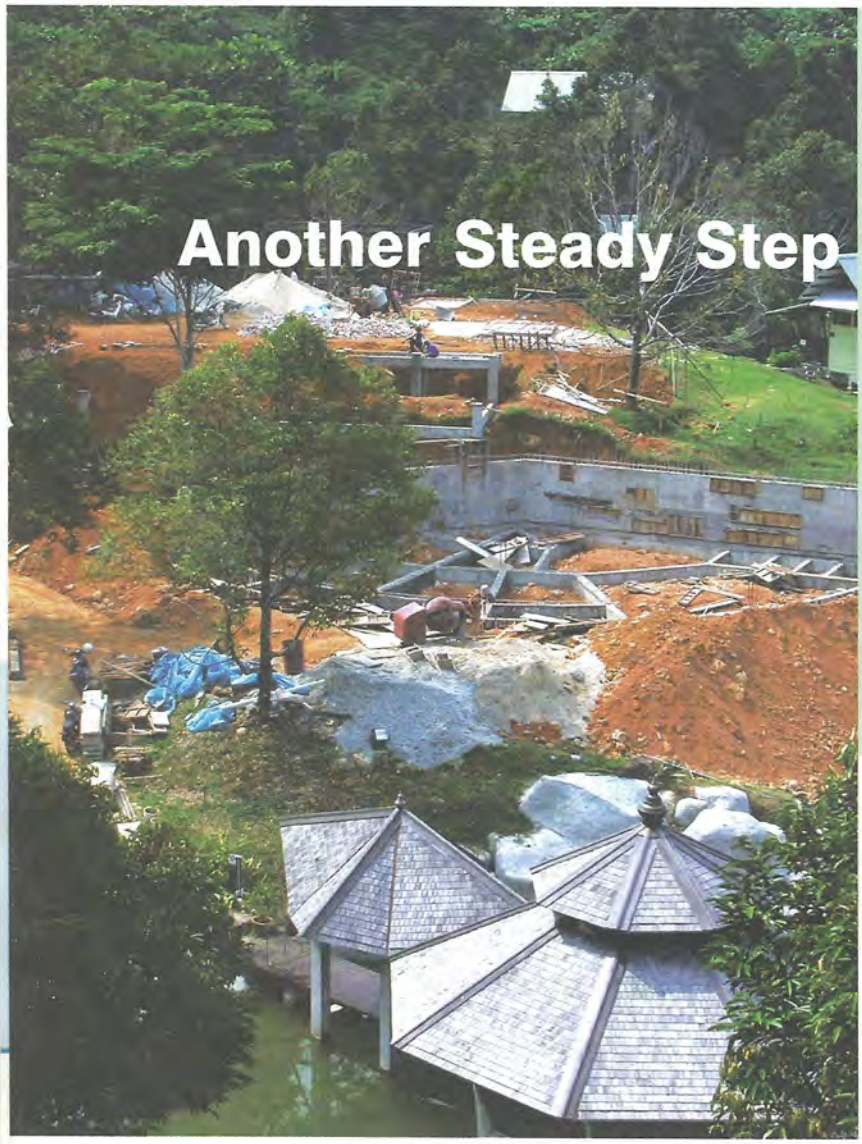
How did the monk save his father? He did not do any *dana*. All he did was meditate then dedicate the merits to his father. And the father was not even aware of the dedication, not to mention rejoicing in it. But he was saved anyhow. This does not seem to be in line with the commentary's conditions for the efficacy of sharing merits. How can we interpret this apparent inconsistency?

According to Luang Phor Jarun (Phra Rajsuddhiñanamongkol, author of *The Law of Kamma*), after meditation, one's mind is very clear and powerful. Hence, contrary to the commentary's argument, people and other unseen beings *can* receive merits that are dedicated to them after meditation, *although they may not even be aware of the sharing*.

So, it seems that we can transfer the merits not only from *dana* but also from any wholesome act, such as meditation.

Based on the above investigations into the *suttas*, I would like to propose the following interpretation with respect to offerings to departed relatives during *Cheng Beng*. We can make **two types of offerings: the direct offering of food and drinks to the departed ones, and the *dana* to the Sangha followed by sharing of merits.** SBS

This article will be expanded into a more comprehensive work tentatively entitled *Honouring the Dead – a Buddhist View* to be published for free distribution in three languages in the near future.



We invite you once again to come with us as we continue our journey into another phase of construction.

Another Steady Step along the long road to development

Lim Tai Eng reports on the developments that have taken place since the last issue of SASANARAKKHA. In the forefront of the on-going maintenance works is Phase 3 construction, which centres on the communal facilities for monastic training and education.

It was on a Wednesday, and I was about to go for the Perlis State Multi Religious Council meeting, when I received a call from Taiping, asking me to serve on the Management Committee of SBS. After speaking to Ven Aggacitta, I decided to accept the appointment in the development department because I felt that my professional expertise was needed.

I shall now give an overall picture of the development work that has taken place from December of last year to the present time. This can be categorised under two areas: maintenance works and Phase 3 construction.

MAINTENANCE WORKS

1. *Sima* Pond

After successfully concretising the *sima* pond to prevent water seepage, we managed to get a rock landscape artisan-cum-contractor to put some finishing touches to it. For him, the project was a love of art that he happily executed despite the continual difficulty of obtaining workers to work up in SBS. Finally, he completed it at cost-minus,

joining the ranks of those who sponsored the project.

2. Baseline Assessment Works

Headed by Dr Soo Kian Sin, our geotechnical engineering consultant, a baseline assessment was carried out on 7 & 8 December 2002. He was assisted by Development Manager 1, Wai Seng Moh, and Field Assistant, Tan Hock Lam. Salient data, especially around steep slope areas and around buildings were collected and documented. Dangerous spots and areas that posed a potential safety hazard were identified, so that action could be taken to monitor, and if need be, to rectify and stabilise the situation. The main objective of this assessment is to ensure that the place is well maintained and safe from potential hazards. Works carried out under this included

- widening sections of the road at potential hazardous junctions
- constructing safety GI railings at a narrow bridge along the approach road to SBS
- identifying and stabilising trees that could disrupt power supply if they fell
- stabilising big boulders that could fall should there be any land movement
- constructing energy breakers in drains so as to prevent excessive erosion of the concrete.
- repairing weak or eroded slopes by trimming and grass turfing.

Owing to the lack of labour, the above works were carried out in stages, depending on the degree of urgency of a particular project. We are glad to report here that our own workforce was able to execute them. During this period, we also

marked out plumbing, electrical, intercom and earthing systems that are underground or covered by vegetation. This was done by inserting coloured flag-markers made of mild steel plate at appropriate intervals. We also marked our concrete roads at intervals of 15 metres. This demarcation will be essential for record, damage control and maintenance purposes.

3. Lightning Protection System

SBS is situated on hilly terrain in an area of high rainfall that is prone to frequent lightning strikes. The need to have a proper lightning protection system is therefore obvious. Ir Tan Ban Loong, an electrical engineer, volunteered his services to look into this problem. He devised a protection system covering five areas, namely,

- buildings and structures
- open spaces
- access road
- electrical system
- telephone/intercom lines.

• Building/Structural Protection System

This involves fixing copper strips at building ridges and earthing these strips. These were then looped to a common earthing system connected to copper electrodes embedded in marshy ground downhill, near a stream. We have completed this system and there seems to be a significant decrease in the ground resistivity (by about 50%).

• Open Space Lightning Protection System

It is proposed to erect special lightning conductors on 10-12-metre poles—one each at two open areas where lay devotees normally assemble for special functions: the Buddha Shrine and the Sangha Central Facilities near the *sima* pond. The latter spot is also the area where the Sangha members will gather for their communal activities.

• Access Road Lightning Protection System

The proposal is to request TNB to speed up the installation of an insulated cable surge protection system.

• Electrical and Telephone Line Protection System

We had earlier installed surge arresters at the distribution boards of four strategic buildings: Admin Office, Abbot's Office, Dhamma Workers' Quarters and the "White House" (just demolished to make way for Phase 3 construction). This system worked to some extent, although the arresters were frequently damaged and replaced. Sometimes our electrical equipment was damaged as well! However, it was more effective in arresting the lightning after the earthing loop system was improved. We hope to install better quality surge arresters to minimise the chances of damage to our electronic equipment.

PHASE 3 CONSTRUCTION *BUILDING DEVELOPMENT TEAM*

Architect Jade Saw

Structural Engineer Ir Tan Buck Soon

Geotechnical Engineer Dr Soo Kian Sin

Electrical Engineer Ir Tan Ban Loong

Quantity Surveyor Kee Swee Aun

Project Manager Ir Lim Tai Eng

PHASE 3 CONSTRUCTION

10 March 2003 was an auspicious day for Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary, for it marked the starting date for Phase 3 construction: a library, a publication and meeting room, a classroom and the Sangha Central Facilities. These buildings are only a stone's throw away from the Sima Hall, on higher terrain overlooking it.

Just as in Phases 1 & 2, our very capable team of honorary consultants, specialists in their own particular fields, is involved in the construction. Together, they have come up with designs that fit into the environment and are economical to build. One of the structures, the Sangha Central Facilities, has been designed such that it will be recessed into a hill slope, just to make it suit the surrounding.

The Management Committee awarded the contract to Tong Hup Engineering, who was also the contractor for Phase 2. At the time of writing, construction up to ground beam level for 3 buildings, i.e. classroom, library and Sangha Central Facilities has been completed. We should be seeing steel frames being erected for the classrooms and the library by the second week of June. A publication cum meeting room block will be built over the site of the "White House", which was demolished during the first week of June. The contractor is to complete the Sangha Central Facilities before Kathina Day on 26 October 2003.

A major problem in the initial stages of construction was the uncovering of big boulders in the excavation pits of the building foundations. Close coordination between the site staff and consultants resulted in engineering solutions that were creative and timely. This helped significantly in the management of the project.

For this project, the Field Assistant is the only person who maintains daily contact with the contractor. He plays an important (if not the most important) part in maintaining both a high standard of quality control for the works produced, and a good safety standard for the workers, resident monks, staff and visitors to the sanctuary. SBS

Lim Tai Eng is an electrical engineer and project management consultant by profession. He is also Vice Chairman 2 of the Management Committee. At the suggestion of Ven Aggacitta, the MC has given him the job of overseeing the physical development of the sanctuary in general, and managing Phase 3 construction in particular. A dedicated and able Project Manager (PM), he can be seen almost weekly on site, coming all the way from Kangar, Perlis, to ensure that the project is being smoothly implemented. Members of the Building Development Team can testify to his efficiency through his weekly site reports sent by email. Ven Aggacitta has also frequently expressed his gratitude to him for taking over the PM post as he can now concentrate more on his monk duties.

The **Public Relations Manager** of the **Management Committee** shows you around her department.

GREETINGS FROM THE PR DEPARTMENT

By Lim Lay Hoon

Warmest greetings from SBS! Sounds familiar? If so, chances are the Public Relations Manager of SBS has dropped you a line before.

SBS has received very encouraging national interest and support from Buddhist individuals and organisations since it was conceived. With such a wide network of support, the evolution of the Public Relations sub-committee as an integral part of the SBS Management Committee is only a natural phenomena.

This department plays a vital role in building mutually beneficial relationships between SBS and its supporters, as well as other Buddhist devotees. It does so by establishing effective communication, creating awareness of the facilities, resources, services and programs at SBS and by building goodwill.

Heading this sub-committee is the Public Relations Manager whose function is to manage the activities of five sections—Programmes, Publications, Communications, Web Site and State Representatives. A *bhikkhu*, acting as the Public Relations Adviser, advises on Sangha-related actvities.

Programmes

Whenever there is a major event in SBS, the Head of Programmes is kept busy mobilising and coordinating a team of volunteers to ensure the successful planning and smooth running of the event. Thus far, this section can be credited with the organisation of the following memorable events:

- Family Day (25 June 2000)
- Ground Breaking Ceremony (27 October 2000)
- Demarcation and Declaration of Sasanarakkha Sima Ceremony (30 June & 1 July 2001)
- Gilding of the Buddha Image (20 October 2002)
- Consecration of the 4 Great Kings Shrine (16 March 2003)
- Kathina Ceremony 2001 & 2002

The experience of organising all the events has been as unique as the events themselves. The success of all the events is the result of the selfless service of volunteers, as well as the overwhelming support of participating devotees from all corners of the country. Nothing is more gratifying than to witness the coming together of the Buddhist fraternity, working and participating harmoniously and joyously in a meaningful event.

Many Buddhists from different parts of the country have put SBS on their list of Buddhist landmarks. Many groups, big and small, have come to spend a weekend doing voluntary service or just to visit, or to do *dana* and listen to a Dhamma talk. Sometimes there are also individuals who drop into SBS if they happen to be passing by Taiping.

Once, we received a call from such a visitor. "Hello, can you please give me directions to SBS? I'm from K.L and am now in Taiping. I've seen pictures of SBS in your newsletter and I wish to go there to meditate while I'm here." It was too bad that it was a Sunday. The SBS office was closed and the monastics were at Taiping Insight Meditation Society for *dana*. As a result his wish to visit SBS was not fulfilled. To avoid such disappointment, we would like to advise visitors to make prior arrangements by calling the SBS office in advance.

Two short meditation retreats have so far been organised at SBS. Both retreats were featured in past issues of this newsletter. The outcome is: we've received a number of enquiries from a few individuals who wanted to come to SBS for their personal retreats. Much as we would like to encourage such a noble intention we had to turn down the requests. SBS does not have the necessary facilities for meditation retreats for the laity. The past two retreats were organised as a gesture of appreciation and gratitude for SBS helpers and supporters who had to contend with makeshift facilities. Priority now is to complete the construction of facilities for the Sangha. As far as lay people are concerned, SBS offers accom-

FOCUS human resource section

sbsmail@yahoogroups.com

modation for a limited number of male volunteer Dhamma workers who come to offer their services by doing odd jobs for short stints.

Publications

This is the creative nerve centre of the PR team that is responsible for processing, producing and presenting news and information related to SBS which reach readers of SASANARAKKHA, HUFA and the events calendar "Unfoldment" in the SBS website.

SASANARAKKHA is the official English newsletter of SBS that is published twice a year. The Chinese edition of SASANARAKKHA is HUFA. They bring you up to date information of happenings in SBS as well as up and coming activities. You are now reading the eighth issue of the English newsletter. The Chinese newsletter began publication a bit later, and we are hoping that the third issue can come out together with this one that you are reading.

This publications section works closely with the webmaster to update you regularly on activities in SBS through the events calendar, "Unfoldment".

It has also published two books: *Kathina Then and Now* and *Discourse on Atanatiya Protection*, both translated into Chinese, for free distribution.

This dedicated team not only plays the important role of providing the opportunity for many people to share in the experience of the events and activities at SBS from their armchairs but it is also leaving behind a dhamma legacy for posterity.

Web Site

At our website <http://www.sasanarakkha> you are kept abreast of the happenings in SBS mainly through the events calender "Unfoldment", a record of selected activities that are significant or meaningful. Transcripts of Dhamma talks given by SBS monastics are part of this events calendar. In the words of Ven Aggacitta, "The Sunday Dhamma talks could be very useful and applicable to daily life. In fact, the monastics are taking material from *suttas* that show us the way to lead a Buddhist life."

Communications

The work of the PR sub-committee has been made more efficient, thanks to the existence of the communications department which is 'wired' to the state representatives, as well as to the SBS mailing group <sbsmail@yahoogroups.com>. Its function is to relay and disseminate information. If you are interested in receiving announcements on SBS activities, we cordially invite you to join the group. Just log on to the site and register. Information is disseminated mainly via the Internet.

State Representatives

To reach out to Buddhist devotees throughout the country, there is a network of SBS representatives for every state in the country to

- disseminate information related to SBS to the various Buddhist organisations
- distribute SBS newsletters and other publications to the various Buddhist organisations and groups
- assist in recruiting prospective trainees for SBS
- attend to the immediate needs of SBS monks when they travel to these states
- publicise major events to devotees in their areas who are interested in attending major events in SBS such as Kathina, as well as liaise with monks and devotees who are attending the event.

State representatives play an invaluable role by being the link between SBS and Buddhists in other states.

Damage control is part and parcel of the PR job. We occasionally meet with members of the public who have misconceptions about SBS. I have personally met with someone who had the idea that SBS accepts only university graduates as trainee monks. We promptly put him right by giving him a copy of the SBS prospectus. Matters relating to Sangha affairs are handled by Public Relations Adviser, Ven Kumara.

Bouquets and brickbats, the PR team takes them all in their stride. Our door is always open to ideas and members. So, welcome and see you all at SBS! SBS

HOBBY

Looking for a worthwhile hobby? Great!
Join the **SBS Publication Team.**
We need: **EDITORS** and **PROOFREADERS.**
You can help in two stages of editing.

Content editing

- You shall improve upon the content of articles.
- We need discerning minds. Strong grasp of English is *not* required here.
- Being familiar with and active in SBS happenings is important.
- Would be an advantage if you live in or around Taiping.

Language editing and proofreading

- You shall improve upon the language of articles.
- We need people with a strong grasp of English and keen eyes for errors in typography and layout.

If you don't live anywhere near Taiping, you would need to have email access to make our communication easier. Contact us at **sbsmail@pd.jaring.my** if you're interested.

SBS unfoldment

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.

02 Jan Ven Shi Khong Xing and Ven Shi Jizhe, two nuns residing in Taiping, and Ven Kai Xin from Santavana Centre, Sabah, pay SBS a visit.

07 Jan David Chang donates 10 units of power tools plus accessories for SBS workshop to Ven Aggacitta in Buddhist Wisdom Centre, PJ.

09 Jan SBS site staff make good use of David's power tools to cut grooves into the concrete joints in the *sima* pond. The grooves are to be filled with rubberised sealants to ensure that the pond will be as waterproof as possible.

Choo Siew Hwa's Honda C-70 arrives in SBS after one of our supporters, Ah Thai of Hock Soon Motors, had it overhauled. Siew Hwa happily donated her disused bike that had been kept for months in Buddhist Wisdom Centre, PJ, to SBS as soon as she heard of our need for it.

11 Jan Edwin Lim visits with his wife Shirleen. After studying the borer holes at the ceiling of the Sima Hall, he proposes to rectify it with aluminium strip ceiling. He will confirm, by June 2003, whether or not he will be able to sponsor the project.

13 Jan Our Negri Sembilan state representative, Stanley Chen, and some members of Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia (Kajang Branch) visit while driving Ven Kumara back to SBS from their premises.

14 Jan David Chang's gift of DIY plastic drawers for the power tools arrives.

20 Jan Ven Aggacitta gives an interview to Ms. Ong Ju Lin, a journalist from a local English daily, *The Star*. She has been given the assignment of writing a feature article on Buddhist monastics in Malaysia.

23 Jan Site workers use a Lavor Hydro Cleaner donated by David Chang to clean the *sima* pond bed before filling the pond with water to test whether the sealants have been successfully applied.

A Bakita Air Compressor, another gift from David Chang, arrives.

25 Jan Our Finance Manager 1, Eng Lai Hiang, donates a Canon Laser Printer LBP 810 to replace our HP Laserjet 1200 printer that was short-circuited by an intruding gecko on 3 January 2003.

26 Jan The Lunar Horse seems to be saying goodbye with a shower of gifts. The latest donation comes from Lim Ewe Seng who brings a wooden gong about 4 feet high and 1 foot in diameter. The gong was carved out of *cempedak* trunk by him. Can we hope that the Ram will make its entry with more gifts?

01 Feb It is the first day of the lunar year and the monastics are in TIMS for *dana*. Ven Aggacitta continues with his sermon on blessings from the *Mangala Sutta* with a cross-reference to the *Tamotama Sutta (AN 4.85)*.

After the *Uposatha* ceremony in Sasanarakkha Sima, Ven Aggacitta gives a talk to the monastics on the Buddha's concern for monks to behave with mutual respect for one another according to seniority.

02 Feb This is the second day of the lunar year and *dana* is again at TIMS. The talk for today is given by Ven Kumara who continues with the *Mangala Sutta* by expounding 4 more blessings.

04 Feb Dr Soo Kian Sin walks up SBS to check on the work done on his recommendations for the baseline assessment of the buildings and infrastructure in the Sanctuary.

08 Feb Dr Soo is here again to give construction details for safety curbs and footings of a proposed granite slab outdoor table.

09 Feb Ooi Teow Keat donates hierarchical locks for the open-air shrine cupboards.

13 Feb Ajahn Tik and Phra Sunthorn pay us a visit in the afternoon.

Ven Varadhammo (who has 12 *vassas* and is among the very few Malaysian Indian monks) and Ven Guttapala (who has 6 *vassas* and has stayed here during the last *vassa*) arrive today for a short stay.

15 Feb Ven Kumara conducts a MS Word Workshop for SBSMC members and friends in the computer lab of Hua Lian Primary School 2. The workshop is specifically aimed at familiarising MC members with basic and intermediate skills in formatting and reviewing MS Word documents. This will hopefully facilitate the MC members' communication by e-conferencing, especially on the subject of drafting a Manual of Operating Procedures for the various sections of the MC.

17 Feb Ven Dhammasiri Mahathera, Ven Vinita Thera (both from Sri Lanka) and Ven Sujivo (Malaysian) visit us. They have a discussion with Ven Aggacitta and are taken on a tour of SBS.

19 Feb SBS supporter and wireman Ah Heng brings Ong Mei Ni, a sales/project engineer of Tokai Sdn Bhd, here to give advice on the lightning

Yangshengong Therapy

By Xiufei

***Qigong* as a treatment for the physical ills of the body is well known. *Sifu* Chow and his disciples apply *qigong* therapy on the *qi* in SBS.**

All the 'performers'on the stage were dressed in identical attire. Some were young while others were not so young, but all were undoubtedly fit. They went through their routine, on the stage, in silent concentration for a full forty-five minutes. The main actor was positioned in the centre while the supporting cast formed a circle around him. The whole group, in graceful unison, with eyes closed, raised and lowered their arms in continuous movements. A dance without music? A mime? Exorcist rites? Wrong!

The stage was the open deck of the Buddha Shrine; the cast were the senior members of the Yangshengong Centre of Damansara Utama in Petaling Jaya and the main actor, none other than Master SC Chow, *sifu* and founder of the centre. Yangshengong is a form of *qigong*, the practice of which helps to nurture good physical health. Master Chow himself is a well-known healer using *qi* therapy, specialising in back problems.

About a year ago, Master Chow paid his first visit to SBS together with a group of his disciples. He found the *qi* in SBS strong, but dispersed. So he made a promise to his *qigong* disciple, Ven Aggacitta, that he would come back with his senior disciples to centralise the *qi*.

Having arrived early that morning, they decided to work on the *qi* in three focal areas: the Open Deck of the Buddha Shrine, the Sima Hall and the car park area outside the Abbot's Office.

The Buddha Shrine was their first target and they spent a good 45 minutes working on the *qi* there. During the last few minutes of the session the *sifu* went through *qigong* motions of 'plucking' curative herbs from the air around and 'transplanting' them on the open deck. We were told that the surrounding *qi* now has a therapeutic quality and thus a positive effect on people meditating there. Is it my imagination or was there added spring in my steps as we went down to the Sima Hall?

The nature of the area being such, the mud in the pond and its dampness had caused a concentration of *yin qi*, which could bring health problems to people spending time there. This time, Ven Aggacitta sat in meditation facing the Buddha image while the *sifu* sat behind him. The rest of the group sat in a circle around, lining the walls of the hall. It took another 45 minutes of *qigong* for the group to balance the surrounding *qi*. Goodbye to the aches and pains caused by the damp *qi*.

The last stop was the area near the Abbot's Office, this area being a gathering place for visitors and often a focus of activity. The group again formed a ring, this time in the car park below the Abbot's Office. It only took them 15 minutes to deal with the *qi* here.

Thank you, Master Chow and Yangshengong. SBS

protection for existing structures as well as future buildings in Phase 3 development.

21 Feb The monastics are invited for house *pindapata* at Kuan Yuen Pen's house on the occasion of the death of her father-in law. She is a member of the SBS *dana* team.

23 Feb David Chang donates a battery charger and a chain saw to us. He also brings some plants donated by Eng Lai Hiang. Edwin and Shirleen donate some stationery items.

Master SC Chow, *sifu* of the Yangshengong Centre in PJ, arrives early in the morning with eight of his senior members to centralise the *qi* in SBS.

26 Feb The monastics go to SBSMC Development Manager 1 Wai Seng Moh's house to recite *Bojjhanga Sutta* for his wife, Jessica, who is a member of the SBS *dana* team. She has just been discharged from hospital after treatment for a head injury inflicted by a snatch thief.

Heavy rain and thunderstorm blow up the surge protector at the Dhamma Workers' Quarters and damage the auto gate mechanism.

27 Feb David Chang & friends donate a hedge trimmer, jump-start cable and clips, and G-clamps for SBS.

28 Feb A client-consultants meeting for Phase 3 project is held in Satyaloka Centre, KL. Representatives of SBSMC ex-co members and the Building Development Team decide to award the tender to Tong Hup Engineering Sdn Bhd.

01 Mar Kuan Kow Hor of Singapore is here to study the electrical, water, and sanitary systems in SBS so that he can help monasteries in Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

06 Mar Vincent Low of the Kuala Lumpur office of Thomas & Betts Asia (S) Pte Ltd, Ong Mei Ni and Joanne Gan of Tokai Engineering (M) Sdn Bhd come to do earth conductivity tests. They intend to present a proposal for a total lightning protection system applicable to SBS.

10 Mar Work on Phase 3 construction begins today with the pegging out of the construction site.

11 Mar Ven Rakkhita Thera, a Sri Lankan monk, comes for a short stay.

14 Mar Ven Cattamalo and Ven Samyamo arrive for the Consecration Ceremony of the Four Great Kings Shrine.

15 Mar Ven Thitayañño, an Indonesian monk on the way home from Myanmar through Thailand, comes to stay for a few weeks.

16 Mar

It's the day for the Consecration Ceremony of the Four Great Kings Shrine in SBS.

19 Mar Lim Poh Eng brings a number of table phones that were earlier donated to us by Computronix Enterprise.

21 Mar Tong Hup Engineering, the contractor for Phase 3 construction, begins work proper by setting out the boundaries of the proposed buildings.

22 Mar Ven Kumara is invited to Hua Lian Independent, Taiping, where he speaks on *"Kamma"* to the members of the Buddhist Society of the secondary school.

SBS monastics give moral support to the Saturday evening meditation session in TIMS by their participation. The numbers coming for the regular session seem to be dwindling.

23 Mar The SBSMC holds its 12th monthly meeting in TIMS.

27 Mar Lightning strikes again during a heavy thunderstorm in the afternoon, damaging 4 units of search arrestors, our auto-gate and Ven Aggacitta's PC card modem.

29 Mar Beginning from today and stretching up to the rest of the week, the monastics temporarily go for *pindapata* at the Nine Emperor Gods Temple to avoid the *Cheng Beng* crowds at the *Hokkien* Cemetery.

David Chang and his wife deliver a portable welding set, four rechargeable power searchlights and 2 power drills, which have been sponsored by them and their friends.

31 Mar Three UKM students on holiday offer their voluntary service by wrapping books in the library at the Abbot's Office.

02 Apr Siah Chee Way, representative of SBS in Perth, is here for a short stay. He brings his electrical engineering expertise for consultation in Phase 3 construction.

04 Apr Ven Tejadhamma arrives for a 3-day stay.

08 Apr Ven Kumara goes to Aulong to offer counselling to Mr. Ooi, father-in-law of Yeoh Kah Kheng's cousin. He is paralysed after having suffered a second stroke and is depressed.

10 Apr David Chew Cheow Beng, SBS representative for Teluk Intan, visits with his wife and daughter.

12 Apr SBS Building Development Team members are here for a site visit. Tan Buck Soon (C&S engineer), BL Tan (M&E engineer) and Kee Swee Aun (QS) come all the way from the Klang Valley to look into Phase 3 construction. They have discussions with Ng Kian Chong (SBSMC2 Chair), Siah Chee Way (M&E adviser), Lim Tai Eng (Project Manager), Wai Seng Moh (Development Manager 1) and Tan Hock Lam (Field Assistant), together with three waterproofing specialists.

14 Apr Dr Soo Kian Sin is here to look into the progress of Phase 3 construction.

15 Apr Ven Aggacitta's former schoolmate, Tan Thean Jin, brings Gary Lau and friends to discuss the scope and management of a proposed

The HR Section organises a training session for the members of the Management Committee

NO TOWKAY, NO COOLIE, ONLY ONE HAPPY FAMILY

by Doreen Lim

What makes one a good employer or employee? As an employer, have you wondered why certain staff members were performing below their abilities? As an employee, did you ever feel like not wanting to go to the office? Or did you just adopt a 'could-not-care-less' attitude towards your seniors and your work?

In recognising the importance of being a good employer, the SBS Management Committee invited Ms Kong Poey Leng, an HR expert, to conduct a workshop for its members. Ms Kong is the Regional HR Manager of the Premier Automotive Group as well as a practising Buddhist well known to the Buddhist fraternity of KL and PJ. We were very fortunate to have her share with us her knowledge of and wide experience in human resource management.

The session was held in TIMS at 2.30pm on Saturday, 19 April 2003. Participants were members of the SBSMC (12) and TIMS General Committee (2), and 2 visitors from the Buddhist Society Ipoh.

Ms Kong shared with us her knowledge on

- how to be good employers
- how to continually motivate employees
- time management

She explained the 5 sets of basic human needs according to Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (1939-1943): i.e. physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation (in that order of priority). Unlike inhabitants of developed countries of the West such as Switzerland, UK, etc., where self-actualisation is their main concern, generally Malaysians fall into the first and second levels of Maslow's theory, i.e. physiological and safety, which address basic needs like hunger, thirst, sleep, and protection from danger and deprivation.

How a manager perceives the needs of his staff and motivates them is another relevant HR skill. Ms Kong pointed out that according to a manager's perception, the top 10 priorities of employees are salary, bonus, vacation, retirement, benefits and perks, interesting work, involvement in decision making, feedback, training, and respect. However, employees perceive differently: they place interesting work, not salary, at the top of the list! These are followed by involvement in decision making, feedback, training, respect, salary, bonus, vacation, retirement, and other benefits and perks.

Participants were divided into 3 groups to brainstorm and list what they thought were their biggest time wasters. The handouts on *Time Savers* and *Biggest Time Wasters* are useful reference material on good time management, which many are poor at. We learnt that a successful manager is one who knows how to prioritise his tasks, stays focussed, reviews expectations of management and staff, and provides creative alternatives.

All participants agreed that they had benefited from the session. Although it was supposed to end at 5.30pm in time for Ms Kong to keep another appointment, she was not able to leave until nearly 6.00pm. I'm sure the session could have stretched into the night, as there was never a dull moment.

Sadhu, Ms Kong for the invaluable sharing and also for showing us the way to better employer-employee relationship. We know you have a busy work schedule but we are eagerly looking forward to your next session. SBS

Buddhist Institute flanked by a multi-storey columbarium to be built in Georgetown, Penang. The columbarium will be named "House of Remembrance".

Ang Poh Heang and Lim Lay Hoon donate a megaphone (loudhailer) for use on major occasions in SBS.

19 Apr Some *yogis* from PJ visit SBS in the morning and enquire about sponsorship for Kathina 2004 and 2005. Ven Aggacitta informs them that the standing policy of SBSMC is to award Kathina sponsorship to registered organisations or to informal groups rather than to individuals.

Regional HR Manager of a multinational company, Ms Kong Poey Leng, conducts a sharing session with SBSMC members on "How to be a Good Employer & How to Motivate Employees" from 2.40pm to 5.40pm.

Ven Aggacitta conducts a meditation class for beginners in TIMS tonight. In an attempt to revive the dwindling response to Saturday night meditation sessions, he will continue to be present at each session whenever possible.

20 Apr SBSMC2 holds its 13th monthly meeting.

21 Apr At the invitation of Ven Aggacitta, Hor Kwei Loon comes to SBS to give a presentation of his proposal for the scope and management of the proposed Buddhist Institute flanked and financed by the House of Remembrance (HOR). The members of SBSMC who attend are impressed by the comprehensiveness, farsightedness and professionalism of his proposal. Ven Aggacitta calls Gary Lau immediately to introduce HOR.

23 Apr A guru of the Ananda Marga Yoga Society, Acarya Lalitashwananda, comes to teach the monks some yoga postures that are beneficial to celibates.

Hor Kwei Loon calls to say that Gary Lau and friends were impressed with and excited over his presentation, which covered wide areas of systematic Buddhist education, training, and propagation strategies. They gladly accepted his proposal, but requested the addition of one essential item—bereavement services.

27 Apr On the invitation of the Buddhist Society of Ipoh, Ven Aggacitta gives a talk entitled "Worthy Wishes, Worthy Deeds".

03 May Acarya Laliteshananda comes again to conduct his second yoga lesson for the monks.

08 May Ven Aggacitta, together with the other monastics, goes to Penang. Bhante gives a talk in Mahindarama Temple as part of YBAM's 2003 National *Sanghikadana* programme. The topic is "*Pattakamma Sutta*: Worthy Wishes, Worthy Deeds".

14 May It is Wesak Eve. TIMS holds a candle lighting ceremony in SBS.

15 May It is Wesak Day today. There is a special *dana* in TIMS and Ven Kumara delivers the Dhamma talk.

17 May Hor Kwei Loon comes to discuss with Ven Aggacitta and some of the SBSMC members on an attractive way to raise funds for Buddhist organisations and fascinating Buddhist projects he will be spearheading in Penang.

Sayadaw U Candima from Mahasi Sasana Yeiktha (Yangon, Myanmar) and 15 devotees from Lunas Hermitage and Kuala Kurau Meditation Centre come for a visit.

22 May One of our general workers, Kumar, brings his wife to see Ven Aggacitta. She is suffering from tuberculosis and is one and a half months pregnant. *Bhante* chants some parittas for her.

25 May SBSMC has its 14th meeting.

27 May Twenty mattresses sponsored by a group of Malaysian devotees arrive today.

30 May Chan See Fatt from Ipoh comes to try out life as a postulant. He is interested to become a monk but does not have his parents' consent. Since he can neither speak English nor *Hokkien*, Ven Aggacitta suggests that it may be better for him to go to Nibbanarama in Kajang, where Mandarin is the main medium of instruction. SBS

TIMS and SBS celebrate Wesak with a candle lighting procession which wound its way up the SBS hill at dusk on Wesak Eve.

Candles in a Different Light

By Lim Lay Poh

The experience of participating in this year's Wesak was truly memorable. When I was asked if I would join other members of the Wesak organising Committee to place 3000 candles along the road leading to SBS to prepare for the evening's lamp lighting ceremony, I jumped at the chance.

We arrived at the SBS foothill at 2pm. Eager to complete our task, our group, comprising eager children and adults, made our way briskly to the starting point for the candles. We armed ourselves with a cache of candles each with which to line both sides of the road. It was more difficult than I had thought, as the candles, moulded in little glass receptacles, would often refuse to stay put but insist on sliding down the slope. Amazingly, we did not break more than what we did.

It was exhausting to bend and straighten after every few steps to position the candles while climbing the very steep uphill road. And we had to balance our armfuls of fragile candles at the same time! We placed candles about 2 feet apart. Luckily it was a cloudy day. We made it in good time but not without some minor hitches.

It was 7pm by then, and time for the ceremony to begin. A large crowd had begun gathering at the starting point, with more still on the way. The monastics came down at 7.45pm and Ven Aggacitta started off the ceremony by lighting the first candle. It was not easy trying to hold back such an eager crowd. I felt that to some it was almost a competition to light as many candles as possible. No wonder there were some who did not get any opportunity to light a single candle! I managed to light just a few and felt joy in taking part in the event.

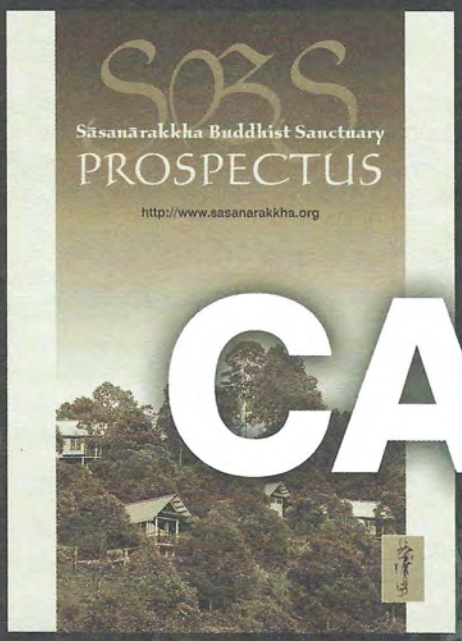
When we got to the top, the fragrance of citronella from some 1500 yellow candles that had been lighted there filled the night air, and the glow from the candles made the whole place look so magical. The view was truly magnificent from there. Finding myself a seat at the back of the deck before it was filled up, I sat there contemplating the whole event. In spite of the crowd, I felt peace up there, looking at the Buddha bathed in candlelight. It looked like it was made of porcelain although it was gilded.

At 8pm, light feathery wisps of rain fell for about ten minutes, as though in a gesture of approval and blessing from the *devas*. During the chanting just before the short Dhamma talk, echoes picked up the chants and brought them back to the open deck. It felt so ethereal, as though a group of unseen beings were joining in the chanting.

When Ven Aggacitta spoke about celestial flowers and sandalwood powder from heaven showering on our Lord Buddha at his *parinibbana*, I compared this to the gentle drizzle, the fragrance of citronella and the echoing chants of the evening. I had a bit of a struggle though with the guided *metta* meditation session led by Ven Aggacitta, as the sound system was not loud enough in the open space, but I was sure that the loving-kindness radiated by everyone benefited all beings.

After the ceremony, I was among the last to make our way down on foot. It was exhilarating walking through the cemetery grounds in the night along a path brightly lit by oil lamps! A beautiful sight awaited us at the end of this path, just where it joined the main road: someone had creatively spelled out the letters 'SBS' with oil lamps. SBS

DON'T MISS THE CALLING!



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Development Manager 2 (HR) Ms Doreen Lim T. 04-8277118 F. 04-8277228 E. sukhihotu@pd.jaring.my

Voices from Within SBS Workers share their thoughts

Tan Hock Lam, our Field Assistant, finds familiar work in totally different surroundings.

From Multinationals to a Monastery

I have been working in SBS for more than six months now and I find the working conditions here very conducive. The people here are very helpful and it is a great pleasure working with them.

I got to know that SBS was looking for a field assistant through some friends and here I am, in a monastery. Although I have worked for many different employers before, from multinationals to local companies, this is the first time I've worked in a monastery.

My work here is essentially what I have been doing before, but learning about the day to day life in a monastery is something totally new to me. I'm learning. SBS

Chi Hui Fong, our Administrative Assistant, and pioneer member of the SBS office staff, commenced work in a little corner in TIMS' premises. Her office was later shifted up to SBS.

A Reward for Good Deeds

When I was asked to write something for the newsletter as a member of the SBS staff, I thought of a letter that I had written to a friend which best expresses my thoughts and feelings.

Dear Sis Yoke Foong,

I am sure you remember the first time you came to visit me in Taiping. Remember the small white house up in SBS surrounded by durian trees? I can still recall our sitting together beside the small pond and your face beaming with joy.

Now, my office has shifted up here and I have the privilege to enjoy the fresh air, seclusion and beautiful scenery! Don't you think that people who have the chance to work here must have done some good deeds in their previous lives? Visitors who visit SBS often say the same thing. Guess what? There have been times when some pop-in visitors thought that this was a resort and they asked if they could rent a "*chalet*" here!

Another great thing about working up here is that we have the chance to ask and discuss the Dhamma with the Abbot whenever we have doubts. He is never too busy to share his knowledge despite his many duties and tight schedule. Association with the wise is one of the highest blessings indeed!

Currently I have four colleagues working with me. They are friendly and nice and the office is always full of laughter.

I'm busier up here than when I was down in the previous office. On the other hand, voluntary workers often drop by to help us whenever needed. They even provide us with nutritious and delicious home-cooked lunch every day. Bro Cheong, my immediate boss, always says that the food is prepared with a lot of *metta*!

May the blessings of the Triple Gem be with you and your family.

With metta,
Hui Fong SBS

SASANARAKKHA BUDDHIST SANCTUARY

KATHINA DAY

Sunday, 26 October 2003

AM	7.00	OFFERING KATHINA CLOTH TO SANGHA
	7.10	SPEECH BY KATHINA SPONSOR
	7.15	AWARDING KATHINA CLOTH TO QUALIFIED BHIKKHU
	7.25	SPEECH BY GUEST OF HONOUR
	7.35	SEWING KATHINA ROBE (MONKS ONLY)
		BREAKFAST FOR DEVOTEES
	8.00	PRESENTATION BY BUBS AND BFS
	9.00	OFFERING KATHINA ACCESSORIES*
	9.30	PRESENTATION: HELPING CHARITY TO HELP YOURSELF
	10.30	PINDAPATA
	11.00	DHAMMA TALK
	11.45	LUNCH
PM	1.00	BREAK
	2.00	CONTINUE SEWING KATHINA ROBE (MONKS ONLY)
	4.00	REFRESHMENT BREAK
	4.30	CONTINUE SEWING KATHINA ROBE (MONKS ONLY)
	7.00	SPREADING KATHINA

NOTE: THIS PROGRAMME IS TENTATIVE AND IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Let us come together once again in a united show of support for our Sangha

Contributions are most welcome. Please note that your contributions will be used to defray expenses during the *vassa* and Kathina Day. Any excess collected will be kept for supporting the SBS monastics and for the general maintenance of the sanctuary.

The Kathina Ceremony Organising Committee will be most happy to:

- provide you lunch on that day
- facilitate your hotel booking if you so require

Important note:

- To facilitate arrangements, please contact the SBS office at least two weeks before your arrival date (Tel: 05-8084429)
- Wear footwear without heels, preferably sneakers.
- Bring your own torchlights if you want to come up early to witness the offering of the *kathina* cloth.

**Kathina* accessories refer to allowable requisites, other than the *kathina* cloth, offered to the monks on Kathina Day, including potential requisites obtainable from monetary donations entrusted to their *kappiya-karakas*.

Organised by SBS Management Committee and sponsored by **Bandar Utama Buddhist Society (BUBS)** and **Buddhist Fellowship of Singapore (BFS).**

A devotee witnesses the consecration ceremony and shares with us her personal experience and thoughts on *paritta* chanting.

Who Says *Parittas* Don't Work?

By Su Leng

SBS had been on my "must visit" list of Theravada establishments since its inception. Somehow, I just seem to miss out on the opportunity to visit time and again. Who says opportunity knocks only once? It came knocking again when, together with a busload of other devotees from Penang, I made my way to SBS for the Consecration Ceremony of the Four Great Kings on 16 March 2003.

All my observations during the consecration ceremony prompted me to share with fellow Buddhists my humble experience of the efficacy of *paritta* chanting.

In my opinion, unlike fellow Buddhists in Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka, Buddhists in Malaysia generally do not place great emphasis on learning and reciting the *parittas*. I was one of those Buddhists who would rather omit the devotional and emotional side of Buddhism, holding strongly to the belief that Buddhism is a 'DIY' religion and I had reservations about the efficacy of *parittas*. To me, morality (*sila*) and wholesome deeds *(kusala kamma)* were the only protection a Buddhist needed...until my late father was on his deathbed.

The physicians had given up hope, and there was little else we could do except to pray for him. The *parittas* would have been handy but, unfortunately, I was not able to chant fluently. I felt very depressed and totally helpless. So, I invited Ven Suvanno, whom I deeply revere for his boundless compassion and *metta*, to chant at his bedside. He went to my father in the hospital although he was due to fly off to Myanmar within the next few hours.

I was very touched and amazed when my father, despite being declared unconscious, deaf (without hearing aid) and dependent on a life support system, immediately clasped his palms the minute Ven Suvanno came in. I could see the calm and peace permeating my father's whole being during the chanting. He refused to unclasp his palms even when Ven Suvanno had left the room. I could only attribute this to faith and familiarity, as my father did not understand Pali chanting although he had requested *bhikkhus* to chant for others before. He passed away peacefully a few days later.

The experience at my father's deathbed changed my perspective of the value of *parittas*. When afflicted with severe illness and in time of severe mental distress, devotional practices, especially *paritta* chanting, can help bring solace to the sick and their caregivers. It arouses confidence, reverence and deep devotion. Confidence dispels fear and worries, giving rise to a chain of positive emotions such as peace, joy and contentment. This, in turn, brings about general well-being. All of us know that many modern illnesses are psychosomatic in nature, i.e. caused by negative mental states such as stress, anxiety and depression. Holistic healing begins with the mind, and this has been medically well documented.

It is a well known fact amongst Buddhists that the Buddha recited and taught his disciples to recite the Dhamma to help relieve sufferings arising from illness and calamities. On one occasion, he taught Angulimala a *paritta* that helped a pregnant woman through a difficult delivery.

However, we should bear in mind what Ven Nagasena (believed to be an *arahant*) said to King Milinda when asked if *parittas* worked for everyone:

> *Only to some, not all. There are three reasons for the failure of parittas: the obstruction due to past kamma, that caused by present defilement and obstruction caused by lack of confidence. That which is a protection loses its power through their own blemishes.*
>
> ***The Debate of King Milinda*** by Bhikkhu Pesala

The final analysis is this: Parittas are beneficial only when certain conditions are fulfilled. May all have right views and right understanding. SBS

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

The *Atanatiya Paritta* forms only part of the *Atanatiya Sutta* and comprises 51 verses. These verses revere the seven Buddhas, and describe each of the Great Kings, their kingdoms and their subjects' reverence for the Lord Gotama Buddha. All Buddhists can freely recite the *Atanatiya Paritta* at any time for their protection from evil spirits.

On the other hand, the complete *Atanatiya Sutta* comprises these 51 verses as well as an invocation to the *yakkha* generals to punish any evil spirit who stubbornly continues to harass a Buddhist. The complete *sutta* should only be recited by experienced members of the Sangha.

After the discourse, the members of the Sangha recite practically the whole *Atanatiya Sutta* in Pali. A brass gong is then sounded and all devotees present join in the recitation of the *Atanatiya Paritta*.

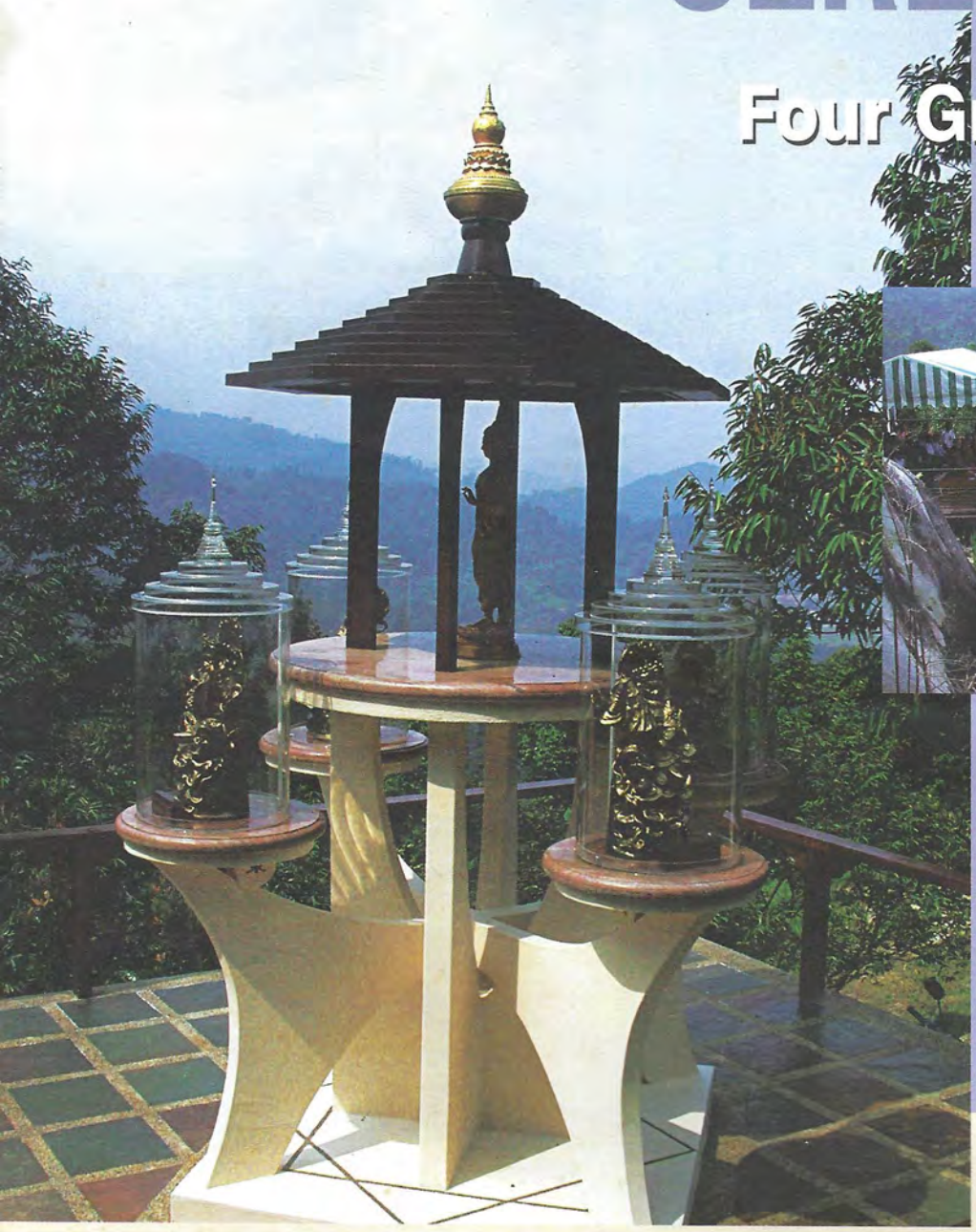
At 11.45am, everyone gets under the canopies out of the sun to have their lunch. The crowd is larger than expected, easily numbering more than 300 people. This includes a busload from Perlis, two busloads from Penang, a van-load from Alor Setar as well as those who have driven from Alor Setar, Penang, KL and Ipoh in their own cars. Many locals have also turned up.

Some devotees are seen making their way down to the foothill by 1.00pm while others queue up for the exciting downhill drive on a 4WD. Some of the out-of-town visitors are taken on a tour of SBS.

The usual quiet and peaceful ambience of SBS is restored by 2.00pm. SBS

CONSECRATION CEREMONY

Four Great Kings Shrine



An elegant shrine to honour the **Great Kings** is set up next to the Buddha Shrine and devotees learn of the usefulness of the *Atanatiya Paritta* in keeping away evil spirits.

by Looi Sow Fei

Why is the rain being perverse today of all days? It has been raining in the afternoons off and on during this period but always well after 2.00pm. But today, 16 March 2003, the infamous Taiping rain greets the early dawn, descending as heavy rain on this wettest of all Malaysian towns.

The reason eventually unfolds as, by 7.00am, only a slight drizzle remains. This is the appointed time for the convoy of 4WDs to begin ferrying passengers up for today's ceremony. For the rest of the morning, the weather at SBS is cool, as the sun hides discreetly behind thick clouds until when the ceremony is almost over. Divine intervention?

The *devas* have been kind to cool down the place with the early morning shower. So, the throngs of devotees do not have to endure the sun while lining up for the alms round at 9.30am and sitting on the grassy slopes around the Deva Shrine to listen to the Dhamma talk.

Booklets on the *Discourse on Atanatiya Protection* in English and Chinese are given out to all present as Ven Aggacitta prepares to explain the *Atanatiya Sutta*. While many of us are familiar with *parittas* such as *Metta Sutta, Ratana Sutta and Mangala Sutta*, few of us are familiar with *Atanatiya Sutta*.

In his talk, Ven Aggacitta explains that the Four Great Kings take their place in Theravada cosmology as rulers of the four quarters of the lowest *deva* realm. They are also known as the Guardian Kings because they undertook to protect the *Bodhisatta* when he was conceived in Queen Maya's womb.

The Kings offered the *Atanatiya Paritta* to the Buddha to be used by *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*, as well as lay disciples for their protection and comfortable living with respect to malicious spirits. Any evil spirit who disturbed a *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhuni* or lay disciple who had mastered the *paritta* verses of the *Atanatiya Sutta* would be punished.

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