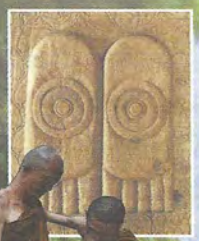
Issue 1 • January 2004

Sāsanārakkha Newszine

News and views from Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary, a special project of Taiping Meditation Society



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Winged Seeds to be Dispersed

by Tan Joo Lan

"As from a heap of flowers many a garland is made..." Thus, from a proliferation of seeds many an upright tree will grow.

An unusual natural phenomenon took place just before the start of the Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP). All who saw it were agog with wonder. It seemed as if the energy generated by the preparations for IMP had sparked off some cosmic energy, igniting the branches of a towering tree growing on the slope below the Abbot's Office. Standing upright, head and shoulders above the other trees surrounding it and unobstructed by surrounding foliage, it was illuminated by a blaze of flaming red bracts. There were myriads of the red bracts in clusters of four waiting to take wing, carrying with them a crop of seeds to be dispersed by the wind.

On 25 November 2003, the Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) Sangha began nurturing its own seeds. Nine participants of IMP, ages ranging from 16 to 49 years, registered for the programme. They included students, a leisure industry executive, a businessman, and a finance executive. All had

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EDITORIAL

We Are Grown Up Now

Welcome to the first issue of Sasanarakkha Newszine. We've grown, almost unrecognisable from the toddler taking its first tottering steps in April 2000. It was the custom for a scholar in China in the olden days to take on a different name to mark each stage of his growth or achievement in life.

We have been bringing you more than just news. It's now enriched with dhamma talks, quotes from the scriptures, and articles on topics pertaining to Buddhism in general, and particularly to the Buddhist scene in Malaysia. Hence it's high time we take on a different name, Newszine.

Two historic events mark the second half of this year — our first *sāmaṇera* (novice) ordination and the Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP) held from 25 November to 9 December. *Kathina* (a ceremony where cloth for making robes is offered to the Sangha) is another important event. They have all been documented for you.

In this inaugural issue, "Attempting to Deworm Theravada" highlights the need to purge *Theravāda* ("Doctrine of the Elders" — Gotama Buddha's teachings preserved in the Pali language) of the ills that are life-threatening. "Relaxation and Realisation" is more than just about a retreat in SBS — it is a skilfully crafted course in *vipassanā* (Insight) meditation for beginners. "Not so Enviable After All" reminds us not to lose sight of the essence of Buddhism, the original teachings of the Buddha.

Besides bringing you news and views of what has taken place, we also would like to draw your attention to an event that is just around the corner. This is the second IMP, scheduled for March 2004: a must for those with a yen for monkhood but are still hesitant to take the first step.

Celebrate with us our "Coming of Age"!

WE'VE GOT MAIL

Dear Ven Aggacitta

This note is just to let you know how much I appreciate the way you led the transfer of merits to my late "4th aunt" at yesterday's *dāna* (food offering). This is the first time I have seen it done this way, with the name of the deceased mentioned several times. I felt touched and humbled by the kind and gentle way the dedication was done by you, the *bhikkhus* (monks) and the laity.

My aunt's eldest daughter, Anna had only done dana once before. She had joined in the dana to mark the 7th day after my mom's death back in 1983 at the Kuala Kangsar Road Siamese temple in Ipoh. Back then, both of us as well as the rest of the family didn't know the Dhamma and the significance of dana. We just did what we were told to do.

Anna also did what I told her to do at yesterday's dana, but the difference was the generous support from all present in this dedication to her mom. I am sure this must have affected her in a positive manner and my deceased aunt as well. Both of them are more into *pai ang kong* (deity-worship). I hope the Dhamma seeds took root for them yesterday.

Judy Chua

I followed Doreen to SBS yesterday and killed three to four birds at one go. I had the good fortune to attend breakfast dana at the Hokkien Tiong Pavilion; was treated to *char koay teow* (fried flat noodles) by Mr Goh and listened to a Dhamma talk, "Make the Forest Your Teacher", by Ven Ajahn Sujata given to the IMP participants. I still had time to tend to the durian trees.

I was greatly impressed and moved by the large dana crowd (many children and older ladies among them), most of whom are not Taiping Insight Meditation Society (TIMS) or SBS members. Everything was pretty well organised. It was great to meet up with Mr Goh, the Vice Chairperson of the SBS Management Committee, after a lapse of a year or so. At his age, he's still as fit as a *kampung* (village) chicken — going by the way he made his way up and down the hill slopes helping me tend to the durian trees.

SB Chiu

Thank you for giving us an opportunity to do service at kathina this year. It was our very first experience and also an enjoyable one, especially helping out as *kappiyas* (monks' attendants). Please convey our thanks to Bro Andrew for guiding us. Thank you for your hospitality and your kind accommodation. Best wishes to all at SBS and the wonderful Kathina Organising Committee. *Sādhu* (well done)!

Mun Yee

On behalf of the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia Youth Section (BMSMYS) and Dhammaduta Youths (D2Y), I would like to thank you for your hospitality during our visit to Taiping and SBS. We were impressed by the efforts TIMS has made in ensuring the success of the SBS project. SBS is a great place, beautiful and peaceful. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to contribute our service to SBS and also to the Triple Gem. We all look forward to another visit to SBS in the future.

Wan Hua

We thank you for finding the time to write to us. We would like to hear from more of you; so do keep in touch with us!

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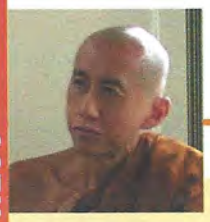

ABBOT'S ADDRESS

Three to Four

As we step over to a new year, Ven Aggacitta reviews the major events of 2003 and charts the direction for SBS in 2004.

Perhaps the two most significant events in SBS for the year 2003 are the first *sāmaṇera* (novice) ordination, held on 13 July, and the Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP), held from 25 Nov–9 Dec. These are the first big steps towards realising our primary objective of establishing a home-grown Sangha nurtured by holistic monk training. In addition to these, we have also taken other new steps: *piṇḍacāra* (alms round) in the markets and hawker centres in and around Taiping town on Sunday mornings; more frequent Dhamma propagation activities outside of Taiping; weekly *sutta* (discourse of the Buddha) discussions; and explored another popular method of *vipassanā* (insight) meditation.

The virtually completed Phase 3 construction was pivotal to the success of IMP, as until then, we were lacking in proper communal facilities for residential group activities. Although the first IMP was targeted at Forms 5 and 6 school leavers just after their exams, we didn't receive a single application from that age group. Nonetheless, the first IMP participants were quite a receptive lot despite their varying age differences. The positive feedback from them not only justifies IMP, but is also an impetus for us to go for the next one soon — this time targeting university students during their forthcoming year-end semester break.

Pindacara in the markets and hawker centres in and around Taiping on Sunday mornings (whenever possible) is our way of trying to redeem the tarnished image of Buddhism wrought by robed exploiters who accept money or exchange purportedly blessed talismans or strings for money. We started on 24 August, and are making this an ongoing task to educate the public, by practical example, that Buddhist monks — at least Theravādins (those who profess *Theravāda* — "Doctrine of the Elders") — do not accept money on pindacara.

We have also increased our Dhamma propagation activities beyond Taiping. In early 2003 I gave Dhamma talks at the Buddhist Society of Ipoh and Mahindarama Buddhist Temple, Penang. Later in October, I delivered a series of lectures on "Dying to Live" for the Course on Living and Dying held at Than Hsiang Temple. The course was organised by the Malaysian Buddhist Sangha Association primarily for students of the Malaysian Buddhist Institute. While in Penang for the course, I also conducted *Pāli* (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) chanting and vipassana meditation sessions in the evenings at Penang Buddhist Association for the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) students' English Dhamma Camp. At the end of 2003 to the beginning of 2004, while in Penang to oversee the final production of this newszine, I led a Dhamma discussion in Lotus-Bud (a Buddhist house of USM students at Taman Permai) and gave Dhamma talks almost daily in Peace House, Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre and USM.

Ven Kumara was also invited to give talks / lead Dhamma discussions at the Ipoh Buddha Dhamma Association, Buddhist Society of Ipoh and Persatuan Buddhis Universiti Malaya. We plan to reach out to even more people in 2004. Imagine how many more lay Buddhists would benefit if we had more suitably qualified monks to serve!

The *Vinaya* (monastic discipline) can be likened to the foundations and superstructure of a multi-storey building, while the *Dhamma* (teachings found in the suttas) is like its claddings, fittings and facilities. One without the other would not be complete or useful. That's why the Buddha called his teachings "DhammaVinaya". Bearing this in mind, we now have, whenever possible, weekly sutta discussions to supplement daily Vinaya classes, Dhamma talks on *Uposatha* days (full moon and no moon days when monastics meet to reaffirm their commitment to the monastic discipline), and regular meditation sessions. We hope that with the participation of more resident monastics, these sutta discussions will be even more interesting and enlightening.

In SBS, we try to abide by the ancient spirit of liberality where monastics practise different methods of meditation while staying together in the same monastery in perfect harmony. SBS monastics had a chance to explore another well-known

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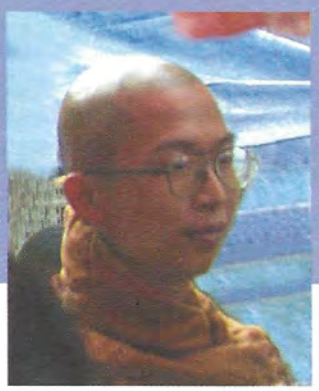
Attempting to Deworm Theravada



A look at some of the issues facing Theravada Buddhism and the problems encountered in the effort to look for solutions.

by Ven Kumara

THERAVĀDINS (those who profess *Theravāda* — "Doctrine of the Elders") generally have a high regard for their tradition. They see it as the best among the major Buddhist traditions — in terms of authenticity in both scriptures and practice. However, if we were to look objectively at the present state of popular *Theravāda* ("Doctrine of the Elders" — Gotama Buddha's teachings preserved in the *Pāli* language) we have to admit that it is not as pretty and healthy as we would like to imagine it to be. In fact, it is like a lion that is infested with worms that have silently, yet pervasively proliferated inside.

In one of the discussion sessions of the Introduction to Monkhood Programme held in SBS in December 2003, we discussed some of the issues raised in an uncompleted manuscript by a concerned Buddhist on this subject. Here, let me share a few issues that we touched on and, more importantly, explore what we can do to help counteract the debilitating trends of the present Theravadin world.

...while Theravadins now cannot claim their Pali Canon to be a carbon copy of that sanctioned by the First Buddhist Council, they can have confidence that it is fairly close to that.

Selective Emphasis and Questionable Interpretations of Theravada

The writer points out that Theravada does not equal the Buddha's teachings as recorded in the Pali *Tipiṭaka* (the Three Baskets). Rather, "Theravada is based on a *particular* interpretation of certain teachings from the Pali Tipitaka." (*italics mine*) That is a fact that we cannot rightly deny.

With more than two millennia of inevitable transformation since the Blessed One passed on to *Nibbāna* (highest and ultimate goal of all Buddhist aspirations, i.e. extinction of greed, hatred and delusion), we cannot expect any Buddhist tradition, as we know them now, to be an exact representation of the original teachings. Contrary to popular traditional belief, there are evidences within the Pali Canon itself (as we have it now) to show that it is not the same as the original sanctioned by the First Buddhist Council, which was held soon after the Buddha's demise.

Furthermore, we must understand that Buddhism did not split into just a few schools in India, but at least 18 of them. Not only did they bear differing views among them, but also differing sets of scriptures. A few hundred years after Theravada reached Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), it split further into a few subgroups. Although they probably agreed on most texts of the Pali Canon (which was then committed into writing for the first time), they did have some dissimilar texts and they did not share the same interpretations in all aspects.

What we now generally accept as the orthodox Theravadin teachings is largely based on the interpretations of only one of those groups: the Mahavihara. (Their interpretations of the Pali Canon were compiled and sanctioned by them as what we now call the *Aṭṭhakathā* or the Pali Commentaries). This is so because all other Theravadin lineages (notably the Jetavana and Abhayagiri sects) did not survive due to various reasons. As such, the general understanding of the *DhammaVinaya* (Doctrine and Discipline) according to orthodox Theravada, as we know it today, may well be incomplete, and in some cases probably wrong.

Nonetheless, historians generally agree that although the set of Pali Canon sanctioned by the *Mahāviharins* (members of Mahavihara sect) may not be an exact "copy" of what the Buddha taught, it does contain the essence of it. Moreover, a careful comparison of the *suttas* (discourses of the Buddha) and their corresponding commentaries also strongly suggests that the Mahaviharins were conscientious enough to not modify the teachings contained therein according to their understanding. We can see this in cases where their commentaries disagree with the literal and obvious meaning of what the suttas say. Therefore, while Theravadins now cannot claim their Pali Canon to be a carbon copy of that sanctioned by the First Buddhist Council, they can have confidence that it is fairly close to that. In fact, as a complete, codified set of Buddhist scriptures, it is probably the closest.

On top of that, the teachings that an average Buddhist receives tend to be rather selective — in many cases not for the listener's benefit, but the speaker's. The writer boldly chided Theravadin monks who, motivated by self-interest, preach much about the benefits of generosity towards monks and monasteries, but little about other greater virtues.

Selective preaching of the Dhamma also occurs when the preacher wants to draw others to his point of view — he highlights suttas that seem to support his opinions and conveniently ignores suttas that contradict them. This is rather common among meditation debaters.

Therefore, the question now is this: What can truth-seeking Theravadin Buddhists do under such circumstances? There is not much that we can do now to regain the complete original teachings of the Buddha (unless perhaps we are willing to trust certain individuals who say they can go back in time!). Nevertheless, if we wish to get as close as we can to the original teachings, considering what is currently available, the Pali Canon seems to be our best bet.

Getting back to the irrefutable statement that Theravada does not equal the Buddha's teachings as recorded in the Pali Canon, truth-seeking Buddhists should make the effort to study the canon. The best, of course, would be to learn Pali so that one can go beyond interpretations (personal or from the commentaries) that tend to creep into translations. If that proves beyond a person's limitations, he or she can at least study reliable translations by objective, learned and practising Buddhists (such as Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi) who are assisted but not confined by interpretations of the Commentaries. The only problem is that we do not have a complete set of such translations yet. As such, it is still necessary to learn Pali if we wish to have the full picture of its content.

By doing the above, we can cut through the orthodoxy of Theravada and get closer to what the Buddha taught.

Four Great

Now there at Bhoganagara the Blessed One stayed at the Ananda Shrine.

There the Blessed One addressed the *bhikkhus* (monks) and said, "I will teach you, bhikkhus, these four Great Standards. Listen! Pay attention! I will speak."

"Yes, *Bhante* (Venerable Sir)," replied the bhikkhus. The Blessed One said:

1. "Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu may say, 'In the presence of the Blessed One himself have I heard this, in his presence have I learned this. This is the Dhamma, this is the *Vinaya* (Monastic Discipline), this is the teaching of the Master.'

"The word spoken, bhikkhus, by that bhikkhu should neither be rejoiced at nor scorned. Without rejoicing and without scorn the words and syllables should be carefully learned and checked to see if they are included in the *sutta* (discourse) or seen in the Vinaya. If when so doing they are not included in the sutta, and are not seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly learned by that bhikkhu.' So, bhikkhus, you should reject it.

"But if they are included in the sutta, and are seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well learned by that bhikkhu.' This, bhikkhus, you should bear in mind as the first Great Standard.

2. "Here again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu may say, 'In such and such a monastery there is a Sangha with its *theras* (elders) and leaders. In the presence of that Sangha have I heard this, in its presence have I learned this. This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the teaching of the Master.'

"The word spoken, bhikkhus, by that bhikkhu should neither be rejoiced at nor scorned. Without praise and without scorn the words and syllables should be carefully learned and checked to see if they are included in the sutta or seen in the Vinaya. If when so doing they are not included in the sutta, and are not seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly learned by that Sangha.' So, bhikkhus, you should reject it.

"But if they are included in the sutta, and are seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well learned by that Sangha.' This, bhikkhus, you should bear in mind as the second Great Standard.

These measures form part of what SBS is trying to do, and we hope others will join or support us in this task so crucial to the health of the *Sāsana* (Buddha's Dispensation).

The Vinaya

The writer also points out certain issues surrounding the observance of the Vinaya in today's world:

1. Rules that are irrelevant and meaningless outside the ancient Indian context.
2. Monks who follow rules according to their own traditions, which do not

Standards

3. "Here again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu may say, 'In such and such a monastery there are dwelling many theras, learned, holders of the traditional teachings, bearers of the Dhamma, bearers of the Vinaya, bearers of the summaries. In the presence of those theras have I heard this, in their presence have I learned this. This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the teaching of the Master.'

"The word spoken, bhikkhus, by that bhikkhu should neither be rejoiced at nor scorned. Without rejoicing and without scorn the words and syllables should be carefully learned and checked to see if they are included in the sutta or seen in the Vinaya. If when so doing they are not included in the sutta, and are not seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly learned by those theras.' So, bhikkhus, you should reject it.

"But if they are included in the sutta, and are seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well learned by those theras.' This, bhikkhus, you should bear in mind as the third Great Standard.

4. "Here again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu may say, 'In such and such a monastery there dwells a thera, learned, holder of the traditional teachings, bearer of the Dhamma, bearer of the Vinaya, bearer of the summaries. In the presence of that thera have I heard this, in his presence have I learned this. This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the teaching of the Master.'

"The word spoken, bhikkhus, by that bhikkhu should neither be rejoiced at nor scorned. Without rejoicing and without scorn the words and syllables should be carefully learned and checked to see if they are included in the sutta or seen in the Vinaya. If when so doing they are not included in the sutta, and are not seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly learned by that thera.' So, bhikkhus, you should reject it.

"But if they are included in the Sutta, and are seen in the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Surely, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well learned by that thera.' This, bhikkhus, you should bear in mind as the fourth Great Standard. These, bhikkhus, are the Four Great Standards."

MAHAPARINIBBANA SUTTA (DN 16)

always agree with the Vinaya Pitaka.

3. Misinterpretation of rules, which lead to inane and even hilarious observances.

On the first point, we have to agree that some rules seem rather absurd to observe in our present world, and it does make some sense to do away with such rules, which have become more like mere rituals. Besides, in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, the Buddha was said to have allowed the Sangha to abolish minor rules if it so wished.

However, as the Buddha did not say which rules are to be regarded as minor, it does not seem prudent for any one of us now to cite that allowance as a valid justification for abolishing rules. Why is that so?

1. The enlightened attendees of the First Council could not agree as to what the Buddha meant by minor rules, and instead agreed to keep all of them. Who among us now can say for sure what the Buddha meant? Are we to consider ourselves wiser?
2. If one group or even individuals (particularly respected ones) are seen to do away with what they think are minor rules, we can only expect others to also abolish what they think are minor rules. Furthermore, if one group were to start abolishing rules, what is there to prevent future generations from abolishing even more rules? If members of the Sangha keep pruning the Vinaya (in keeping with their traditions), can we expect the level of discipline to be better than if they had kept the Vinaya as it is?
3. We should remind ourselves that the splitting of the Sangha was due to the wish of a larger segment to change ten rules. Following that came an unstoppable proliferation of new groups with differing ideas of not just the Vinaya but the Dhamma as well. Do we want to instigate a repetition of that regrettable episode of history?
4. Besides, if such abolishing is to be done, we should bear in mind that the Buddha allowed only the Sangha to do so — not individual members or chapters. This presupposes the need for a *sanghakamma*, a monastic

...quite a large portion of the Sangha consists of people who seem to have entered it with not-so-pure motives.

legal action. To my knowledge, there has never been such a sanghakamma in the entire history of the Theravadin tradition — which is a good thing. Otherwise, with a trimmed down code of discipline as a guide for monastic behaviour, what can we expect the Sangha to become?

On the issue of monks who merely go by their own traditions, it drives home the necessity to go back to the Vinaya Pitaka and uphold the Vinaya according to it instead of blindly following the norm of a certain community. Admittedly, this is quite impossible to implement in a large community deeply entrenched in its own norms. However, it can be done by small groups that appreciate the advantages of doing so for the benefit of the Sasana. As variations of interpretation are unavoidable, it is only fair that different communities agree to disagree in those areas so long as they do not contradict the original rules. (*See "Four Great Standards," pg 6–7*)

As for the writer's point about misinterpreting the rules, it is clear that monks need to have practical understanding of the Vinaya, which necessitates tutelage under a learned, qualified teacher. Otherwise, it should not surprise us to find misguided monks who do such things as using tweezers to count money they have received (as mentioned by the said writer), thinking that they are being pure in their precepts.

Becoming a Monk

It should not be too difficult for well-informed Buddhists to realise that quite a large portion of the Sangha consists of people who seem to have entered it with not-so-pure motives. Although there are cases where some of such monks later discover their spiritual potential and grow to become respectable monks, it rarely happens. As for the rest of them, they naturally actualise their unwholesome motives, thereby bringing disrepute to and consequent loss of faith in the Sangha in the eyes of the laity. This is another issue that the writer brought forward.

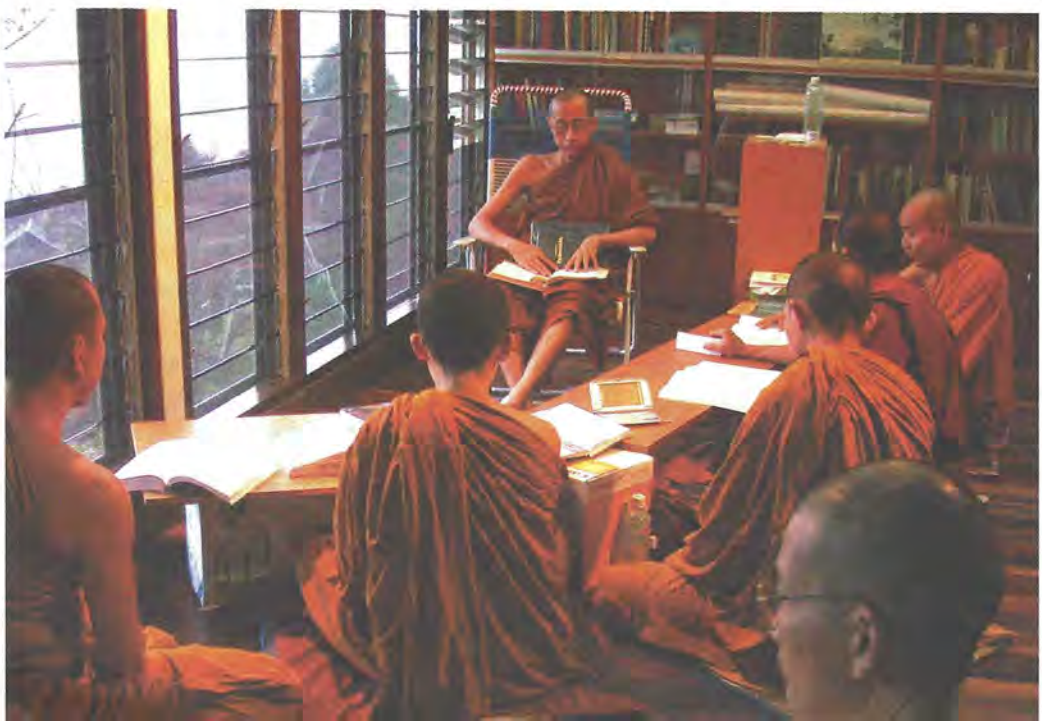
"We need to have some quality control in the Sangha!" Such is the concern of many knowledgeable and observant Buddhists. However, in most Theravadin cultures — particularly long existing ones — this is hardly done.

In Ven Aggacitta Bhikkhu's "Role of the Sangha in the New Millennium: the Monastic Perspective", he reiterated the need for Sangha quality control. For this purpose, it is the policy of SBS (of which the venerable is the abbot) that a person wishing to be ordained a monk here must be a postulant for at least one year before he can be considered for ordination. This also provides the monk aspirant an opportunity to try out the life very similar to that of a monk before he makes a deliberate decision.

Many other monastic communities besides SBS have insisted on a similar policy and it has proven practicable and effective in filtering off unsuitable individuals. While we do not expect this to change the whole face of Theravada, we certainly hope that more communities will see its necessity and implement the same policy.

A New Buddhism?

There is no doubt about the grave problems facing the present Theravada Buddhism and the writer's call for change deserves much attention. While sensational and outrageous issues may grab our attention, they are relatively isolated and have more to do with the individual rather than the community. The scriptures tell us that such things also happened during the Buddha's time, though perhaps in milder degrees. As for those issues that are not so sensational but pervasive, they are in reality more pernicious and



virtually impossible to uproot in places where immoral behaviour among monks has become the norm.

At the end of the uncompleted manuscript, the writer presented a proposal for a new sect of Buddhism. He shared a number of very constructive suggestions that are truly worthy of our attention. However, the proposal also includes certain things that are unsuitable and even deviate from the Dhamma-Vinaya as enshrined in the Pali Canon.

So, while we can agree with a large portion of the writer's proposal, we cannot agree with that of creating a new sect, which has happened more than enough times in the history of Buddhism. Doing so has always opened new cans of worms — the gravest one being the breaking up of the Buddhist family, which the Buddha is known to have taken pains to prevent.

Instead, we believe in revitalising the Sasana from within, starting with the core of the Buddhist community: the Sangha. Like natural medicine to cure a deep-seated illness, it may be slow, but it is steady. SBS is taking measures to this end. Care enough to join us?

Note:

1. *I have promised the writer not to circulate the manuscript outside SBS as he is yet ready for that. So, please do not contact us to ask for it. However, he did reveal his plan to publish it on the Internet for public discussion later this year (2004).*
2. *We will be happy to receive useful comments from you on the subject. Feel free to write to us.*

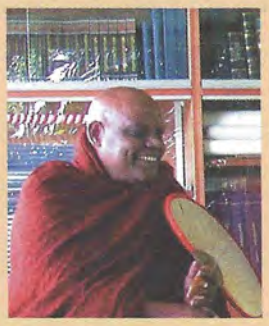
TRIBUTE

Ven Kadavadduwe Jinawamsa Mahathera
Chief Anusasake and Samuppadaka
Sri Kalyani Yogashramaya Vanavasi Sangha Sabha
1906–2003

Ven Kadavadduwe Jinawamsa Mahathera passed away calmly on July 13, 2003, on the night of Esala Poya in the Galduwa Yogashramaya, Sri Lanka. Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary wishes to express its tribute to the late Ven Mahathera for his great nobility and effort in successfully reviving the forest Sangha dedicated to the actual study and practice of the Dhamma-Vinaya in Sri Lanka.

The late Ven Kadavadduwe Jinawamsa Mahathera's success has been a continual source of inspiration for us as we struggle to create a similar revival — on a very much smaller scale — here in Malaysia. Coincidentally, we are exactly 50 years behind him because we started Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary in the year 2000 while the late Ven Mahathera began in 1950.

FELICITATIONS



Ven Nauyane Ariyadhamma Mahathera
Chief Anusasake
Sri Kalyani Yogashramaya Vanavasi Sangha Sabha
2003–

After the demise of the late Ven Kadavadduwe Jinawamsa Mahathera, the Mahasangha Sabha unanimously appointed Ven Nauyane Ariyadhamma Mahathera to the position of Chief Anusasake of the Sri Kalyani Yogashramaya Vanavasi Sangha Sabha. Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary wishes to convey its heartiest felicitations on the Ven Mahathera's worthy appointment. *Sādhu* (well done) Bhante *sādhu!*

May the Sri Kalyani Yogashramaya Vanavasi Sangha continue to flourish under the Ven Mahathera's able leadership. May Bhante be well and happy always as you selflessly serve the *Buddhasāsana* (Buddha's dispensation).

FROM PAGE 3

technique of vipassana meditation at the end of the year. We planned to attend a 10-day retreat in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin organised by the Malaysia Vipassana Meditation Society, while Ajahn Jeff Oliver stood in for me to conduct a retreat for SBS helpers. At the last minute, Ven Kumara could not make it due to health reasons, but Ven Balacitta and I had a beneficial retreat in Sabak Bernam. Perhaps 2004 will see the prevailing spirit of liberality in SBS enhanced by the introduction of a new meditation technique.

With the completion of Phase 3 construction, we hope to take a break from building projects — at least for 2004 — and concentrate more on fulfilling our spiritual objectives by implementing more effectively the knowledge gained through Vinaya classes and sutta discussions; having more meditation retreats; making good use of Phase 3 facilities for more residential group activities and reaching out to more people, especially the younger generation.

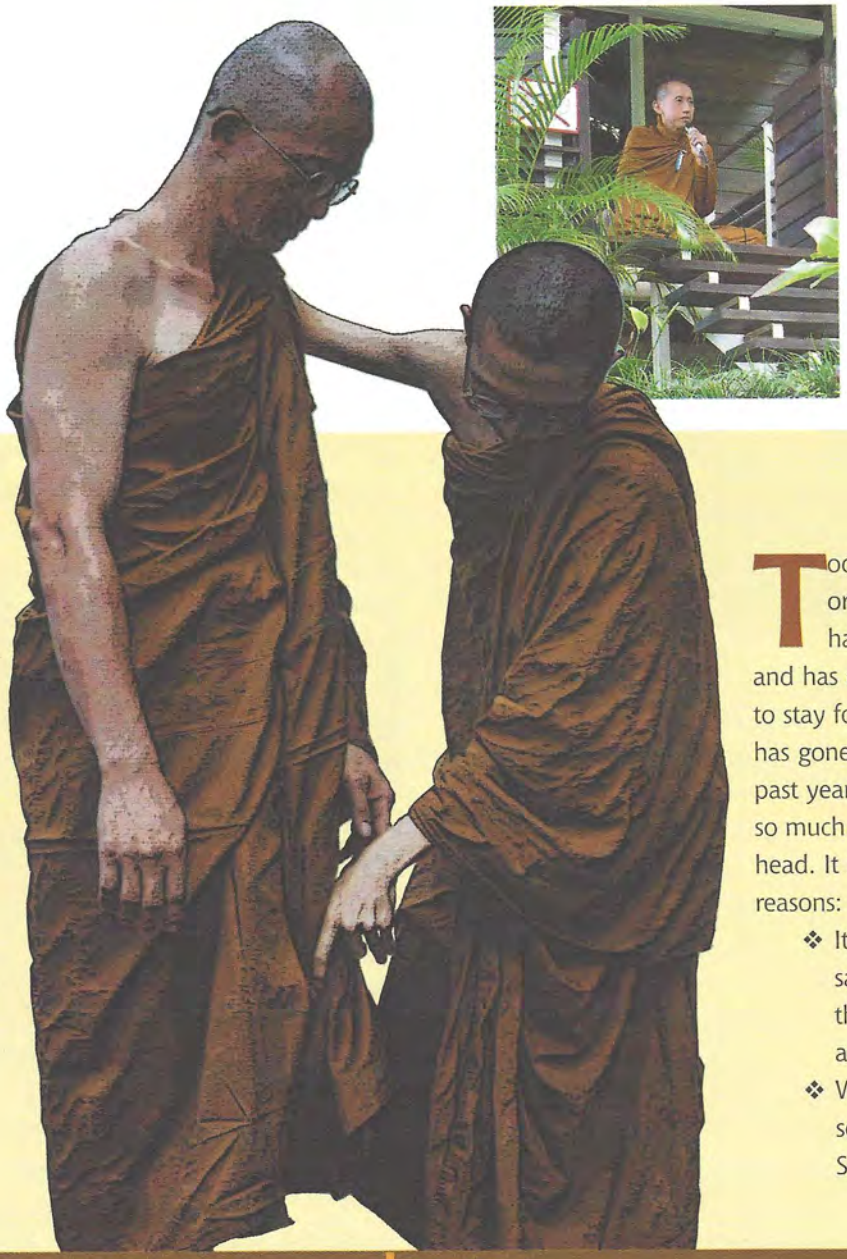
"Three to Four" is but a step nearer our long-term goal of "monk building", and along the way we will always have in mind the short-term needs of our faithful supporters.

DHAMMA TALKS

We bring you a record of the Dhamma talks that were given by SBS monastics in Taiping between June to December 2003. 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, "Donning the Robes", given on 13 July, as an article.*

TOPIC / SPEAKER / DATE	SYNOPSIS
Pathama-Saranani-Sakka Sutta (SN 55:3:4) Ven Aggacitta, 01-06-03	Does a *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer) drink alcohol? Ven Aggacitta examines this question with reference to the Pathama-Saranani-Sakka Sutta from the Saṃyutta Nikaya.
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 08-06-03	The blessing of the timely hearing of the Dhamma. When is the right time and how is it a blessing?
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 22-06-03	On the blessing of patience — how it is a blessing and how to cultivate it.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 29-06-03	On the blessings of obedience, meeting a monk and Dhamma discussion.
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 06-07-03	Next two blessings: spiritual striving, the holy life.
Donning the Robes Ven Aggacitta, 13-07-03	A talk given on the historic occasion of the first *sāmaṇera* (novice) ordination in SBS.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 20-07-03	The blessing of seeing the Four Noble Truths and the difference between conventional truth and ultimate truth.
Sangarava Sutta (AN 3:61) Ven Aggacitta, 27-07-03	Does a monk benefit others? — a talk given to visiting members of the Tze Xin Society from Penang.
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 03-08-03	Right Understanding of the Noble Eightfold Path.
Tirokutta Sutta (Khp 7) Ven Kumara, 10-08-03	A talk in conjunction with the 7th month of the lunar calendar when the Chinese celebrate the festival of the hungry ghosts.
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 17-08-03	Explanation of the Law of Kamma for a better understanding of the Four Noble Truths.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 24-08-03	The Noble Eightfold Path: general introduction followed by a brief explanation on Right View, Right Thought and Right Speech.
Sabbhi Sutta (SN 1:31) Ven Aggacitta, 31-08-03	Associating with the Good — a talk given to visitors from Kota Kemuning and Alor Setar.
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 07-09-03	Right Action of the Noble Eightfold Path.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 14-09-03	Right Livelihood of the Noble Eightfold Path (1).
Reaping Merits Again and Again Ven Aggacitta, 29-09-03	A special talk given to visiting devotees from Samnak Sambodhi, Kepong, with a reference to Udaya Sutta (SN 7:12).
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 05-10-03	Right Livelihood of the Noble Eightfold Path (2).
Antidotes to Destructive Emotions Ven Aggacitta, 13-10-03	What are destructive emotions and what should one do about them?
Responsibility to the Dead Ven Kumara, 18-10-03	Remembering and letting go — a talk given at a bereavement *dāna* (offering).

Donning the Robes



13 July 2003 was a day that Ong Chin Cheong had been waiting for since he joined SBS as a postulant in May 2002. Now, a year later, he receives ordination as a sāmaṇera *(novice) in a short but moving ceremony, after which the abbot,* **Ven Aggaccita**, *delivered this Dhamma talk.*

Today is an historic occasion. The first samanera ordination in SBS has just been completed. We have found that Postulant Ong has been patient and has endured postulant training here well enough to stay for more than a year with us. Furthermore, he has gone through a radical transformation within this past year. I am sure many of you would have noticed so much more clarity on his face and especially on his head. It is a happy occasion for all of us here for two reasons:

- It is a boon to the *Sāsana* (Buddha's Dispensation) to have a new member. We hope that here he will receive holistic training in an ancient tradition through a new media.
- We are happy that Mrs Ong has given her son to the Sasana and has thus become a Sasana heir.

TOPIC / SPEAKER / DATE	SYNOPSIS
Offering Wisely to the Sangha Ven Aggacitta, 26-10-03	Offerings of what is right and proper to the Sangha. A talk given on Kathina Day.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 09-11-03	Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration of the Noble Eightfold Path.
The Fourth Precept Ven Kumara, 09-11-03	A lesson to young children on the importance of not telling lies. Given to visiting Sunday School students from Bodi Lanka Ram Temple.
Mangala Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 16-11-03	The ultimate blessing: remaining unshaken by the eight worldly Dhammas — the ups and downs of life.
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 23-11-03	Review of blessings (1).
Mangala Sutta Ven Kumara, 30-11-03	Review of blessings (2).
Chanting After Offering of Dana Ven Aggacitta, 07-12-03	The significance of chanting *Pāli* (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) passages after offering dana.
Q & A Ven Aggacitta, 14-12-03	On the efficacy of blessing ceremonies for students sitting for exams; children reaping the benefits of parents' meritorious deeds.

Parents, with a child who has become a monk, will visit the temple more often... (and) will be drawn closer to the Dhamma.

Sasana Heirs

I wrote about Sasana heirs in a previous issue of Sasanarakkha. King Asoka, the famous emperor of India, was a brutal conqueror who changed radically after meeting an inspiring samanera. He became a righteous king (*dhammika rāja*), advocating non-violence. The Asoka edicts and inscriptions on stupas that he erected bear testimony to his propagation of the Dhamma in many ways. He contributed requisites and built monasteries and stupas. He also practised religious tolerance and did not use force to convert his subjects to Buddhism.

King Asoka one day approached the *Sanghathera* (most senior monk of the Community) and asked, "Since I've given so much support to the Sasana, can I be called a Sasana heir?" When told that he did not qualify, he asked how he could become one. The answer was, "Only if one can give up one's child to the Sasana and allow him to become a monk."

How does giving one's child to the Sasana make one an heir? What does one inherit?

We have a present day example in Ven Kumara's parents. He tried very hard and it took some time for him to get his parents' permission to become a monk. He tried various ways to bring his parents closer to Buddhism by bringing them to talks, discussions and temple activities. Finally, they gave their blessings to him. Since then, they become more knowledgeable Buddhists, attending retreats and getting more involved in temple affairs. Parents, with a child who has become a monk, will visit the temple more often, as compared to being just "Wesak Day Buddhists". They will be drawn closer to the Dhamma. In the same way, Mrs Ong is now in closer contact with the Dhamma and probably is giving *piṇḍapāta* (alms food) correctly for the first time.

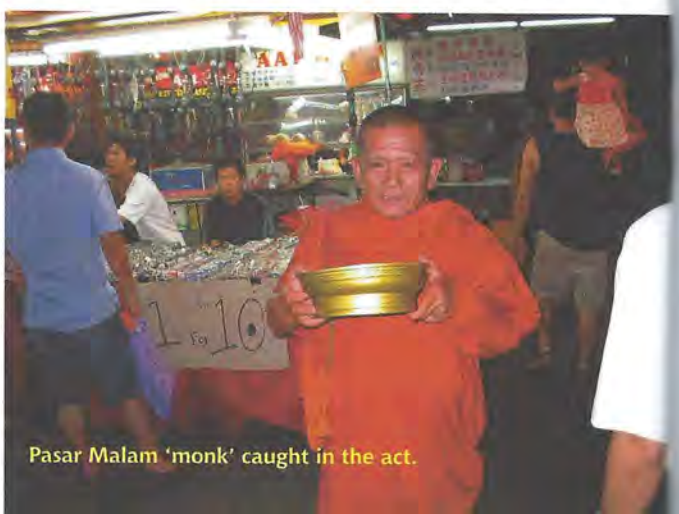
Sasana Opportunists

Let's come back to the story of King Asoka. Due to his lavish support, many people became monks for ignoble and opportunistic reasons. They became monks not because they were interested in the pure and holy life of a celibate striving for liberation from *saṃsāra* (round of birth and death). Rather, they wanted the easy life that King Asoka had, through his generous patronage, made possible for monks.

Even during the Buddha's time there were already such opportunistic people. A group of 17 young children were sent by their parents to be ordained as monks at a very young age because their parents thought that the *Sakyaputtiyas* ('Sons of the Sakyans' — an epithet for Buddhist monks) were well taken care of, receiving good food and having comfortable lodgings. They would thus have an easy life without having to learn a skill and work for a living.

At that time there was no distinction between a samanera and a *bhikkhu* (monk). However, being young, they could not endure hunger, having to wait till daybreak for their meal. They cried, refusing to be consoled. When the Buddha heard of this, he passed an initial rule that no one less than 15 years of age could be ordained. Thus even during the Buddha's time, "bogus" monks such as we see today in the *pasar malam* (night market), existed.

Asoka's unrivalled support for Buddhism prompted members of other religious sects to join the Sangha for an easy life. As their numbers increased,



Pasar Malam 'monk' caught in the act.

...if one does not put theory into practice, it is not befitting of a member of the Sangha.

they posed a threat to the Sangha. Consequently, the Third Buddhist Council was convened and senior monks asked for the expulsion of such "bogus" monks.

You Are What You Pronounce

I have chosen the name, Ven Balacitta, for our new samanera. '*Bala*' means 'strong' or 'powerful'. '*Citta*' is the mind. But in *Pāli* (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) one has to be careful with the pronunciation, as '*Bāla*' pronounced with the long '*ā*' means 'foolish' or 'immature'. As he is learning Pali, I tell him, "You are what you pronounce."

Although he has a newly shaven head and new robes, it may not make much difference in his lifestyle as he has been living the life of a monastic for more than a year. However, besides the ten rules of training for a samanera, there are many other rules. He has to learn how to wear the robes, behave like a monk, go for pindapata and so on.

Upholders of the Sasana

Just as there are some who renounce to take advantage of the circumstances of the well-supported Sangha, there are others who do so because of their faith in the Dhamma. Their primary objective is to make use of the opportunity as "homeless ones" to dedicate their lives to the study, practice and propagation of the Dhamma, without the responsibilities of worldly life.

First Responsibility

The first responsibility of members of the Sangha is to observe the precepts. Then they have to study the Dhamma. During the time of the Buddha, there were no books so they had to listen to the teacher and learn by heart the teachings of the Buddha. The teachings were then explained to them after which they had to practise them. Memorising 227 (major) rules (for bhikkhus) is one thing; internalising them is another. That is why during the Buddha's time it took 5 years for a bhikkhu to become independent.

There are many study monasteries in Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka where mostly theory is taught. This can produce great scholars, but if one does not put theory into practice, it is not befitting of a member of the Sangha.

Thus after learning the theory, a monk has to put into practice what he has learnt of monastic rules and regulations. As with any community, the Sangha needs to abide by rules in order to have law and order. It is because the rules have been laid down in such detail that the Sangha became one of the oldest existing monastic orders, if not the oldest.

Once, before monastic rules were laid down, Ven Sariputta asked the Buddha, "Why did the Sasanas of some Buddhas last a short time?" The Buddha said that some Buddhas taught the *DhammaVinaya* (Doctrine and Discipline) in brief. They did not lay down many rules. Instead, they read a person's mind and then taught him according to his individual disposition for him to get enlightened quickly. As a result when the Master passed away and there was no one to consult, there were disagreements as to what was correct. This soon caused splits among the monastic community.

Our Lord Gotama Buddha laid down rules and regulations in meticulous detail. Hence, his Sasana has lasted so long. However, Buddhism today has so many different traditions, sects and denominations. What would it be if rules had not been spelled out in such detail?

One of the primary objectives of SBS is to try to revive this traditional lifestyle of study and practice. The Vinaya is concerned with the precepts of a monk. Buddhists believe that the amount of merits one makes depends on the virtue of the giver and that of the recipient. Thus if a monk is virtuous and observes his precepts then the *dāna* (offering) given to him will bear great fruits. This is the first and most basic level at which he can repay his supporters.

Fulfilling the Basic Responsibility

If he meditates to attain concentration and insight into the true nature of reality, he progresses deeper and deeper into spiritual maturity; then the dana given to him will bear even greater fruits.

When one receives, one ought to give something in return. It is the same in the relationship between the Sangha and lay community. Monastics need to study and practise. Lay people give them the support to enable them to do so. In return the Sangha has to give them the

It is because the rules have been laid down in such detail that the Sangha became one of the oldest existing monastic orders, if not the oldest.

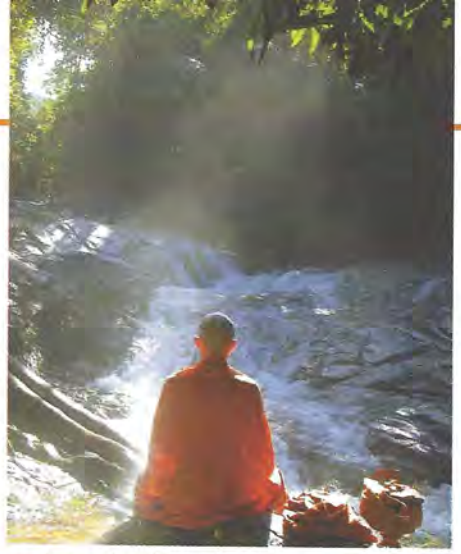
opportunity to reap the good fruits of *sīla* (moral virtue), *samādhi* (mental concentration) *and paññā* (wisdom).

In my Sunday talks in TIMS, I have told the stories of Asoka and Ven Sariputta and the benefits of meeting a monk. Asoka met a samanera who changed him into a good Buddhist. Sariputta, then not yet a monk, became a *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer) when he met Ven Assaji, an *arahant* (fully liberated one), who just recited a short stanza of the Buddha's teachings to him.

Thus a monk who has purity of conduct and spiritual attainment has already fulfilled his responsibility as a member of the Sangha. He can give his supporters the opportunity to create merits when they offer dana to him. They will then reap the benefits such as prosperity in this life and rebirth as a *deva* (deity) in the next. This is the fundamental duty of a monk.

Additional Responsibilities

In addition to this, he can do more. Looking at the spiritual needs of people as a whole, we realise that besides the importance of having well practised and knowledgeable monks, there is also a need for monks to chant and to perform rites and rituals. This is in high demand, as rites and rituals are necessary in society. However, practising monks do not like to



perform rituals or do chanting.

As such, we need different types of monks:

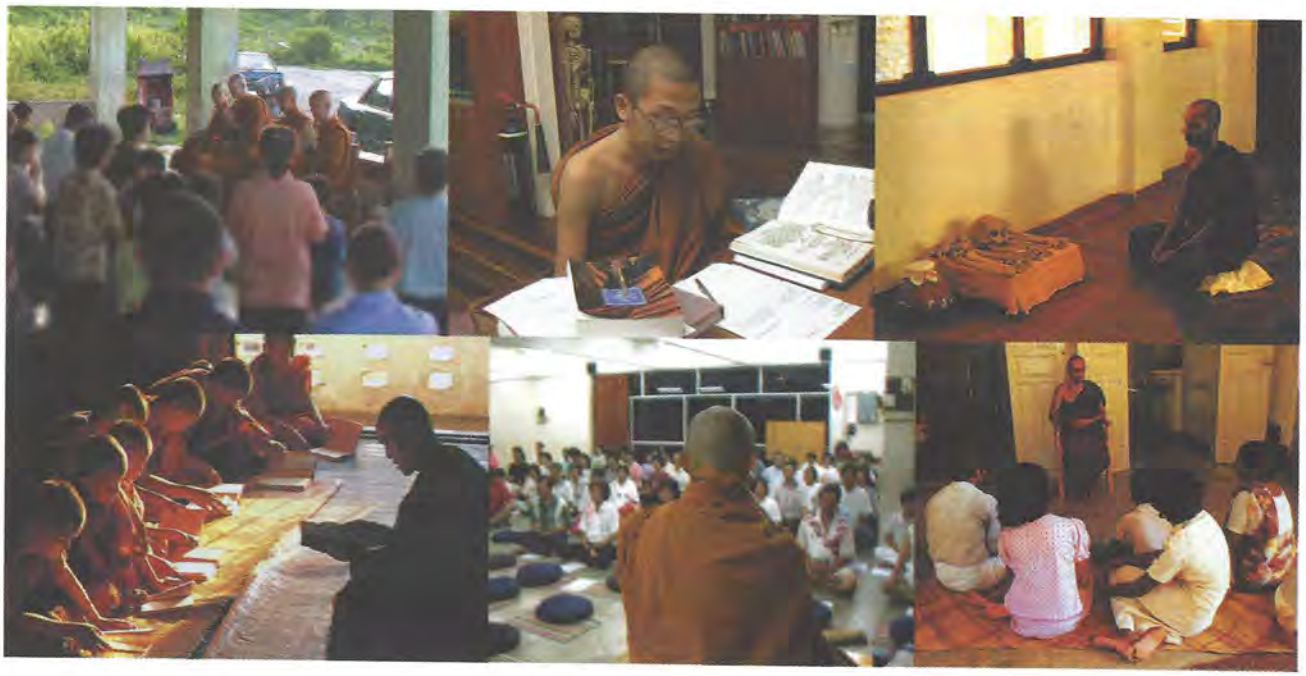
- Those who perform rituals
- Those who study theory so that when we go astray they possess the knowledge to set things right
- Those who practise, as they are living embodiments of the Dhamma
- Those who teach, of which there are two types:
  - Those who teach monks
  - Those who teach lay people, again of which there are two types :
    - monks who teach meditation
    - monks who teach people how to apply basic Buddhist principles in daily life.

Conclusion: Buddhism for All

Different people have different inclinations and interests. So, we should not be biased and support, for example, only practising monks who stay in the forest; neither should we support only teaching monks because we feel that practising monks do not contribute to society. We should look at Buddhism from a wide perspective and cover all facets of it. That is why Buddhism is so wonderful. It can be practised at so many levels of spiritual maturity and it appeals to people with different interests.

In SBS we understand this well and aspire to train not only one type of monks. We provide holistic training and give opportunities for the development of individual talents and capabilities. Some, after the basic course, may want to go to the forest to practise while some, after a stretch of practice, may want to propagate the teachings. Others may want to do Pali studies to access the actual teachings of Buddhism. We will give support and guidance to all of them. We welcome people of different inclinations to come and join us so that we can help perpetuate the Buddha's teachings in a holistic way that benefits all levels of society.

Although we have only one samanera, I feel that on this historic occasion, it is relevant for me to lay the groundwork for all future residents of SBS who wish to participate in our training programme. There are quite a few lined up and I hope to see them in the very near future.



Get a feel of monastic life at the edge of the forest...

INTRODUCTION TO MONKHOOD PROGRAMME

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

10–30 *March* 2004

(24–30 March: optional meditation retreat)

GENERAL PROGRAMME COMPONENTS:

- Life of a monk and things he should know
- Useful advice for those contemplating monkhood
- Current issues on Buddhism

ACTIVITIES:

• meditation class & retreat • qigong/yoga session • talks & discussions on DhammaVinaya & relevant issues • Pali pronunciation workshop • Pali chanting • alms gathering & other ascetic practices • nature walk • riverside breakfast • other beneficial and interesting activities

REQUIREMENTS:

- Possess general physical and mental fitness
- Willing and able to stay for at least the first 2 weeks of the programme
- Willing to observe all the stipulated regulations
- Able to communicate in English effectively
- Aged 17 and above with Form 5 education

COST: Fully sponsored by SBS & supporters. However, participants are welcome to contribute towards IMP at the end of the programme.

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: English

APPLICATION & APPROVAL:

- Details and application forms can be obtained from our Contact Persons.
- Complete and submit the application form by 14 February 2004 to SBS Introduction to Monkhood Programme
  c/o Mah Tuck Cheong
  638-A Pokok Assam
  34000 Taiping PERAK
- We appreciate early submission to facilitate selection of candidates.
- Interview may be conducted if deemed necessary.
- Successful candidates shall be notified by 21 February 2004

CONTACT PERSONS:

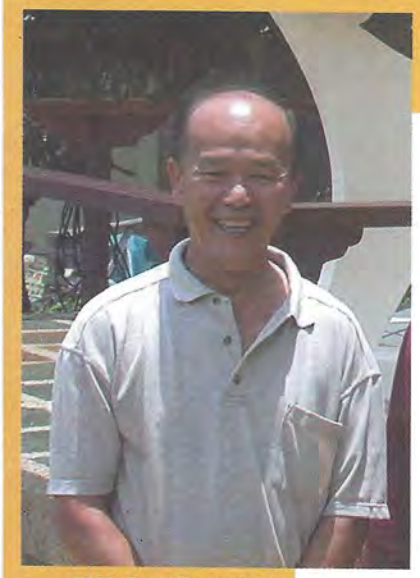
•David Chang •(SBS General Administrator) Programme Co-ordinator 2 •tel: 05-808 4429 •fax: 05-808 4423 •email: *office@sasanarakkha.org*
•Doreen Lim •Organising Secretary •tel: 04-8277 118 •fax: 04-8277 228 •h/p: 019-569 4599 •email: *sukhihotu@pd.jaring.my*

A department with a very heavy responsibility is the Finance Department. If money makes the world go round, then donations keep SBS running. The Finance Manager thanks all supporters for their past contributions and looks forward to their continuing support.

FM1 Eng Lai Hiang

Finance Department

by Eng Lai Hiang



FM2 Ong Thean Kin

Where We Fit In

The Finance Department is one of the four departments that make up the SBS Management Committee. You have heard from the Administration Department, the Development Department (Building Development and Human Resource Sections) and the Public Relations Department in previous issues of Sasanarakkha. Now it is our turn to speak.

Heard but Seldom Seen

Most of the time we are busy behind the scenes keeping our accounts straight and making sure that the public funds with which we are entrusted are judiciously spent and accounted for. You do not see us but you do hear us when we make our appeals for donations. Only on special occasions such as *kathina* (a ceremony where cloth for making robes is offered to the Sangha) do we make ourselves seen — behind the donation counters set up especially for the occasion.

Money is a fact of life, even for a monk-training centre. How else could we have seen through successfully three phases of development — putting in place the infrastructure, quarters for monks and staff and other buildings which include the Sima Hall, classroom block, library and the Sangha Central Facilities? This is only the beginning. We have to make sure SBS has the means to continually finance its day-to-day operations and maintenance.

A Good Head Start

Our primary objective now is to make sure that the funds for the day-to-day upkeep of the facilities and the monastics are sufficient and well managed. Although building construction is still ongoing, we are managing all right so far in this area, thanks to the Pro Tem Committee for starting the financial ball rolling and snowballing it with a good take off pace. They did this through successful fund-raising projects such as the official launching, road shows, dinner, etc. which are now history. This snowballing has enabled us to give SBS the physical facade that is seen here today. But then, it is in the nature of snow to melt and for snowballs to get smaller.

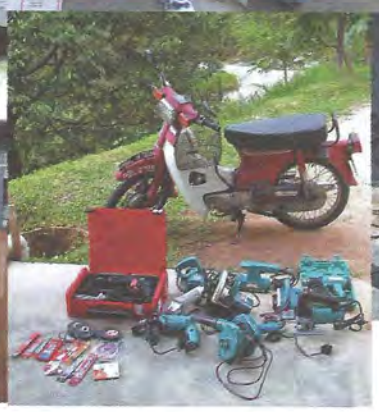
Thus ongoing Phase 3 construction works on a tighter budget. Future phases of development will now have to depend on more snowfalls. More often than not, we keep our ears pricked, hoping to hear the rumble of an unexpected avalanche. Even a snowdrift will be most welcome. I hope you are getting my drift.

Financial Gurus of the Management Committee

We have a very simple setup. There are two finance managers. As Finance Manager 1, I take care of the bookkeeping, making sure that accounts are accountable. Finance Manager 2, Ong Thean Kin takes care of the store system, keeping a proper record of all fixed assets. Thus between us we look after the money and the property.

To find ways and means to keep the funds coming in, we have a Fund Raising Sub-committee, comprising Lee Lee Kim (Chairman), James Khoo and Lim Hee Chay. They ensure there are sufficient funds to see development projects through as well as to fund the day-to-day operations.

Future phases of development will now have to depend on more snowfalls — not just donations in kind such as these which are always welcome and appreciated.



Channels of Funds

As we have supporters from all over the country as well as from abroad, we maintain a bank account into which people can bank in their donations online. Our other source of funds is cash donations from visitors to SBS who come as individuals or as part of organised groups from other Buddhist centres. This is especially so when we hold special events such as kathina. We also receive donations in kind. They have come in the form of motor vehicles, building materials, furniture, electrical fittings and appliances, plants for landscaping, bottled drinking water, tools and suchlike practical items.

We must not leave out donations in the form of service, such as professional and technical advice and services. We are also grateful for local and out-of-town volunteers, including members of the SBS Management Committee and those of the building development, *dāna* (food offering), housekeeping and landscaping teams. They all donate their time, energy and skills generously and selflessly. Without these volunteers, SBS would have to dig deeper into its pocket to pay for such services.

Organisation of Funds

The money received is channelled into four discrete funds according to the wishes of the donors. The two main funds which we draw heavily upon are the Building Fund and the General Fund. The former is used to finance the different phases of building development while the latter is the operating fund for the daily upkeep and running of SBS. These expenses include staff salaries and the costs of maintenance of grounds, buildings, machines and equipment. Utilities such as electricity and telephones have to be paid for as well. Costs of publications such as our newszine and books for free distribution also incur expenses. In addition, special programmes such as kathina and meditation retreats for SBS staff and helpers are also financed by the General Fund.

The other two funds are the Sangha Dayaka Fund and the Food Dana Fund. The former supplies the monastics with allowable requisites whenever required, while the latter is maintained to pay for the daily food expenses of the monastics. The Sangha Dayaka Fund has also initiated to sponsor the Introduction to Monkhood Programme.

Present Concerns

The daily financial upkeep and running of SBS is an ongoing concern for the Finance Department as bills have to be paid just as in any other organisation. As for building and construction costs, we try to cut our coat according to our cloth to make sure we are always in the black. After the completion of the ongoing Phase 3 buildings, future plans will have to depend on our financial situation which in turn depends on all of you generous donors who thus far have been so supportive. For this, the Finance Department says a big *"Sādhu"* (well done).

Phase 3 is mostly completed according to schedule — to the satisfaction of the development team; to the joy of the Introduction to Monkhood Programme participants; to the delight of the year-end yogis.

A Sense of Fulfilment
along the long road to development

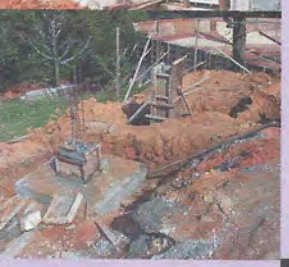
by Wai Seng Moh and Lim Tai Eng

Wai Seng Moh, Development Manager 1 of the SBS Management Committee, gives you an overview of the construction process.

Library

PMR

Classroom



I am glad to say that construction has been going according to plan, though at times not in the planned order of priority.

In our last report published in Sasanarakkha #8, we walked you among the rubble of the beginnings of Phase 3 construction, which officially commenced on 10 March 2003. Foundations for four buildings — the Sangha Central Facilities (SCF), a classroom, library and a publication and meeting room (PMR) were being laid and the building process had just begun.

By Kathina Day on 26 October, all major construction works for the first three buildings had been completed and we were able to house some of the activities on that day in SCF and the classroom. When IMP began on 25 November, only finishing touches and some rectification of defective works remained to be done on them while PMR was still undergoing construction. When the year-end meditation retreat began on 17 December, the yogis had the use of all the four buildings.

It has been an achievement for all those involved in the construction to be able to preserve the terrain almost as it was originally in spite of having four buildings in such close proximity to one another.

Lim Tai Eng, as the project manager of Phase 3 construction, will now take you on a stroll among the buildings and give you a more detailed look at the area.

Foundation problems were encountered in the initial stages of the project. To overcome them we had to be flexible and make changes to the original plan, such as changing the size of the foundation, changing locations of the footings, having additional footings, resting the structures on existing rock etc., just to suit the site ground bearing capacity and location. I am happy to say that there was close cooperation from all quarters to overcome the problems.

The classroom, library and PMR are on the same level and are connected by covered corridors. They overlook SCF which is recessed into a slope below. A flight of concrete steps connects the two levels. The locations of these four buildings are on a higher terrain overlooking the Sima Hall.

The classroom and the library are built on reinforced concrete footing with steel columns. The steel columns are above the existing ground so as to prevent corrosion. The library is the only building

Library

Classroom

that will be fully air conditioned. This is to maintain a suitable level of humidity so as to preserve the books. The floors of both buildings are finished in timber.

The PMR is the only double storey building. It is basically a reinforced concrete structure sitting on pad footings. While the ground floor is tiled, the first floor finish is of timber strips.

SCF houses communal facilities such as a pantry, a sewing room, two storerooms, a laundry area and four bathrooms. In the front part of the building, there is an open area reserved for an oven to be used for baking alms bowls. This is the only building that is wholly reinforced concrete and it is recessed into the cut slope to fit into the natural surroundings. The roof of this building is flat with mushroom-like vents for lighting and ventilation. Although the original plan was to have a rooftop garden overlooking the Sima Hall, defective waterproofing has created concern over its feasibility. We are still waiting for a good stretch of dry weather to resolve the issue.

Besides the construction of Phase 3 buildings, we also installed an open space lightning protection system in the area of the Buddha Shrine. This is part of an elaborate lightning protection system because Malaysia is located in an area with very frequent lightning strikes. This is especially true for SBS, which is situated on high terrain in the wettest part of Malaysia.

Some maintenance work was also carried out. Energy breakers were constructed in drains to check the velocity of water flow along the drains to prevent erosion of the drain surface during heavy rain. Due to the high rainfall this year, we have had two minor slope erosion problems that are still outstanding. A major potential slope failure was also identified by Dr Soo. Preliminary tests have been carried out and we are awaiting dryer weather to rectify the situation.

The plywood ceiling of the Sima Hall had to be renovated by using plasterboard because of the timber borer problem. Thanks to Edwin Lim of PJ for sourcing and sponsoring materials and labour for the renovation works. Subsequently, a local carpenter, Ah Poh, sponsored the reconstruction of the Sima Hall entrance shelves. All these were completed just in time for Kathina 2003.

It is with the close cooperation and diligence of all concerned that we have seen the smooth and successful implementation of yet another stage of the physical development of SBS.

FROM FRONT COVER

gathered at SBS with one aim in mind — to experience the life of a Theravada monk in SBS.

They were the first batch of Introduction to Monkhood Programme Participants (IMPPs), and were transformed into white-robed, bald headed and bare footed monastics complete with *Pāli* (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) names bestowed upon them by Ven Aggacitta or by others previously. Thiradhamma, Ariyavamsa, Sivali, Subhamitta, Nandiya, Sumana, Medhavi, Dhammavijaya and Paññobhasa lived the life of an SBS Theravadin monastic for a fortnight.

I had the privilege of being an observer at some of their activities. So allow me to share with you some glimpses of the activities carried out as part of the integrated programme that had been drawn up to give IMPPs a holistic experience, balancing the mundane, the intellectual and the spiritual.

The process of transformation had already begun when each IMPP freed himself of the vanity of his crowning glory. For most of them it was the first time they saw themselves bereft of hair.❶

They also learned some basic living skills which I am sure were new to most, if not all. They sewed their own *aṃsa* (a small robe worn over the left shoulder) ❷ and made brooms needed to clean the surrounding compound with.❸ Daily tasks included doing their own laundry as well as cleaning the compound and *kutis* (huts).

The intellectual and spiritual side of their training involved attending talks and discussions on monastic matters,❹ chanting various Pali passages according to proper pronunciation and meditation.❻ Two other subjects were perhaps more novel: learning some basic practical astronomy to understand the reckoning of *Uposatha* days (full moon and no moon when monastics meet to reaffirm their commitment to the monastic discipline) according to the alignment of the full moon with Pali constellations❼ and making a sundial to determine solar noon time.❽

Walking down and up again every morning to collect alms food at the Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion must have been a foot-tickling experience,❾❿ to put it mildly. Nightly yoga exercises, taught by Sivali, a qualified yoga instructor, to maintain fitness and health were also part of their life.

They discussed the Dhamma and practised some aspects of the *Vinaya* (monastic discipline). Practice of the rules leads to harmony and excellence in the Sangha, to individual growth and development, to the increase of lay devotees, to the perpetuation of the true Dhamma as well as to the fostering of discipline.

The abbot, Ven Aggacitta, gave a series of talks. He stressed that different personalities have different strengths and weaknesses and as a monk grows in his experience of the Noble Eightfold Path, he should be able to find the area in which he performs best, be it meditation, research and teaching, pastoral service to the Buddhist community, monastery administration, or devoting himself to the tradition of the forest monk.

One of the guest speakers was a Malaysian, Ven Hui Xin of the Fo Guang Shan Monastic Order. In his talk on "My Experience of Monkhood" he told the participants that when he first applied for a place in his training school, he had to write an essay about what he intended to

do after he was ordained. This is important because an aspirant must have good intentions for wanting to be a monk. The good intention is the good seed from which a strong tree grows.

Ven Ajahn Sujata shared his experiences of life as a forest monk in his talk, "Make the Forest Your Teacher". Then KL Hor delivered his thoughts on how a person can "live meaningfully and joyfully in a dedicated spiritual life" as a member of the lay community. Such principles of living could also be adopted as a guide to build up discipline by aspiring monks so that they could help themselves to help others. Tan Hoe Soon's talk was on the topic "What I Would Do if I Were a Monk". He began by considering the role of a monk in the area of community service, but concluded that his ultimate goal would be to strive for liberation from all forms of suffering. Lim Teik Leong's "Speaking in Public" gave the participants helpful tips on how to speak in front of an audience. Interesting Q & A sessions ended these sessions.

When asked for their response to the programme, many indicated that the most significant and memorable practice was collecting *piṇḍapāta* (alms food). The daily walk down the hill for their alms food had an unforgettable impact on their consciousness. Breakfast by the riverside some mornings on their way back up the hill must have been an invigorating experience.

"We know we have to follow some *dhutaṅga* (ascetic) rules...[11] I wanted to see how far I could go... I have had a lot of reflections on how I have applied the teachings ...Obviously I'm not good at certain things. Bhante Aggacitta's approach gave us a lot of personal time to absorb what we learnt in the programme," said Medhavi.

Paññobhasa did not hesitate in his appreciation of the experience "...I like it...the time passed very fast ...observing morality and accumulating good kamma."

Dhammavijaya pointed out that he had attended two other novitiate courses, but found that those were different from IMP. The schedule was well-planned, there was no pressure and he would have preferred the course to be longer, at least one to two months. "I'd heard of Ven Aggacitta, but didn't really know him. Now I know he is a monk who really follows Vinaya and dhutanga practices. He is very open, patient and respects other points of view. After seven days, we still didn't know how to wear the robes properly, and he checked and helped us with them every morning. He is full of caring kindness."

In an allusion to the Buddha's advice to the first 60 arahants, Ven Aggacitta in his concluding address to the pioneer batch of IMPPs similarly advised them,

"O IMPPs, I have been freed from all misconceptions of monkhood. You too have been freed from all misconceptions of monkhood. Wander forth and travel around for the welfare and happiness of the many, of gods and men. Preach to them about IMP which is beautiful in the beginning, the middle and the end! "

The end of this first IMP is by no means the end of an interesting experience. Rather, it is the significant beginning of an important stage in the lives of the participants, and in the development of the Buddhist community in Malaysia. Nine fine Malaysian males have taken the first step to finding out whether they have got the right stuff. We are coming of age.

O winged seeds of russet tinge,
Standing tall on the forest fringe,
Your fate: dispersal far and near;
Taking root, sprouting shoots.

Dare we to think
That this is Nature's omen:
The sanctuary's role
A Sangha to mould
For Malaysians to uphold?

Evaluation of IMP

A programme designed to allow Malaysian males considering monkhood to get the feeling of it without having first to make a commitment, was carried out. This will, we hope, help them to make decisions when the time is ripe.

by Lim Lay Hoon

A programme, Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP), was held in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary from 25 November –9 December 2003. Malaysian men with a bent towards the monastic life in SBS were invited to join the programme which is an emulation of monkhood. Ong Boon Uar, Michael Tan, Lee Toon Sun, KC Ng, Charles Khoi, TL Cheong, Melvin Ho, Victor Lim, and Yeoh Kar Kheng became the pioneers of IMP.

The activities conducted during the fifteen days included the following:

- Lectures by Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara
- Presentations by guest speakers
- Discussion sessions with the SBS Sangha
- *Piṇḍacāra* (alms round)
- *Pāli* (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) pronunciation
- Pali Chanting
- Meditation
- Skills training (sewing; making brooms; practical basic astronomy; determining solar noon time)
- Yoga
- Riverside breakfast

The constraint of facilities limited the number of successful applicants to ten. Unfortunately, one of them had to withdraw at the eleventh hour due to unforeseen circumstances. At the end of the programme, an evaluation exercise was carried out where all the nine participants wrote about their impressions of IMP. This has given us valuable feedback which will stand us in good stead in the tailoring of such courses in the future.

Allow me now to share with you the views of some of the participants, given in response to questions posed to them in the evaluation exercise.

Are you glad you participated in this IMP?

There was unanimous agreement on this. In the words of Thiradhamma, "I had

some reservations before I came because I was told that Ven Aggacitta is a very strict abbot and the training programme would be very tough. Well, it turned out to be a very enriching experience for me and I am glad I came."

Medhavi said "I'm very happy to say that whatever ignorance and misconceptions I had about being a monk have been cleared. Ven Aggacitta is a teacher who has the ability to tap and develop his students' potential."

Sivali says, "Ven Aggacitta, being open-minded, patient and kind, is a teacher to whom the participants can voice their opinions freely."

Has your purpose for participating in this IMP been achieved?

None of the participants were disappointed, although Sumana and Ariyavamsa felt that they did not fully achieve what they had hoped to achieve. Ariyavamsa, who expected IMP to be a meditation retreat explained, "I had come with the main purpose of attending a retreat and the secondary purpose of getting monkhood training." Sumana however, whose purpose was to gain an insight into the lifestyle of a monk felt that he had not really experienced the normal life of a monk. "It is so because this is a crash course," he said. The majority came with the main purpose of getting a taste of monastic life in SBS and agreed they had more than a taste of the flavour.

How do you rate your desire and chances of making a long-term commitment to monkhood?

More than half the men came to the programme with an inclination towards making a long-term commitment to monkhood. Their actual experience of simulated monkhood did not dampen this inclination in any way. Thiradhamma said, "Although I cannot join the monastic life immediately, the possibility is there after I have fulfilled my worldly responsibilities."

For Dhammavijaya and Sumana, the experience has whetted their appetite and they will be coming back for more. They left with the promise that they will be back in SBS as postulants in February 2004. SBS awaits your return!

In what way have you benefited from this programme?

This question received unanimous positive response, with the majority explaining that they now have a better understanding of monastic life, know and understand more about Vinaya rules and are aware of the purpose and benefits of observing them. For some, it was an opportunity to enjoy simplicity and peace.

With inspired conviction, Dhammavijaya said, "Today I have a better understanding of the Theravadin's Vinaya. If one has a deep understanding of the Vinaya and its benefits for one's spiritual progress, one will abide by the Vinaya. Then, this automatically harmonises the Sangha community which serves to increase the faith of the lay people. This understanding will dispel uncertainties in one's mind. Hence one is able to highly discipline oneself rightly." Subhamitta contributed, "The IMP has helped me to make a better informed decision about joining the SBS monastics."

Do you find the activities in this programme interesting?

All participants agreed there was never a dull moment. Some of them even felt that two weeks was too short a period of time for the programme. "From day one until the end of the programme, it was so much fun for me. It would be good to have an "IMP Advanced Level", enthused Dhammavijaya.

Generally, the talks by Ven Aggacitta and the guest speakers, discussions and pindacara topped the list of most interesting activities. It is not surprising that riverside breakfast and yoga were well-received as they were novel experiences for most, if not all, participants.

For Sivali however, pindacara was an unforgettable experience for a different reason. Moved by the faithful devotees who turned up daily, he said, "It took a few days to get accustomed to the physical demands of walking down and up daily for pindacara. But it's worth the effort. It was touching to see the large group of devotees waiting eagerly to offer food."

In Conclusion

The success of the first IMP at SBS can best be summed up in the words of Sivali:

"IMP is an excellent programme for those who have stirrings of monkhood. SBS is an ideal place for one who has decided to go forth. This is because SBS has all the necessary facilities and a capable and experienced teacher. SBS also has a holistic programme to train new monks, not only in the theory and practice of the DhammaVinaya but also other skills expected of monks in the 21st century."

Our volunteer dhamma worker reflects on the role of SBS in rooting the Sāsana in Malaysian soil and reminds us of the essence of Buddhist teachings.

Not So Enviable After all

by Dr Yoon Tien Leong

My first visit to Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary was when I served as a volunteer for a week in June 2003. The visit provided me with the privilege to personally participate (albeit only in a very minor way) in the effort to root the *Buddhasāsana* (Buddha's Dispensation) in Malaysian soil. Towards the end of the week's stay, it occurred to me that all of us owe Ven Aggacitta, whom I hold in high esteem for being a truly respectable monk in all Buddhist aspects, the utmost debt of gratitude for his determination and effort to establish such a place. I am glad to have the opportunity to associate with such a monk.

It is relatively easy to run ordinary organisations such as temples and charities. Setting up a Buddhist monk-training monastery that is faithful to the essence of *Theravāda* ("Doctrine of the Elders" — Gotama Buddha's teachings preserved in the Pāli language) tradition however, is the kind of difficult task which is not a popular choice among the many ways to spread the Dhamma.

Engagements such as conducting funeral rites, holding *paritta* (protection) chanting sessions to provide solace in times of need, or even leading Wesak processions, may at first appear to be appealing ways of spreading the Dhamma. However, such mundane events — in which one becomes content, delighted by the participation of huge crowds who may or may not understand or practise the Dhamma — do not constitute the ultimate way to keep the Sasana flag flying. A crowd will sooner or later disintegrate if it is not held together by some integral factors. In our context, monks following the fundamental, authentic practice of monkhood as laid down by the Buddha about 2500 years ago, can be the binding factor.

Establishing a centre to train aspiring members of the Sangha according to the earliest Buddhist tradition is planting firmly the root of the Sasana. There is no doubt that such an effort is a most noble undertaking. The Sangha is the seed for the preservation and propagation of the Sasana, and planting the seed is the most effective way to preserve it. Therein lies the significance in the establishment of SBS.

As I neared SBS which is located among the secluded hills of Taiping, I was reminded that the nature of SBS is not like running a business in a worldly society where people would do anything to optimise material returns. Preservation of the priceless Sasana does not go by the mental paradigm as business does. Instead, it calls for nothing less than great wisdom and compassion.

As I see it, modern day values have an erosive effect on the spiritual basis of our world. Although people are enjoying a much more comfortable and luxurious lifestyle, the three characteristics of *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (non-self) prevail as always — whenever, wherever and whatever.

Imagine a scenario where one totally neglects the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of existence, and is continually pursuing only material gain. Then, imagine another scenario where one, amidst the shroud of greed, hatred and delusion, finds a secluded sanctuary rooted in the fundamental teachings of the Buddha which reveals and stresses the true nature of things and existence. When I picture this, I aspire to support this sanctuary in all ways I possibly can.

Intrinsic Taste *of* Solitude

Teo Chee Kian *found his first stay in SBS in April last year an "eye-opener" (see Sasanarakkha #6) and is back again to make full use of his holidays "experiencing the life of a recluse" and "understanding the intrinsic workings of the mind".*

Eleven days in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary passed by in the blink of an eye. It was not the grandest holiday I ever had, but it was certainly fulfilling and very satisfying to know that my holidays had not been spent wastefully. It offered more than just an opportunity to practise the Buddha Dhamma; it was also a chance to follow closely the footsteps of one of the elders in the Malaysian Sangha — Ven Aggacitta. Although I went through a 14-day novitiate programme in the Buddhist Maha Vihara, Brickfields in 2001 and attended a retreat in Subang Jaya Buddhist Association in 2002, I have to admit this is the closest I have been to experiencing the life of a recluse.

Young people should have a taste of it. I do not want to scare other youths with the idea that one should spend one's time in seclusion during the holidays. Neither do I wish to worry parents that I am putting into their children's minds the idea of leaving home never to return, but the life of a recluse really appeals to me. It is peaceful, calm and noble. Far from the hustle and bustle of the city, SBS offers the aspirant much time to look within himself and to develop concentration.

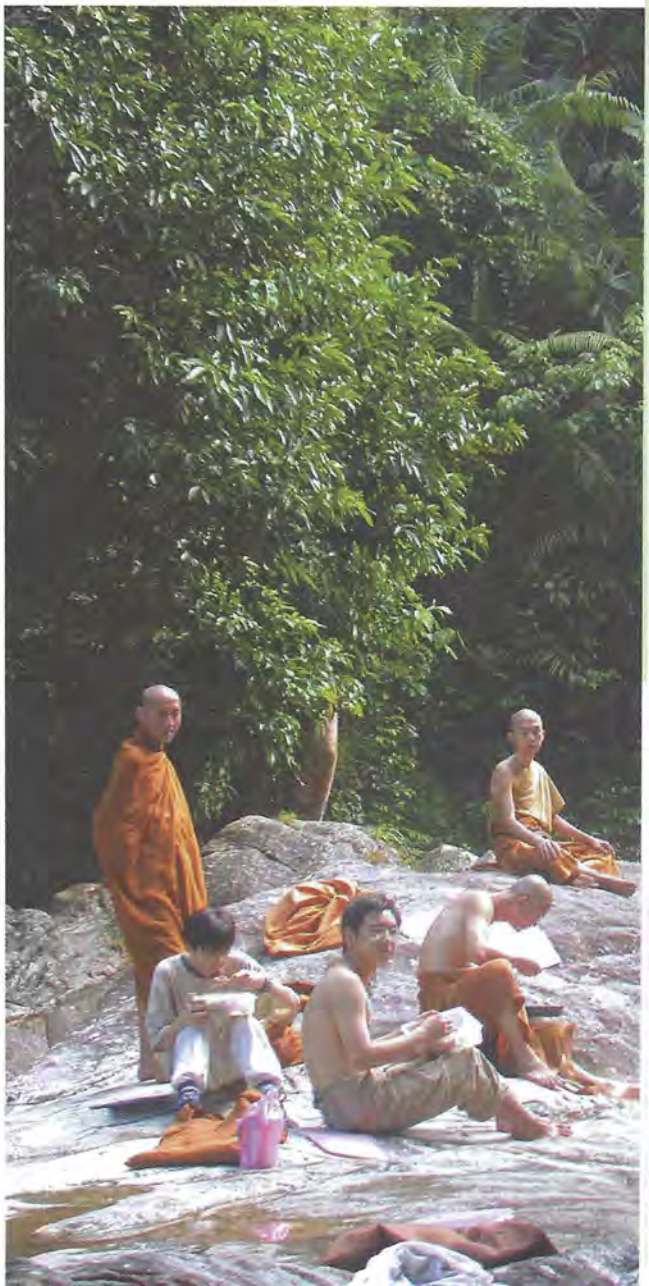
My choice of living near Bhante was sometimes perceived as anti-social. Some thought that I do not have many friends because I am such a 'staunch' Buddhist. Well, let's just say that it was a chance for me to practise equanimity.

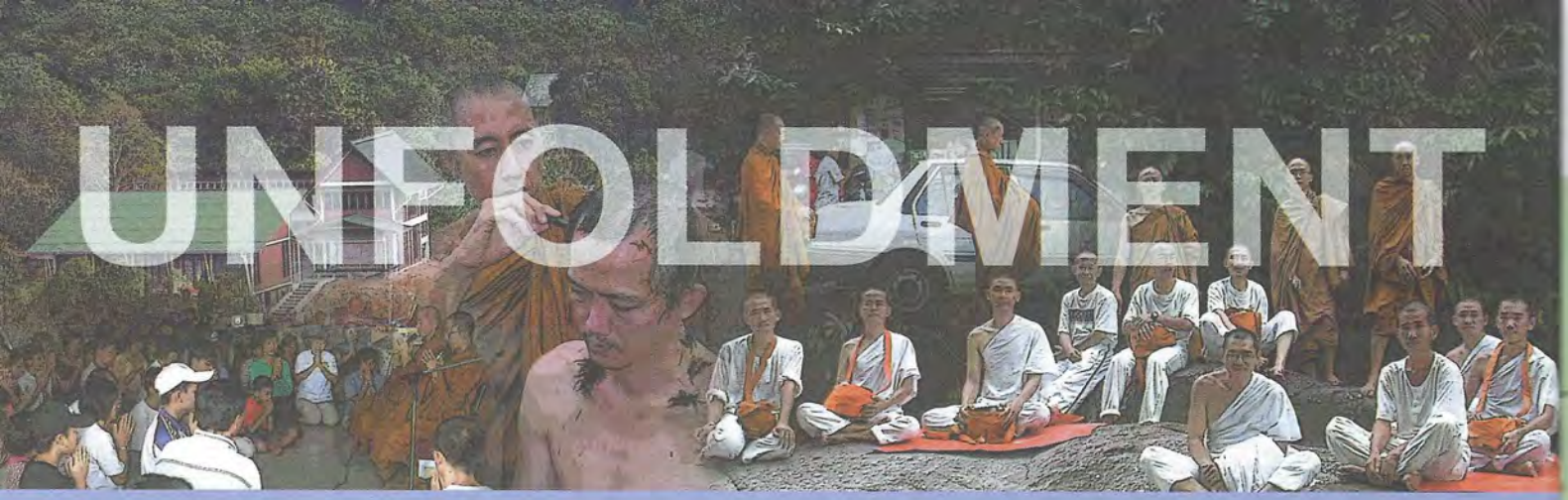
My stay in SBS was very interesting. My 'timetable' was fixed, which meant my days were well planned. Early each morning, I woke up at 5.00am to prepare for an hour of sitting meditation at 5.30am. After that, there were *qigong* exercises at 6.30am, meant to warm one up and start off the day. After that it was time for *piṇḍacāra* (alms round). We walked down the hill at 7.00am to collect *piṇḍapāta* (alms food) and it was usually another one and a half to two hours before we were back again in SBS. After breakfast we were free until 6.30pm when the *Vinaya* (monastic discipline) classes began. At 8.00pm, we had our daily interview with Bhante, followed by chanting at 8.30pm. The chanting sessions ended the activities for the day.

I spent most of my morning after breakfast doing my laundry, a little reading, meditating and sometimes voluntary work such as helping the SBS staff with Adobe PageMaker. In the afternoon, I sometimes spent hours cleaning the *kuti* (hut), on top of my few hours of sitting meditation. In the evening at about 5.30pm, I would focus on chanting and *mettā* (loving-kindness) practice.

Overall, it was a very happy holiday for me to be close to the teachings and the sons of the Buddha. I have to admit though that the holiday was not a bed of roses as I had my fair share of boredom, loneliness and fear of the unknown. However, it allowed me more time to understand the intrinsic workings of the mind and to look *Māra* (the Evil One) in the face.

May you find peace and happiness in this chaotic world.





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.

1 June Ven Aggacitta begins his personal retreat in the afternoon and spends the next six days in Agga Kuti.

5 June Tan Kim Chong aka Ah Seng, an 8-precept-holder who previously stayed in Vivekavana, Bukit Berapit, is here to inquire about *sāmaṇera* (novice) ordination in SBS. He decides to stay for a few weeks. We now have three 8-precept-holders.

14 June Ven Kumara goes to Ipoh to conduct a *sutta* (discourse of the Buddha) reading workshop at Ipoh Buddha Dhamma Association (IBDA).

16 June Devotees from Kuala Kurau sponsor some used fishing nets which will be used to erect fencing to keep away wild boars.

22 June Ven Dhammagaruka, Ven Guttapala, Ven Dhammapala, and Ven Mahapañño are here for a week-long stay.

24 June Upon the invitation from Ven Sek Chee Ern, the abbess of the nunnery on the hill across the river, the monastics walk there for chanting and *dāna* (offerings such as food) in conjunction with its opening ceremony.

5 July Chan Kheng Hoon of Ipoh, Lee Boon Chin and Lee Boon San help with the landscaping of the sima pond area, having arrived yesterday. One of the Lee brothers is a professional landscaper. They spend the whole day hard at work digging, planting, moving boulders, carrying huge potted plants and doing everything else imaginable that is necessary for such a task.

13 July This morning bears witness to yet another landmark occasion for SBS and will lead the way for other similar joyous ceremonies. Postulant Ong Chin Cheong who has completed his mandatory one-year term as a postulant makes history when he dons the robes in the first samanera ordination in SBS.

Bro Ong is ordained as Ven Balacitta by the Abbot after repeating his request for ordination three times in a firm and resolute voice. The ceremony, witnessed by a small crowd of about 30 devotees, is conducted in *Pāli* (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) and Bahasa Malaysia.

16 July Chu Chee Keong, who arrived yesterday, is here as a volunteer worker for 10 days. His first assignment is to label the books in the library of the Abbot's Office.

17 July Ven Kumara and 8-precept holder Tan Kim Chong start their 2-week meditation retreat while Ven Aggacitta tutors newly ordained samanera Ven Balacitta on monastic conduct.

20 July Edwin Lim and wife arrive from KL to have a look at the Sima Hall ceiling that is infested with timber borers. They plan to sponsor the renovation in time for the *kathina* ceremony (a ceremony where cloths for making robes is offered to the Sangha) on 26 October 2003.

22 July GA Cheong Thoong Leong and family donate a Sunpod Dry Cabinet to SBS Sangha for storing electronic equipment sensitive to the high humidity here.

A Fruitful Meeting

IT and Multimedia enthusiasts of Than Hsiang's ITC Department led by Ong Yoon Khing exchanged views and ideas with our Publication Team members.

by Ong Yoon Khing

On 8 August 2003, a hot and humid day in Penang, a group of Than Hsiang staff from its Information and Communication Technology Department began preparations for a short trip to Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary in Taiping, about an hour's drive away. I had made prior arrangements with the Public Relations Manager of SBS for the time and date of our meeting. We were looking forward to this trip as we had seen wonderful pictures of SBS published in its newsletters.

However, the day did not start out as smoothly as we had hoped. The temperature was not the only thing running high as several of my colleagues were seen with frowns plastered firmly on their foreheads. A colleague of ours, who had promised to guide us to our destination, was held up on an errand elsewhere. We decided to leave without him. So, with "highly flammable" written on our faces, brought on partially by the heat within the confines of the van, we began the journey to Taiping, feeling more like demons than devout Buddhists.

All our negative emotions evaporated into the invigorating air at the sight of the lush greenery of SBS located near the peaceful town of Taiping. A slight drizzle greeted us when we reached the foothill of the Sanctuary and whatever embers which still lingered were immediately extinguished. We were all smiles once again.

A black 4WD came into view, with a smiling Hui Fong, whom we later learnt is the administrative assistant of SBS, sitting behind the wheel. Rapid introductions were made, after which we were treated to a thrilling uphill ride as Hui Fong expertly drove up the winding road. As the 4WD negotiated the sharp bends of the steep uphill road, we felt as if we were on an exciting adventure! One of my colleagues said he felt like we were in Jurassic Park. Eventually, a small, white and weathered building came into view, a contrast to the surrounding green foliage. Its two occupants, David and Cheong (members of the SBS administrative staff) came out to greet us. The wonderfully clean, fresh air and the breathtaking view which can rival that of the tea plantations in Cameron

25 July A devotee donates an amplifier and a pair of loudspeakers to us.

26 July Chan Kheng Hoon, Lee Boon Chin, Lee Boon San and Loh Kian Hooi bring a Ranger-load of plants they are donating to us for planting in the sima pond area which they are helping to landscape.

27 July Four monks of the Thai Theravada tradition accompany fifty members of Tze Xin Society from Penang, comprising children and adults, for a day's visit. The members offer requisites to the Sangha and utility items to SBS. Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk based on Sangarava Sutta (AN 3:61).

2 Aug This is officially the last day of work for Cheong Thoong Leong, who has served as GA in SBS for over a year. *Sādhu* (well done) to you for being such an obliging and dedicated worker! However, he will be staying on in SBS as a volunteer worker until the end of the month to ensure a smooth transition of duties to our new GA, David Chang from PJ.

4 Aug Tan Guan Soon, our Sarawak state representative, and a group of other Sarawakians bring Ven Siridhamma of Pontian here for a one-day visit.

8 Aug The staff of the Information & Communication Technology department of Than Hsiang Temple in Penang, led by Ms Ong Yoon Khing, pays us a visit.

11 Aug Two young men, Teo Chee Kian and Cheng Man Fai, arrive for twelve days or so as eight precept-holders. This is Chee Kian's second stay with us. He was here last year as a volunteer worker for a short spell. They are housed respectively in Ekagga Kuti and Caga Kuti. (see Chee Kian's article on page 25).

21 Aug Ven Kumara leaves for PJ to share the Dhamma with the Dhamma Study Group of Persatuan Buddhis Universiti Malaya.

Highlands, had our photographer cum video cameraman busily clicking away as we took in the sights of SBS.

David took us on a tour of SBS and pointed out vantage viewpoints from where we got to see vistas of the scenery at the foot of the hill. The best view was from the open deck near the Buddha Shrine where a gilded Buddha image sits in quiet contemplation, in an artistically landscaped corner planted with colourful flowers and plants which are carefully tended to by devotees. We stood still, silently drinking in the peaceful atmosphere surrounding us.

Soon, we climbed the flight of steps to the Abbot's Office where Ven Kumara greeted us with a smile. He waited patiently as we seated ourselves in a semi-circle in front of him. We began introductions and explained the purpose of our visit. As the editor of the Than Hsiang English E-zine, I was impressed with the contents and design of the SBS newsletter and, as I explained to Ven Kumara, I would like to learn more from SBS, specifically about editing and sourcing articles. Looi Sow Fei and Lim Lay Hoon, members of the publication team of SBS, also shared their ideas with us.

Ven Kumara proceeded to explain the process of using different media to promote the objectives of SBS. We also learnt about coping with writers who are behind schedule in delivering articles, as well as sourcing for articles. I was deeply impressed with the commitment of the SBS volunteers in promoting SBS activities. I was even more impressed when I learnt that the abbot, Ven Aggacitta, who was out of town that day, personally guides each production of the newsletter. We on our part offered to share our knowledge of IT with the SBS Publication Team.

My colleagues and I also shared our experiences of working in Than Hsiang. It was a mutually beneficial learning experience for both parties with regards to working in Buddhist organisations. Ven Kumara also commented on the benefits of working within a Buddhist environment where one is encouraged to practise the five precepts, and abstain from immoral conduct. He also mentioned that one would have to be more "flexible" with one's precepts when working in the fast-paced companies of today. It is certainly much better to develop good Buddhist practice within a religious environment than creating defilements in a "profit-oriented" society.

We gained much from this meeting. Apart from unlimited clean, fresh air which one cannot get enough of, it was a learning experience for us. We look forward to more of such sharing in the future.

24 Aug A small group from the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia, Youth section (Dhammaduta Youth) from Brickfields is here as volunteer workers.

SBS monastics go to collect *piṇḍapāta* (alms food) in the Pokok Assam morning market. This will be an ongoing activity in the markets and hawker centres in and around Taiping town whenever possible on Sunday mornings.

26 Aug This is officially the last day of work for Chi Hui Fong, our Administrative Assistant and pioneer member of the SBS office staff. She has been with us since June 2001. We rejoice in her obliging and dedicated service to SBS and wish her well in all her future undertakings. *Bhavatu te sabbamaṅgalaṃ* (May all blessings be unto you)!

Mah Tuck Cheong, who has been understudying her as a volunteer for several weeks, will be officially taking over on 1 September.

30 Aug Our new GA and his friends, Lau Chung Hung and his brother, donate two units of brush cutters (grass trimmers) to SBS.

5 Sept Ven Sek Chee Ern, the abbess of the nunnery on an adjacent hill, brings Ven Kai Yin from Santavana Forest Hermitage of Sabah, two other monks, three nuns and several lay devotees to visit SBS and pay their respects to the Abbot.

7 Sept Lim Poh Chuan takes Ven Kumara and Ven Balacitta to visit a few pottery kilns in Kuala Kangsar. They are researching on the principles and effectiveness of kilns in order to design one for the treatment of stainless steel alms bowls here.

19 Sept In addition to their daily Vinaya and Pali classes, SBS monastics start a new routine with the introduction of a weekly Sutta discussion session. Today they discuss Anapanassati Sutta (MN 118). Although Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk based on the suttas every *Uposatha* day (full

moon and no moon days when monastics meet to reaffirm their commitment to the monastic discipline), this discussion is a bit different because it can be initiated by any other monastic.

21 Sept We receive two Sarawak indigenous rattan mats for use in the Sima Hall. They have been donated by Ms Chen and friends from Sarawak.

Our GA and his friends donate one unit of DIY workbench, one 4" Bench-vise and a 50 metre roll of reinforced PVC hose.

3 Oct Sutta discussion: Dvedhavitakka Sutta (MN19).

5 Oct A supporter who wishes to remain anonymous donates a Bosch Art 23G Generation glass trimmer and a 12" Propeller Ventilator (SHT 30) to SBS.

10 Oct It is *Pavāraṇā* (Invitation) Day, the last day of the *vassa* (rainy season retreat) for the monks in SBS. In the Pavarana Ceremony, each monks formally invites the other monks to criticise him on his (mis-) behaviour so that he can make amends.

Phra Wong of Kampung Bong, Grik, who is on his way to Ulu Tiram for kathina, breaks journey in SBS. He pays his respects to the Abbot before taking a rest after which he departs by the night bus for Ulu Tiram accompanied by SBS postulant, Ah Seng.

12 Oct Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara attend the kathina ceremony at Wat Pah Santi, Ulu Tiram, Johor.

17 Oct Tong Kok Chan of Metta Pharmacy donates a foldaway emergency stretcher — this is a useful item in the event that any untoward incident happens in SBS, particularly during ceremonies attended by large crowds of people as in the coming kathina.

19 Oct Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara go to Than Hsiang Temple in Penang where the former has been invited to be one of the speakers for a week-long course on "Living and Dying". While in Penang, Ven Aggacitta also helps out in conducting *vipassanā* (insight) meditation and *mettā* (loving-kindness) chanting during the evenings at Penang Buddhist Association, where the University Sains Malaysia (USM) students are holding their English Dhamma Camp.

Some anonymous donors sponsor two units of Senao SN-3118C walkie-talkie for use between the main office and the Field Assistant.

23-25 Oct Members of the visiting Sangha who will be taking part in the kathina ceremony arrive. They are Ven Guttapala and Ven Dhammagaruka from Penang; Ven Upahusu, Ven Dhammapala and Ven Mahapañño from Wat Pah Santi, Ulu Tiram; Ven Vuttisilo from Kelantan; and Ven Hirimano from Hulu Perak.

26 Oct It is Kathina Day. A total of ten members of the Sangha participate in today's ceremonies — three residents and seven from other parts of Malaysia.

It is the rainy season and the Taiping weather was as usual faithful to its characteristic wet nature yesterday and the day before. At about 7.00am this morning, just the hint of drizzle, hardly perceptible to most, comes like a sprinkling of blessings. The rest of the day welcomes all present, bathing each and everyone in comfortably warm sunshine, in weather ideal for today as part of the ceremonies is carried out in the open.

Bandar Utama Buddhist Society (BUBS) and Buddhist Fellowship (BF) from Singapore are joint sponsors for this year's kathina.

Today's indoor ceremonies are conducted in the almost completed Phase 3 buildings situated nearby the Sima Hall

The Dhamma Lives...

Some 120 members of Buddhist Fellowship (BF) of Singapore endured the 460-kilometre journey from Singapore to Taiping in three coaches to participate in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary's Kathina held on 26 October 2003 and in the process learnt what SBS is all about. **Ahangama A.P.** *reports.*

After a year of singing the soulful refrains about the Sanctuary at Sunday sessions in our Fellowship Centre, we were finally here, in Taiping.

...at the edge of the forest,
where the spring water flows.

Certainly, the rich imagery Florence Tan had built into Datuk Dr Victor Wee's inspirational tune had boosted all our expectations.

At the edge of the forest,
there are hills high and low,
There the Dhamma seed's planted,
and the Sangha shall grow.

We were here to see this haven, set in idyllic surroundings among the trees, where the essence of Buddhism was being nurtured. Indeed, what we witnessed was this and even more.

Impressions of the Sanctuary

"Such beautiful surroundings... it's just beautiful!" gushed seventy-year-old BF veteran, PC Lim, one not normally stuck for words. "The ambience is so very tranquil, ideal for meditation," added another BF stalwart, KK Lim. Echoing their sentiments, another BF member, Beng Choo, stated, "I'm personally quite attuned to Nature and now being here, singing the Sasanarakkha song in future will be much more meaningful to me!" Her husband, Choon Fatt, added, "It's beautiful, peaceful... blending of natural beauty with modern technology. I just hope that as the Sanctuary develops, there won't be too much technological influence to spoil the environment that's so conducive for the monks to meditate and practise the Dhamma!"

In short, the general opinion was that the Sanctuary remains true to its ideal of being just that, primarily for the training of monks.

This objective was reiterated yet again in Ven Aggacitta's brief address after the offering of kathina accessories. Relating how he and other monks go for alms once a week at various wet markets and hawker centres in and around Taiping, he said that it had the salutary effect of getting across the message that "monks do not take money on alms round". This is a current bugbear affecting Buddhist communities in Malaysia (and even in Singapore). To use a more recent adage, nothing was more effective than "walking the talk" — educating the local populace by example!

Guardian of the Sasana,
Sasanarakkha,
Upholding the Dhamma,
For beings near and far.

Lessons from the Kathina ceremony

It was an inspiration for the Singapore delegation to participate in the kathina ceremony. Particularly so was the tradition of presenting the cloth to the deserving monk, cutting it, sewing the pieces together into a robe, dyeing, and finally drying it. It could not have escaped those present that this daylong process would remind the Sangha of their humble origins and, by having to work together, the virtues of harmony and humility.

Upul Rodrigo commented, "Different societies celebrate the event with slight

where last year's ceremonies took place. These buildings are the Classroom, Library, Publication & Meeting Rooms, and Sangha Central Facilities.

31 Oct Sutta discussion: Rathopama Sutta (SN 35:239)

08 Nov Development Manager 1, Wai Seng Moh, and Tong Hup Engineering boss, Lee Tong Heong, formally sign the contract for Phase 3 construction in the presence of our consultant Quantity Surveyor, Kee Swee Ann, and other SBS Management Committee members.

14 Nov Sutta discussion: Vitakkasanthana Sutta (MN 20).

16 Nov Ven Kumara leads a Dhamma discussion at the Buddhist Society of Ipoh in the evening. The next morning, he initiates *piṇḍacāra* (alms round) at the Simee market.

in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

variations. With the passage of time and particularly because of the complexities involved in organising this in the traditional way, most temples resort to a mere robe-presentation ceremony. The essence is therefore lost!"

For Lina Goh, it was the *piṇḍacāra* (alms round) that was the most memorable. The recently joined BF member said, "It transported me to Lord Buddha's time because of the traditional way it is done here, with devotees all lined up to offer rice as the monks filed past with their alms bowls." Though familiar with the kathina event itself, KK Lim found that it was the explanation of the rituals and practices that brought new meaning. For him, the ceremony, though simple, was very meaningful.

Sponsors' participation

For a good number of those present, the sponsors' stage presentations, which formed part of the day's programme, also held a special place in their hearts. BF's choral rendition of 12 popular Buddhist hymns was certainly a hit, even inviting foot-stomping and chorus support from members of their co-sponsor, Bandar Utama Buddhist Society (BUBS) of Petaling Jaya. The latter's humorous sketch, in a mix of Peranakan and colloquial Chinese, not only brought on the guffaws but also highlighted the problem of "bogus" monks.

Other lessons learnt

The journey up to the Sanctuary the day before Kathina Day also held lessons for some. BF Youth member, Lester Chia recollected, "It was quite a struggle trekking up the dirt track and I remember asking myself why this was necessary — until I came across 78-year old *Ah Ma* (grandmother) just ahead of me. She encouraged me with calls of *jia you* — to step on the gas. She was an inspiration and I learnt a lesson that day — only a determined mind will ensure ultimate success both in life and in our spiritual development."

For PC Lim, the care and concern of fellow trekkers for his welfare throughout the journey from Singapore touched him. "Coming up the hill, for instance, they would sidle up beside me or even behind me without appearing too obtrusive. Makes an old man like me feel really good!"

More lessons learnt

During the tour of the Sanctuary, we were told that the open-air shrine is a gentle reminder that to practise Buddhism, one does not need the edifice of a temple. Lord Buddha, in his day, preached in the open and was exposed to the elements. It is in the practice that we discover the truth and become worthy heirs of his teachings.

Expressing these same sentiments, PC Lim noted, "This has been a very spiritual journey for me." Joe Leng, in turn, is looking forward to more such outings by BF. "It has been a new but good experience! I was delighted to witness the Malaysian and Singaporean groups blending so nicely to make this kathina so special for all of us."

Overview

It is an honour for BF to be associated with this kathina ceremony as a co-sponsor under the aegis of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary. BF Vice-President (Member Affairs), Clara Tang has this to say, "The enthusiasm of our members right from the start has been inspiring. We look forward to the day when we lay people can come here to meditate...!"

We had set out to include a monastery visit on our BF calendar this year because we could not think of a project more worthwhile than one which would expose our members to the essence of Buddhism. When the opportunity arose for us to be a co-sponsor for the kathina, we naturally grabbed it. Judging from the initial feedback, we not only fulfilled our objective but many members walked away from here significantly inspired to put the Buddha's words into daily practice.

Sādhu (well done)! *Sādhu! Sādhu!* Long live Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary!

21 Nov Sutta discussion: Opamasamyutta (SN 20:1-7)

25 Nov Today marks the first day of the 2-week long Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP). It is intended to give people who might be considering monkhood, a taste of the life of a monk.

5 Dec Chu Chee Keong's gift to SBS arrives after an overhaul: a Yamaha motorcycle.

9 Dec Today is the last day of IMP. The programme closes with a short ceremony held in the classroom during which souvenirs are given to the participants. All are in high spirits, thankful for the enriching experience.

11 Dec Ah Seng, who has been trying out life as a postulant in SBS for more than half a year, decides to leave for home and a more suitable place to pursue his personal quest. We wish him a good and fruitful journey.

Relaxation and Realisation at SBS

An ideal "retreat centre" is situated in a valley where the sima pond and the newly completed complex sit, where the sights and sounds of nature abound. The teacher brings the retreat to you.

by Ajahn Jeff Oliver

After a long absence, I have returned to my "family" in Taiping. You see, I used to be a Buddhist monk by the name of Dhammarakkhita. He used to be invited to share Dhamma and in particular *vipassanā* (insight) and *mettā* (loving-kindness) here in Malaysia.

Since I disrobed for personal reasons, I have been living in a *wat* (monastery) in Bangkok from where I would also share the Dhamma. Leading a very quiet lay life, I thought my old Dhamma friends had forgotten about me until one fine day I got an email from Sis Lim Lay Hoon asking me to conduct a ten-day retreat in SBS. Knowing how beautiful the place is and having great respect for Bhante Aggacitta as well as wanting to see my friends again, I immediately replied with a big YES!

My Privilege

I'm the guy who is guiding the yogis along their own personal path to freedom, not that I have reached that destination and come back; it is more that I have gone a long way, further than most but not as far as some, and so I can help those who are starting out.

I am extremely happy, not to mention privileged and honoured to be asked by Bhante himself to do him a favour and run the retreat while he takes time out for his own practice. Thank you Bhante and *sādhu* (well done)!

The Practice Proper

We started with forgiveness practice for about one day to open up any remorseful feelings or heavy emotions that may impede our progress during the retreat. Then we practised metta meditation for a day or two, just to settle in to the new environment and to develop some concentration and peace of mind.

After that I shared with them the teachings from the Satipatthana Sutta, beginning with the six sections on mindfulness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) including breathing, the movement of the abdomen and the four postures of sitting, standing, walking and lying.

Many people ask, "How can we use this practice in our daily life?" There's part of the answer, right there in the *sutta* (discourse of the Buddha): mindfulness of physical actions and movements. Another part of the answer is to know your mind, to often ask yourself, "How do I feel?" Just acknowledge your emotional feeling now, not being dragged along by it, not fighting or rejecting it, but objectively knowing it as it is, and it will settle down and maybe even pass away, leaving the mind fresh, clear and calm. Try it for yourself!

I also explained how the remaining sections of mindfulness of the body (the thirty two parts of the body, the characteristics of the four elements and reflections on death) are used in vipassana meditation.

Having practised mindfulness of physical processes and, of course, being aware of the thinking and wandering mind for a few days, we moved on to include mindfulness of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) and mindfulness of the mind (*cittānupassanā*).

In mindfulness of the mind, we focused on the main states of desire, aversion and confusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). I asked the yogis to observe liking and disliking whenever they arose in the mind, as much as possible. Then I explained about the "Five Friends" (usually known as the Five Hindrances), and so our practice evolved from the gross and easy-to-detect physical processes, to the more subtle and elusive mental and emotional states. I believe this is where the true practice lies — the ability to monitor the heart / mind. After all, that is where our decisions are made. All of our speech, actions and thoughts arise from there. If we have the ability to know our mind in all situations and keep it in balance, calm and free from negativity, then we may live in peace and harmony with all living beings and learn more of life and become truly wise along the way. What a way to go!

As our retreat came to a close, the yogis were feeling satisfied with their new experiences, having learnt more about the technique of vipassana, about the Buddha Dhamma in general and most importantly about themselves.

I personally would like to thank everyone associated with this retreat for making it very successful and comfortable. Also, I would like to thank the yogis for putting in some heroic effort and for accepting me as their teacher.

May SBS continue to prosper and may all beings here live in peace and harmony and swiftly experience the ultimate peace of Nibbāna! (highest and ultimate goal of all Buddhist aspirations, i.e. extinction of greed, hatred and delusion.

15 Dec Leong Kok Wan of Cameron Highlands is here to try out life as a postulant in SBS. He intends to stay for 5 days, but due to an old leg injury that recurs on the way back from pindacara, he has to leave to consult his doctor the following morning.

17-28 Dec Jeff Oliver conducts the year end meditation retreat for SBS volunteers.

Ven Aggacitta and Ven Balacitta leave for Sabak Bernam for a retreat organised by the Malaysia Vipassana Meditation Society, while Ven Kumara begins his own retreat in SBS.

30 Dec Ven Aggacitta leads a discussion with USM students in the evening at their Buddhist House, LotusBud, in Taman Permai, Penang.

...as I understand the Dhamma preached by the Blessed One, it is not easy for one dwelling at home to lead the perfectly complete, perfectly purified holy life, bright as a polished conch.

FROM BACK COVER

that the ceremony would be conducted in *Pāli* (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) and Bahasa Malaysia.

Bro Ong knelt before Ven Aggacitta, asked for forgiveness and requested for samanera ordination by reciting the stock phrases from the Pali scriptures. A translation below shows us how relevant and meaningful those words are even at this time:

Bhante, as I understand the Dhamma preached by the Blessed One, it is not easy for one dwelling at home to lead the perfectly complete, perfectly purified holy life, bright as a polished conch. Bhante, I wish to shave off my hair and beard, put on dyed robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness. May I, Bhante, receive the going forth in this DhammaVinaya *(Doctrine and Discipline). Out of compassion, please make me go forth, Bhante.*

His request, expressing his wish to renounce worldly responsibilities, politics, business and family life and thus dedicate his life to the study, practice and propagation of the Dhamma, was repeated two more times.

Several of us followed Bro Ong to the back of the Abbot's Office where the hair shaving ceremony was performed. This was initiated by his mother, who pulled the razor through his hair a few times. Ven Aggacitta then finished the task. It was a touching moment when Mrs Ong picked up a tuft of hair to keep.

The proceedings shifted back to the open deck for the next stage of the ceremonies when Bro Ong received his robes from Ven Aggacitta. Ven Kumara then accompanied Bro Ong back to his kuti to help him put on the robes. While waiting for them to return, Ven Aggacitta explained to the devotees present the significance of the request to "go forth from the household life into homelessness". He also said that when Bro Ong returned wearing his robe he was not a layman but neither was he a samanera, because he had yet to formally take the "Three Refuges".

Looking serene in his robe, Bro Ong knelt before Ven Aggacitta and recited the "Three Refuges" after him. We were told that it was of utmost importance for the recitation in Pali to be done with perfect pronunciation; otherwise, the samanera ordination would not be valid. Ven Aggacitta bestowed upon him the name Ven Balacitta, which means "strong" or "powerful mind".

Ven Balacitta then recited after Ven Aggacitta the ten major rules of training for a samanera, after which he requested Ven Aggacitta to be his *Upajjhāya*, or preceptor.

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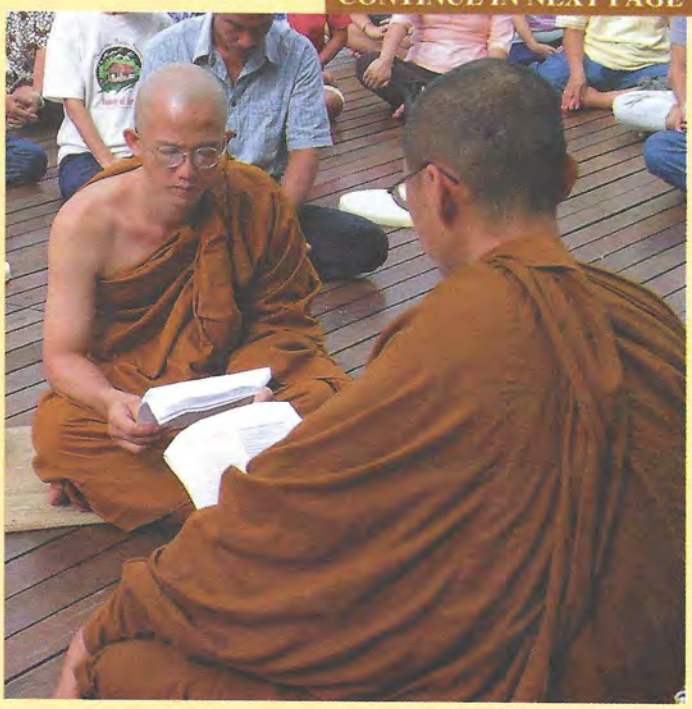

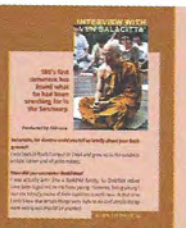

FROM BACK COVER

...my visits to the Brickfields Maha Vihara changed the course of my spiritual life. I wanted to renounce but didn't know where to go.

During my early twenties, I went from one temple to another. I was dissatisfied and confused with what I encountered. Then I met a Theravadin monk who advised me to go to a monastery in Thailand to learn, if I was interested in Buddhism. So in 1988 I left for Thailand. I was actually in a forest monastery called Wat Pah Nanachat in NE Thailand. It was there that I first came in touch with life in a forest monastery setting. I liked the idea of living in seclusion. I was happy during my two-month stay there.

So where did you go from there?

After Thailand my purpose in life became clearer. On returning to Malaysia, I started attending talks at the Brickfields Maha Vihara.

Have you ever been into any other religion apart from Buddhism?

Yes, I was with Sai Baba for a while. It was quite attractive to me then. But my visits to the Brickfields Maha Vihara changed the course of my spiritual life. I wanted to renounce but didn't know where to go. I hadn't heard of any forest monasteries in Malaysia. I thought these could be found overseas only.

How then did you know about SBS?

I actually learnt about SBS by accident. I happened to pick up an SBS newsletter on the free publication bookshelf in SJBA. I looked at the cover and I put it back thinking that it must be somewhere overseas. Then, I don't know what made me take a second look. I realised then that it was in Malaysia, and it was a forest monastery at that. So I was immediately interested and rang the SBS office to make inquiries. I actually wanted to be ordained as a monk at that time but was told that I had to go through life here as a postulant first. So, after a trial stay here for about a week as a prospective postulant, I went back to settle all my affairs in KL and returned to SBS at the end of May 2002.

Did you encounter any objections from your family when you decided to leave lay life?

Yes, but not from everybody. Anyway, what is there to object? I believe I have performed my duties as a son. I have worked hard to give my brother an education as my father passed away when we were very young. So why should they object when I am now fulfilling my own destiny? But I admit that the most difficult part was to let go.

You are SBS's first postulant. Can you tell us about your trials and tribulations during the one year as a postulant?

Life as a postulant was really difficult especially in the first few months. It was most

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The ordination ceremony was over by 11.00am, followed by pindacara in which everyone present participated. We could see happiness and pride written on the faces of the people around and especially on the face of Mrs Ong, who later told us that from a very tender age her son had wanted to become a monk.

In a brief and impromptu interview, Ven Balacitta said that from 1988 he had gone from temple to temple trying to find out more as he had made up his mind to give up the worldly life but he could not find a satisfactory place. He is now very happy that in SBS he can study the scriptures at source instead of being confused with different interpretations.

There was an air of happy fellowship amongst the people present. We truly felt proud to be involved in such a simple yet moving ceremony, rendered all the more meaningful by such a show of support and pride from all present.

difficult trying to separate lay life from spiritual life. I was neither a lay person nor a monk. Being the first postulant, I had no role model to follow. So memories of a lay life pulled me by one hand, and the desire to be a monk, the other. Moreover, I had to adapt to a new environment and a new routine. In SBS, we have to walk down hill and up hill for pindacara. I found this pretty demanding at first, but now I am strong, healthy and happy. It is worth all the hardship I have endured so far.

The indecisiveness as to which side I should go was harrowing. So in the process anger and fear arose. This sort of torment erupted on and off throughout the year.

One day I talked to Bhante about this and asked for his advice. He told me that I had to decide for myself which way I wanted to go. He couldn't make that decision for me. But he did tell me that I was making good progress as a postulant. When I said that I was not aware of that, he gave an analogy. He said that when a woodcutter first uses an axe the handle is smooth. But after years of usage an imprint of his grip can be seen on the handle although he may not have noticed when it first started to become apparent. It is the same in my case, he said. That remark spurred me on.

Devotees have said that you were not very communicative as a postulant. Is that part of your nature or were you asked to keep your distance from lay people so as not to compromise your practice?

Nobody asked me to do that. Actually, Bhante did say that I was not friendly and asked me to change. But I felt that keeping my distance would help me improve in my practice. When I was a layman I used to be good at entertaining guests because it was part of my job. But now I am on the path of practice to become enlightened and if I were to do that sort of entertaining my practice would be compromised. So I decided that it would be better to keep quiet and concentrate on my practice. Please forgive me, dear devotees.

You are making history by being the first monk to be ordained in SBS. What was your reaction and feelings on your ordination?

In a way I was rather disappointed because I thought I was going to be ordained as a *bhikkhu* (monk). Anyway, if it is SBS rules and regulations, I can accept it. I am actually happy now.

A monk needs only four basic requisites, i.e. robes, food, shelter and medicine. I believe that no matter where I am ordained, the quality of the requisites will be more or less the same. But I think it must be my good kamma to be ordained in SBS because here the practice is made easier with the support of the faithful devotees and of course, with the guidance of a very dedicated teacher, Ven Aggacitta.

Devotees have remarked that you look very good and seem happier in robes. What do you think?

I don't know about looking good, but I do feel happy. To be ordained was my target. To tell you the truth, I thought earlier that some kind of bad kamma might prevent me from being ordained. But now that I have been ordained, it is proof that I have not committed such appalling kamma. So how can I not look very happy?

The Pāli (a language in which Gotama Buddha's teachings are preserved) name "Balacitta" was chosen for you. Did you have a hand in choosing it? What does it mean in lay terms?

No, I did not have a hand in choosing it, but I was the first to read it aloud when I was in Bhante's office. It means "powerful mind' and I am happy with it.

In a year's time, you will be ordained as a bhikkhu. Are you looking forward to it and will your name be changed again?

Yes, being a bhikkhu has been my goal all this while. If no unforeseen circumstances pull me away from the holy life I will definitely want to be ordained in a year's time. As for the name, let the Master decide. I am satisfied with the present name but if the Master thinks that by changing it I can become a better person, I will also be happy to accept it.

Do you have any parting words or advice for aspiring monks and lay Buddhists?

For those who aspire to become monks, it is already their good kamma to make such an aspiration. No need for much advice. But if they can enjoy being in seclusion and can meditate well, I believe that they will be able to become happy monks.

However, I would like to say something here. People have different levels of intelligence. So if someone comes and requests for monkhood training, I feel that he should not be turned away or be discouraged. Every aspiring monastic should be given a chance to prove himself. So I hope SBS does not accept students based only on one's education and level of intelligence.

My parting words for lay Buddhists are, "May all of you be well, happy, healthy and beautiful. May you all become stronger each day in your practice." *Sādhu* (well done). Thank you very much.

Thank you for your time, Venerable. We wish you the best in your chosen path. May your progress be swift and smooth.
Sādhu.

ORDINATION DAY in SBS

The first sāmaṇera *(novice) ordination was conducted in SBS on the open deck of the Buddha Shrine, witnessed by a small group of devotees and family members of Ong Chin Cheong.*

by Yeo Khee Aik and Ooi Cheng Cheng

Sunday, 13 July 2003 was an auspicious and memorable day for SBS. This was ordination day, the first such to be held here. Bro Ong Chin Cheong has spent more than a year as a postulant and today he would take the vows of a samanera. As this was our first visit to SBS up in the beautiful hills of Taiping, we really felt honoured and proud to be part of the proceedings.

It had rained in the early part of the morning but by the time the devotees started to go up the hill, the rain had already stopped. A very fresh and crisp hill breeze greeted us with the sun hidden behind some light clouds. The devotees were already up the hill with food for *piṇḍacāra* (alms round).

The crowd made its way to the open deck of the Buddha Shrine and waited with much anticipation and enthusiasm for the ceremony to start. We noticed most people there seemed to know one another, mingling freely in an atmosphere of fellowship.

At 9.00am Ven Aggacitta, Ven Kumara and Bro Ong made their way to the platform and the ceremony began. This was the last occasion for the devotees to see Bro Ong with his crop of hair and in layman's clothes. Ven Aggacitta then announced

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INTERVIEW WITH VEN BALACITTA

SBS's first samanera has found what he had been searching for in the Sanctuary.

Conducted by Akincana

Venerable, for starters could you tell us briefly about your background?

I was born in Kuala Lumpur in 1964 and grew up in the outskirts, amidst rubber and oil palm estates.

How did you encounter Buddhism?

I was actually born into a Buddhist family. So Buddhist values have been ingrained in me from young. However, being young I was not actually aware of their significance until now. At that time I only knew that certain things were right to do and certain things were wrong and should be avoided.

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