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Sāsanārakkha Newszine

News and views from Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS), a special project of Taiping Insight Meditation Society

Second Crop

by Vidhuma Chiu Sheng Bin

If you speak English and want to be trained as a Theravada monk in Malaysia, look no further than Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) in Taiping. Alas, Malaysian males are a complex lot—they fear losing too much if they take up the robes; yet they fear the woes of *saṁsāra*'s merry-go-round if they don't. Thus, SBS is still calling, waiting… and baiting with the Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP).

It has been three weeks since IMP2 ended; a good time to reflect on it and to pen my thoughts. The euphoria has died down, tempered by day-to-day humdrum living and distractions.

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editorial

on the road

The first half of 2004 has brought a respite from major building and construction works. Consequently the monastics have had more time to pay more attention to other matters in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) as well as to personally spread the Dhamma beyond Taiping.

The second Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP2) was held from 20 March to 9 April—read cover story and pg 16 for more details. Seeing the poor response to the calling, Ven Mangala composed some powerful words of inspiration and advice for those on the threshold of renunciation. "Why tarry?" he asks. "Just renounce!" And those who hesitate because of rumours that "Bhante Aggacitta is unreasonably strict" could get some clarification on pg 4.

A week after IMP2 saw Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara conducting a seminar on Sangha-laity relationships organised by the Kota Kemuning Buddhist Centre (KKBC) in Shah Alam on 17 and 18 April. It was a resounding success, according to Benny Liow, KKBC Vice President (pg 22).

Immediately after the seminar Ven Aggacitta flew to Kuching, Sarawak, where he had a short retreat before giving Dhamma talks at three Buddhist centres (see "Unfoldment") for three consecutive days. A revised version of his inspiring talk on how to get enlightened is included in this issue. Turn to pg 8 to see if you can make the grade.

Siddhattha Gotama got enlightened while sitting under the Bodhi tree. If you want to try your luck sitting under one with roots in the original tree, welcome to SBS! On Wesak Day 2004, we planted an Anandabodhi sapling surrounded by an octagonal seat specially designed for meditation (pg 19).

We're not just bringing you past events, though. Important events that are forthcoming include the First Higher Ordination in SBS, a day of rejoicing as Ven Balacitta, who was ordained a *sāmaṇera* last July, will become a full fledged *bhikkhu*. Kathina, an annual highlight, will take place on 14 November. To round off the year, IMP3 is scheduled for 26 November to 10 December, followed by a 10-day meditation retreat.

Don't you think coming to SBS to actively participate in these forthcoming events is better than waiting to read about them? SBS

We've Got Mail

✉ Many thanks for the wonderful "Unfoldment" reports. I find them motivating—the activities happening at SBS and the Dhamma talks.

Chiu Sheng Bin

Thanks for the chance to read the Dhamma talks given by Ven Aggacitta & Ven Kumara.

How Eng Keong

✉ Congratulations on the great job done since the inception of SBS! Although SBS is merely four years old, I would gladly say that it has come of age with the many great activities to-date. I can sense the aliveness of SBS, not to mention the continuous support of the local laity.

So many little things which had been done, as reflected in the Newszine, may seem trivial to some but they are important events in the long term. The work reflects the conscientious effort and determination in charting the history of SBS, for instance, the effort to log daily important events as well as Dhamma talks. These may seem unnecessary to many, but it is an important tool in preserving the history of SBS for later generations to understand and appreciate the scope and amount of effort needed to maintain this Sasana work.

To me, all these work need continuous effort and sustenance and thus it is a reflection of certain *pāramīs* of whoever is involved in the work.

The choice of photos in the Newszine is candid and commendable. In addition, the articles written by various contributors are refreshing and down-to-earth, giving a good choice of reading for the man-in-the-street.

My respect to the Abbot for the good job and I do hope this work will be carried on for many years to come for the benefit of the Buddha Sasana and humanity at large.

Jotika

✉ I read your Jan 2004 newszine about the IMP held last year.

My son, Bjon Yeoh, attended the Novitiate programme at Maha Vihara Brickfields last year.

If SBS is conducting another IMP this year (preferably after the SPM as he is sitting for the exam this year), kindly email me the information so that I can register him for the programme.

Keep up the great job and may the Triple Gem bless you.

Bernad Yeoh

We thank you for finding the time to give us news and views. We do appreciate comments and suggestions and wait to hear from more of you.

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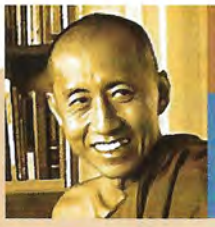
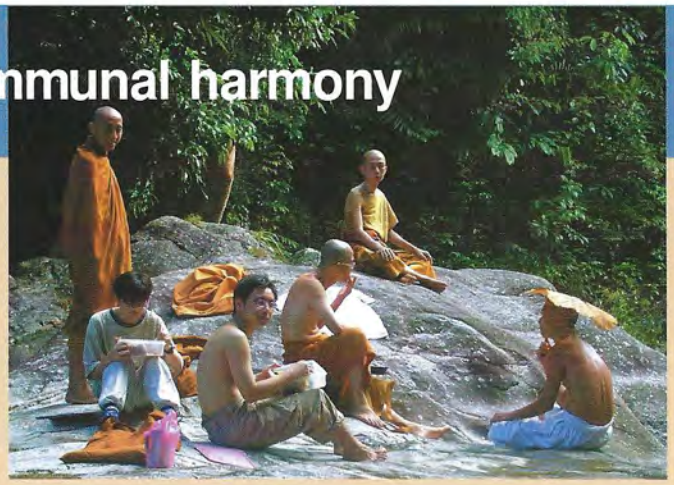


Abbot's *Address*

blessed is communal harmony



Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) was founded on the conviction that the Vinaya was not promulgated merely for the sake of the individual's meditative attainments, but also for more altruistic, communal, and universal motives springing from the supreme, compassionate wisdom of the Buddha. One of these motives is to promote Sangha unity and harmony so that it can more effectively perpetuate the Sasana for the long-term welfare and happiness of *devas* and humans. So, it is not surprising that Ven Ananda expressed his concern over what might happen to the Sasana if Vinaya disputes were to occur. This is recorded in the *suttas* as summarised below.

Pasadika Sutta (DN 29) and Samagama Sutta (MN 104) have a similar opening: Nigantha Nataputta, a spiritual/philosophical leader who was a contemporary of the Buddha had just died and his disciples were quarrelling and brawling with one another over what the correct teaching and discipline (*dhammavinaya*) of their teacher was. The matter was reported to Ven Ananda by the novice Cunda, and together they informed the Buddha. In Pasadika Sutta, the Buddha talked at length on the True Dhamma (*saddhamma*) and how it could be preserved and perpetuated. In Samagama Sutta, Ven Ananda expressed his apprehension over what might happen after the Buddha's demise, saying

> ...there are people who live apparently deferential towards the Blessed One who might, when he has gone, create a dispute in the Sangha about livelihood and about the Patimokkha. Such a dispute would be for the harm and unhappiness of many, for the loss, harm and suffering of gods and humans.

The Buddha answered,

> A dispute about livelihood or about the Patimokkha would be trifling, Ananda. But should a dispute arise in the Sangha about the Path or Way, such a dispute would be for the harm and unhappiness of many, for the loss, harm and suffering of gods and humans.

Roots, Settlement and Prevention of Disputes

Then the Buddha went on to talk on the roots of disputes, how to settle them, and what sort of attitude to cultivate in order to prevent disputes from arising. To summarise, the root causes of dispute are disrespect towards the Teacher, Dhamma and Sangha and not practising the training (*sikkhā*) because:

1. one is angry and revengeful
2. one is contemptuous and domineering
3. one is envious and miserly
4. one is deceitful and fraudulent
5. one has evil wishes and wrong view
6. one adheres to one's own views, holds on to them tenaciously and relinquishes them with difficulty.

The arisen disputes can be settled by certain legal proceedings prescribed in the Vinaya. The preventive attitudes to cultivate are based on *mettā*, and having a common morality (*sīla*) and view (*diṭṭhi*) that leads to the end of suffering.

The last item on the list reminds me of another sutta found in the Anguttara Nikaya (2:4.6), where a brahmin asked Ven Mahakaccana: "Why do lay people dispute with one another and why do monks dispute with one another?" Ven Mahakaccana answered that lay people disputed with one another because of attachment to and obsession with sensual objects/pleasures while monks disputed with one another because of attachment to and obsession with views.

Towards Communal Harmony

I think that preventive measures against disputes—whether about the Vinaya or the path to enlightenment—is a very important area that proper monk-training should deal with. This is for the simple reason that monks are the spiritual leaders and guides of Buddhists in general and of their respective congregations in particular. To this end, we try continuously to instil the four cardinal principles into the minds of SBS trainees:

1. understanding of and respect for the Vinaya
2. practising metta towards all beings
3. mindfulness of one's thoughts and emotions to complement sense restraint
4. humility with regards to one's personal views and openness to the views of others (through the pursuit of general knowledge, particularly the study of the suttas at source, and practical exposure to different interpretations and practices of the DhammaVinaya).

This philosophy also permeates through our policies and guidance to Buddhists, as exemplified in my article on pg 8, which is intended to dispel the "I'm right; therefore you're wrong" mentality and to foster the wholesome attitude, "You may be right and so may I". Eng Kwan Hai's article on pg 24 also seems to nurture this attempt albeit in a style that is more appropriate for the lay reader.

When we have the fortitude to be faithful to our conviction and yet have enough metta to be accepting of those who think differently, we will be mature enough to enjoy the blessing of communal harmony.

> Blessed is the arising of the Buddhas
> Blessed is the preaching of the True Dhamma
> Blessed is harmony in the Sangha
> Blessed is the spiritual pursuit of the united.

DHP 194 SBS

your hearsay? here's our say!

Yeoh Kar Kheng *interviews* **Kumara Bhikkhu** *on Aggacitta Bhikkhu*

You might have heard some unflattering rumours about Ven Aggacitta, the Abbot of SBS. "Don't go by hearsay," says the Buddha in Kalama Sutta (AN 3:66). Listen also to what we have to say—or better still, come see and decide for yourself.

Kar Kheng: Bhante, could you tell us when you first came to know about Ven Aggacitta?

Kumara Bhikkhu: I came to know of him through a trusted friend who learnt of my intention to be a monk. That was probably around 1997. She had met him in Panditarama when she was there on a meditation retreat. She recommended him so very highly to be my preceptor that I was immediately impressed. I didn't get to be ordained under him though as he was not willing to accept students at that time. But I'm quite happy being his student now.

Was he the main reason you came to Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS)?

Yes. And if he had been elsewhere, I would have gone there instead.

What makes him so "special" to you?

Firstly, he's a Malaysian willing to train Malaysians in Malaysia. He uses English, which is my preferred language in which to learn the DhammaVinaya. He's competent since he is well-versed in the scriptures and well-practised too—at least I believe so. Very importantly, he is firm when it comes to discipline, which is a quality that I really need and look up to in a teacher.

After having been his student for some years, have you got what you expected from Bhante?

I've learnt much of the Vinaya as I had expected. I don't think I've met anyone who has a more thorough knowledge of the Vinaya.

He's also as firm a teacher as I had expected. When he finds that I've done something inappropriate he would tell me, sometimes without "giving face". I think, on all those occasions, there was never once when I did not feel at least momentary displeasure. In fact, at times I really resented it.

It's quite a test of my attachment to self-pride. If it's weak, I may see my fault quickly and apologise. If it's strong, I may feel rather angry, though I would not express it accordingly. But when I calm down, I may then see the truth of what he had said and try to find a suitable occasion to apologise for my misbehaviour.

Whenever that happens, I become more mature. I don't see how that could happen if my teacher weren't firm.

He's very strict, huh?

Yes, he's quite strict. Some people, including monks, say that he's "too strict". Maybe that's why some feel intimidated and stay away from SBS.

I don't think it's fair to have a fixed judgement of anyone before we get to know the person thoroughly. As the Buddha said, good judgement requires sufficient time and a discerning mind. Though I've stayed with Bhante for some years now, he still occasionally surprises me. It would be good if they could know Bhante better—the real him, not the hearsay version.

He's strict no doubt, but not unreasonably so. Hope no one thinks of him as what schoolchildren do of their discipline teachers! He is firm with his students, but he is not rigid. From my observations, he seems to be quite discreet about when to act firm and when to just let things be. On top of that, he has this marvellous capacity for *mettā*. That's one thing I didn't expect of him before I came to stay with him and really got to know him personally. Well, I was also quite influenced by hearsay. (smile)

So, I've found him to be a person who can be hard and can also be soft, depending on circumstances. I suppose you could say that he's a person of high EQ (emotional quotient), besides IQ. Sounds like I'm blowing his trumpet, doesn't it? (smile)

But these are just my frank observations about him that I would like to share with others, particularly with those who are contemplating to be trained under him.

I think all of us who participated in the first SBS Introduction to Monkhood Programme would agree that Bhante is a compassionate and friendly person. He is different from what we hear about him outside.

Bhante, have you observed any other special qualities.

something that you didn't expect of him?

I suppose that would be his ability to be open-minded in a critical way. I'm sure you have noticed yourself that Bhante has that rare quality. Haven't you?

Yes! I think many people got a shock when they saw Bhante in a Goenka vipassana retreat. I received a call from a friend just after he came out from the retreat. He told me he would not even have imagined meeting Bhante in that course. He was full of surprise and admiration. I think Bhante has provided an excellent example for all Buddhists.

Yes, I agree. Education by example. (smile)

The more I associate with him, the more I find that I'm dropping my attachment to ideas and becoming open. There is much that I don't know and whatever I do know, I may be wrong about them. Yet, being open-minded does not mean that we should accept everything without critical thinking. We should still be critical but that should also be applied to our own views. Maybe we can call that "critical open-mindedness".

I personally find that ability to be very intriguing and also liberating. It's intriguing because I learn more about myself. It's liberating because I free myself from being imprisoned by my own views.

This open-mindedness has actually enabled me to find some relief from a long-standing wind problem, which has made meditation very difficult for me. Had I not been with Bhante, I probably would not have been open-minded enough to try other alternatives to deal with my problem.

Do you know what made Bhante Aggacitta such an open-minded person? Was he born like this? Did Bhante share his experiences with you? Most of the time, Theravada monks make people think more conservatively, but it is quite different with Bhante

I can't say I know for sure how he became so open-minded. Anyhow, I don't think it is inborn in him.

For example, he told me before that he used to be very critical of his mother's practice of praying to various deities. He tried to "educate" her that they were mere superstitions. But now he has changed his mind rather drastically about it, as you can see in his recent book *Honouring the Departed*. In the book, he seems to be saying in many ways that it's not right to think that we know when we don't really know.

Most people tend to merely accept as the truth what is commonly accepted within the circle of people they associate with. Theravada monks are no exception. So, it's natural for them to "educate" others as they understand or believe. I suppose that's what you mean.

Bhante is a rebel of sorts, a truth-seeker. He is not so willing to settle for mere commonly accepted beliefs when it comes to the Dhamma, the Truth. That's one other thing that I like about him.

Yes, I like that too. I think he's a good teacher. Now, I wonder why so few people come to learn under him, I mean, as a monk or postulant. Do you have any comments about this, Bhante?

I've mentioned this before in another interview which was published in a past issue of *Sāsanārakkha*. However, Bhante believes that there's more to that. He believes that it has to do with kammic affinity. I suppose that's true and I am glad that I have the good *kamma* to be his student. SBS

SANGHA speaks

why tarry? just go forth!

Ven Mangala *was in the midst of his personal meditation retreat in Penang when he received a request from Ven Aggacitta to share with the second Introduction to Monkhood Programme Participants (IMPPs) his experiences of monkhood as well as the practice of Abhidhamma as taught in the Pa Auk tradition. Being a dutiful son of the Buddha, he obliged with his inspiring presence. Now once again he has obligingly responded to our request for an article in this Newszine. Written in the midst of his personal retreat, this short yet powerful article is a must for those who are on the threshold of renunciation.*

Firstly, I guess many good potential candidates for monkhood are held back by petty fears of 'what ifs'. They fear they may fall, having seen some very senior monks fall. They fear some beloved ones may not be able to live well enough if they renounced. Deep inside they feel they are indispensable to the world they live in. So on and so forth.

Please tell them to have a better understanding and faith in the Law of Cause and Effect. Please tell them to contemplate on Dependent Origination and non-self. Then all the fears can be easily dispelled. The fears that triumph on illusion and delusion will find no foothold to stand on. Then all decision-making will be very simple. Fear no loss. Fear no outcome.

Why fear scorn or shame? The shame, if we want to call it so, is in useless fear and indecision. When our ego is big, we fear. Understanding non-self, why indulge in fears? Just walk ahead. We have our *kamma*. Others have their kamma.

If things do not work well, the worst is to disrobe. Failure is never permanent. If we truly try—honestly—there will be no real failure. Every day of *brahmacariya* is meritorious, and is never cultivated in vain even if we disrobe later. Just be honest to oneself in the present moment. Be true to one's present wisdom. Attach not to anybody nor to anything.

Why hesitate? If we say detachment is one of the greatest gifts we can give to the world, the only true way to teach it, is by living it. Detachment can only be taught in a detached manner. We cannot free others without freeing ourselves. Another form of attachment is craving for things, tangible or intangible, in life. Sincere contemplation on death and impermanence is enough to help us make a decisive turn from indulgence in craving for material things and for other aspects of Dhamma (*i.e. mere intellectual theories or views and preoccupations with worldly affairs. Ed.*)

When I was deliberating on becoming a monk, one of the things I considered was, "Thirty or forty years later will I regret the way I spend my youth now?" This thought made everything else superficial and tasteless. Conditional greatness is never great in the stream of impermanence. So I decided, "If there is anything that may be called great that I should do, it is to help myself and others to realise the Deathless."

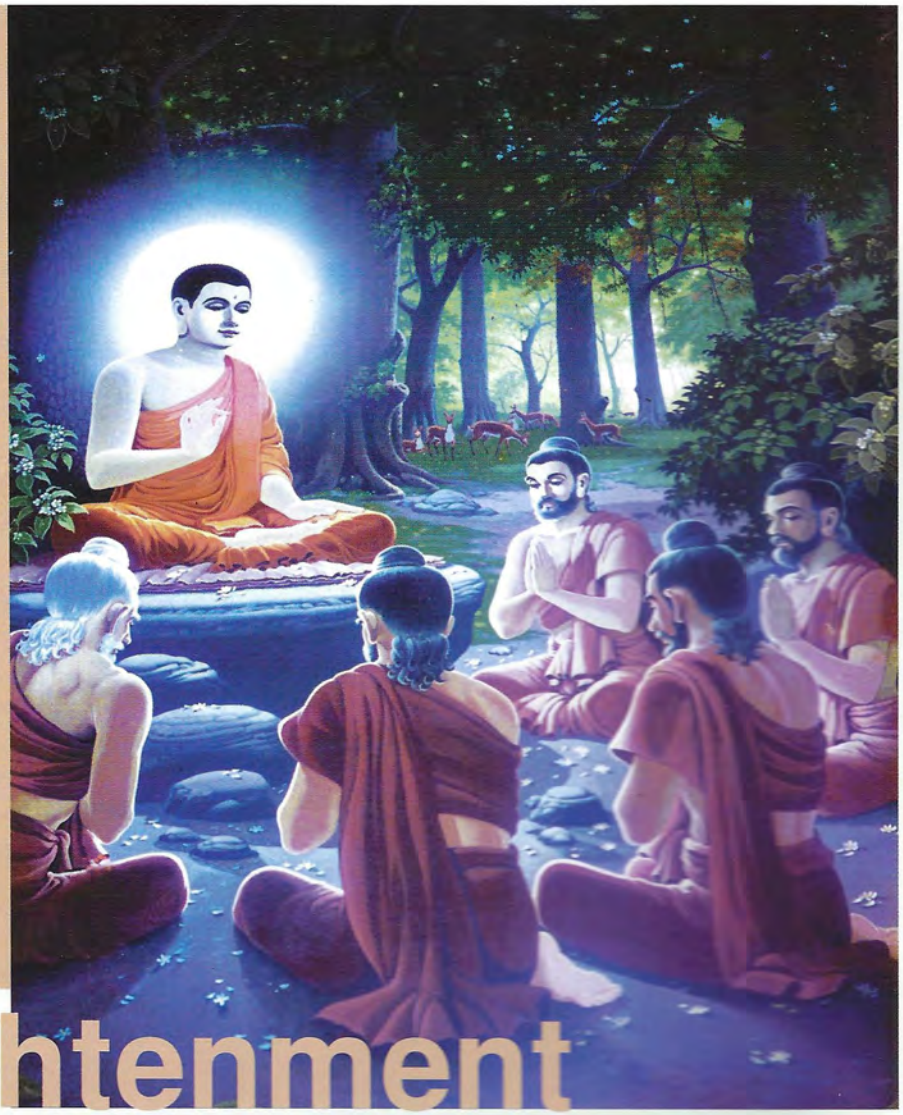
Now, seven and a half years into monkhood, I am still appreciative of this spiritual opportunity granted by the Buddha.

May your vision materialise.
May SBS grow steadily.
May you be well and happy. SBS

dhamma talks

We bring you a record of the Dhamma talks that were given by SBS monastics in Taiping between January to May, 2004. 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 an article based on the talk "How to Get Enlightened" given by Ven Aggacitta at the Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association in Kuching, Sarawak, on 23 April 2004.

Topic/Speaker/Date	Synopsis
Four Sources of Happiness Ven Kumara, 4 Jan	Health, contentment, trustworthy ones and Nibbana
Wholesome Activities for Chinese New Year Ven Kumara, 11 Jan	How one can usher in Chinese New Year in beneficial ways
Piti Sutta (AN 5:176) Ven Aggacitta, 18 Jan	Spring cleaning the house within each of us—the mind
Monkey Tales SBS Monastics, 22 Jan	Lessons about monkeys that can help us to be wiser human beings
Jara Sutta (SN 1:51) Ven Aggacitta, 25 Jan	On precepts, faith, wisdom and merits
Vows of Sakka Devaraja (SN 1:11) Ven Kumara, 1 Feb	Seven habits of a truly superior person
Suppavasa Sutta (Ud 2:8) Ven Aggacitta, 15 Feb	Discomfort in the guise of pleasure
Suppiya and Suppiyā Ven Aggacitta, 22 Feb	The story of two generous supporters of the Buddha
Remembering the Departed Ven Kumara, 27 Feb	How we should remember and honour departed ones
Responsibilities of a Spouse Ven Aggacitta, 6 Mar	Extracted from Sigalovada Sutta (DN 31)
Adhammika Sutta (AN 4:70) Ven Kumara, 7 Mar	How a righteous leader can bring happiness, health and harmony to his country
Kaladana Sutta (AN 5:36) Ven Kumara, 21 Mar	Five types of timely giving
Qing Ming Ven Aggacitta, 28 Mar	The significance of Qing Ming
Jealousy Ven Kumara, 4 Apr	How to deal with this unwholesome mind state
Consequences of Unwholesome Kamma Ven Aggacitta, 11 Apr	Some hair-raising stories based on Luang Por Jaren's personal accounts in *Law of Kamma Part 1*
The Buddha, The Enlightened One Ven Aggacitta, 12 Apr	An introduction to the worthiness of the Buddha's enlightenment as explained to newcomers to Buddhism
Bhojana Sutta (AN 5:37) Ven Kumara, 25 Apr	Five benefits of *dāna*
Cause of Suffering Ven Kumara, 25 Apr	The Buddha explains the cause of suffering in a mundane way to a village headman
Helping Departed Ones Ven Kumara, 30 Apr	Making offerings and transfering merits to departed relatives
Visit to Kuching Ven Aggacitta, 2 May	Ven Aggacitta recounts his experiences in Kuching
Origin of SBS Bodhi Sapling Ven Aggacitta, 3 May	Tracing the origins of the Anandabodhi sapling to be planted in SBS Sangha Court
Kalyanamittas Ven Kumara, 9 May	Qualities and importance of Dhamma friends
Gradual Discourse Ven Aggacitta, 16 May	On the progressive benefits of dana, *sīla* and *bhāvanā*
Protecting Oneself and Others Ven Aggacitta, 23 May	How to protect others by protecting oneself and protect oneself by protecting others



ways to attain enlightenment

Ven Aggacitta opens up more vistas for those seeking enlightenment by scrutinising popular understanding of the process of enlightenment against scriptural evidence.

This article is a revised version of a Dhamma talk given at the Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association, Kuching, Sarawak, on 23 April 2004. It is primarily based on two *suttas* from Anguttara Nikaya—Vimuttayatana Sutta (5:26) and Samadhibhavana Sutta (4:41). In this article, I have used "enlightenment" to mean any of the four stages of enlightenment (but particularly the attainment of the Dhamma Eye, which is usually associated with the first stage of enlightenment) while reserving "liberation" for the fourth stage, i.e. arahantship.

In Vimuttayatana Sutta, the Buddha states five bases (*āyatana*) of liberation (*vimutta*), i.e. five situations from any of which, if one continues to practise, one can be liberated and attain arahantship. Essentially, these bases are concentration (*samādhi*) reached through the following means:

1. listening to the Dhamma
2. teaching the Dhamma
3. reciting the Dhamma
4. reflecting on the Dhamma
5. meditation.

Let me elaborate with examples from the Pali scriptures.

1. By Listening to the Dhamma

While listening to a Dhamma talk one experiences (*paṭisaṁvedī*) the meaning and the Dhamma. This results in a progression of wholesome mental

states—joy, rapture, tranquillity and happiness—culminating in concentration, the base for liberation. In the words of the Buddha, "This is the first base of liberation, and when a monk dwells diligent (*appamatta*), ardent (*ātāpī*) and resolute (*pahitatta*) here his unliberated mind comes to be liberated..." Interestingly, the commentary explains that the Dhamma talk referred to in this sutta means a discourse about the Four Noble Truths.

This was how the first disciples of the Buddha got enlightened. Kondañña, one of the five ascetics who ministered to the *Bodhisatta* when he was striving for buddhahood, attained the Dhamma Eye while listening to the first discourse of the Buddha—Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (SN 56:11).

Ven Sariputta is another example. Called Upatissa before he joined the Sangha, he met Ven Assaji, one of the five ascetics who had attained liberation while listening to Anattalakkhana Sutta (SN 22:59). Impressed by his serene deportment, Upatissa asked Ven Assaji, "Who is your teacher and what does he teach?"

He answered, "The Blessed One is my teacher. But I am new to the Dhamma and don't know much. However, I will share with you the little that I know." Ven Assaji then recited the following verse:

> Of those things that arise because of a cause
> The Tathagata has proclaimed their cause
> And also their cessation.
> This is the teaching of the great ascetic.

Upon hearing this, Upatissa attained the Dhamma Eye. This account is found in Vinaya Mahavagga (para 60).

It seems very simple for these people to get enlightened. Yet in the Canon and elsewhere there are stories of monks who meditated for years but enlightenment eluded them. One such monk is mentioned in the Commentary to Sakkapañha Sutta (DN 21). Ven Mahasivatthera was a great teacher to many *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras*. Inspired by one of his highly attained students, he meditated for thirty long years in vain to try to gain enlightenment. He only achieved liberation when a compassionate *deva* hinted to him to watch his feelings of disappointment. So, we must be humble enough to acknowledge that the process of attaining enlightenment can be highly individualised and very mysterious.

2. By Teaching the Dhamma

While teaching the Dhamma to others one can also experience the meaning and the Dhamma. A similar progression of wholesome mental states ensues—joy, rapture, tranquillity and happiness—culminating in concentration, the base for liberation. In this state, one who dwells diligent, ardent and resolute can also attain liberation.

One such example is found in Khemaka Sutta (SN 22:89). It tells the story of a sick monk, Ven Khemaka, who was trying to explain to his fellow monks the difference between 'I am' conceit (*asmimāna*) and identity view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*). In the process, he and his listeners comprising 60 elders were liberated.

3. By Reciting the Dhamma

While reciting the Dhamma that one has memorised, one experiences the meaning and the Dhamma. Joy arises, leading to rapture, tranquillity, happiness and concentration. Dwelling mindfully and ardently in that state, eager to realise the Dhamma, one can be liberated.

A story mentioned in the Commentary to Dhammasangani, the first book of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, may perhaps help to illustrate this base of liberation. The elder Ven Mahagatigamiyatissadattatthera was travelling by ship from Sri Lanka to Bodhigaya on a pilgrimage. In the middle of the sea where no land could be seen, he compared the vastness of the sea to that of Patthana, The Book of Conditional Relations. This last book of the Abhidhamma Pitaka deals with a very profound topic explaining how everything is related to everything else and how all of them exhibit the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. As he was reflecting on the greatness of the Patthana, presumably by reciting it, he experienced the meaning and the Dhamma, meditated on the feeling of rapture that arose and subsequently became an *arahant*.

4. By Reflecting on the Dhamma

As one mentally reflects on the Dhamma that one has memorised and mastered, one can also experience the meaning and the Dhamma. Subsequently joy arises, leading to rapture, tranquillity, happiness and a concentrated mind. If one dwells mindfully and ardently in this state,

eager to realise the Dhamma, one can also be liberated. The concentration gained through this means is the fourth base of liberation.

I have not been able to find a perfect example to illustrate this base, but I think Ven Sariputta's liberation comes close to this. He attained liberation by reflecting on the abandonment of feelings explained in a discourse given by the Buddha to a wandering ascetic, Dighanakha. Ven Sariputta was standing behind fanning the Buddha during the discourse. According to Dighanakha Sutta (MN 74), Dighanakha also attained enlightenment, but his case better exemplifies the first base.

A Common Theme

These four bases of liberation, and the fifth as we shall see later, share a common theme—a concentrated mind as a prerequisite to achieving enlightenment. The mind can penetrate the Truth only when it is concentrated, free from the Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*).

Most of the lay people (and probably devas too) who attained enlightenment during the Buddha's lifetime did so through the first base, getting enlightened as a *sotāpanna* or *sakadāgāmi* while listening to a Dhamma talk. The intensive meditation retreat for lay people is a modern-day phenomenon. Monks in those days were urged to practise mindfulness and full awareness of all activities and they only practised more formal meditation after completing their chores.

The Buddha used to give a gradual discourse to lay people, beginning with *dāna*, the lowest of the virtues, which brings wealth. Then he goes on to *sīla* which brings rebirth in favourable realms. One with dana and sila can enjoy heavenly pleasures in the next rebirth.

From here the Buddha leads on to the disadvantages of sensual pleasure as opposed to the benefits of renunciation. At this stage, if he finds that the listener's mind is free from the Hindrances and receptive enough to accept the Dhamma, he will talk about the Four Noble Truths. The listener, presumably "dwelling diligently, ardently and resolutely", gains enlightenment.

This was how Yasa, a wealthy man's son, got enlightened. Disgusted upon awaking to the unsightly scene of his sleeping female entertainers sprawled on the floor, he was somehow led to the Buddha's presence. The Buddha took the opportunity to give him a gradual discourse, during which he attained the Dhamma Eye. When his father came looking for him, the Buddha again preached a similar discourse. Consequently, the father attained the Dhamma Eye and Yasa was liberated. This account is found in Vinaya Mahavagga (para 25 – 28).

We might think it is unfair that now we strive so hard in our meditation, yet cannot gain enlightenment. Actually it is not unfair. They had done their homework in their past lives. How many lifetimes have they gone through listening to Dhamma talks, giving Dhamma talks, reciting the Dhamma, recollecting the Dhamma and meditating? Don't compare with others. We must start from where we are.

5. By Meditation

To reach the final base of liberation, one must have properly learned the *samādhinimitta*, properly attended to it, properly maintained it and properly penetrated it with wisdom. One then experiences the meaning and the Dhamma, resulting in joy

Pali term	English translation	Description
appanāsamādhi	absorption concentration	concentration of one experiencing *jhāna*
upacārasamādhi	access concentration	concentration just before jhana is attained
lokuttarasamādhi	supramundane concentration	concentration of the mind when it experiences Nibbana
khaṇikasamādhi	momentary concentration	concentration that is able to focus on changing objects

Table 1. **COMMENTARIAL CLASSIFICATION OF CONCENTRATION**

rapture, tranquillity, happiness and concentration. This is the fifth base from which one can gain liberation by being diligent, ardent and resolute.

What is samadhinimitta? We usually think that nimitta refers to a visual image perceived during meditation. In fact the word nimitta has several meanings, such as mark, sign or cause. So samadhinimitta could mean a sign of samadhi or a symptom of concentration. It could also mean a cause for concentration to occur. According to the commentary, it refers to the meditation subject, which is a cause for concentration to occur.

What is samadhi? What sort of concentration is meant here? There are many types of concentration mentioned in the commentaries, four of which are summarised in Table 1 above.

Jhana and Right Concentration

Nowadays some people like to assert that because Right Concentration (*sammāsamādhi*) of the Noble Eightfold Path is defined as the four jhanas in some suttas, such as Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22) and Saccavibhanga Sutta (MN 141), one must develop the jhanas first before one can be enlightened. Now our present understanding of jhana is largely based on the commentaries, especially Visuddhimagga, and *yogis* who practise accordingly. This understanding describes the rare experience of jhana as follows:

- cessation of verbal thinking and discursive thoughts
- total absorption in an object of attention, e.g. a crystal clear, stable, visual image
- all other sensory perceptions are cut off.

However, it cannot be denied that many beings who gained enlightenment during the Buddha's time did not have these jhanas first. There is neither canonical nor commentarial evidence to prove that Kondañña had developed such jhanas before he gained enlightenment while listening to the Buddha's first sermon. Neither did Upatissa who just listened to four short lines of verse recited by Ven Assaji. And how Yasa and his wealthy father attained enlightenment clearly shows that they did not develop such jhanas prior to meeting the Buddha.

Perhaps we should reconsider our current understanding of the description and scope of jhana in the light of the above observations, particularly on the first four bases of liberation which do not seem to require very intense concentration—yet sufficient to qualify as sammasamadhi for liberation. This notion of jhana should be scrutinised in relation to sutta descriptions of the jhana experience. A typical account can be found in Pancangika Sutta (AN 5:28), where the jhanas are described as right concentration for the development of psychic powers prior to the attainment of liberation. Although the descriptions in the suttas are more elaborate, I have not been able to locate any mention of the meditation subject(s), or object(s) of mental focus. I shall be very grateful for any clarification in this matter with conclusive references from the suttas.

In Mahavedalla Sutta (MN 43), Ven Sariputta explains that the first jhana has abandoned the Five Hindrances—sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, worry and doubt—and possesses five factors—initial thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), rapture, happiness and one-pointedness of mind.

When the mind is rid of the Hindrances it follows that it is automatically concentrated on the object of attention. In this sense then, when a person's mind is thus focused one-pointedly on an object, he has the jhana that qualifies for the sammasamadhi of the Noble Eightfold Path. It is thus no surprise that the Buddha will talk about the Four Noble Truths only when he finds that the person's mind is free from the Hindrances and receptive enough to realise the Dhamma.

In fact, the crucial mental states associated with all the five bases of liberation correspond with the five factors of the first jhana, assuming that vitakka and vicara are already present when "one experiences the meaning and the Dhamma". Even with the exclusion of vitakka and vicara, the other mental states—rapture, happiness and concentration—correspond with the three factors of the second jhana.

These inferences suggest that the actual scope of jhana could well be wider than the narrow definitions in our current understanding.

No.	Type of Concentration	Samadhinimitta	Goal
1	Jhana	(Not stated in sutta)	Comfortable dwelling in this very life
2	Perception of light	Light	Attainment of knowledge and vision (Divine Eye)
3	Consciousness of feelings, perceptions & thoughts	Occurrence of feelings, perceptions & thoughts	Mindfulness and full awareness
4	Contemplating rise and fall of Five Aggregates	Rise and fall of Five Aggregates	Liberation

Table 2. **SUMMARY OF CANONICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SAMADHI**

Fourfold Development of Concentration

In order to have a better understanding of the scope of samadhi in general and in the compound samadhinimitta in particular, we can refer to Samadhibhavana Sutta (AN 4:41), where the Buddha expounded four kinds of development of concentration leading to four different, though related, goals.

1. Jhana

When one is in a jhana state, one is free from the Hindrances. Constant abiding in the jhanas makes the mind undefiled, concentrated and energised, so that even when one has emerged from the jhanas the defilements are suppressed for a considerable period due to the tranquillising effects of jhana. This leads to both mental and bodily comfort for the yogi.

2. Perception of Light

One pays attention to the perception of light and tries to maintain it throughout the day and night. Thus with an open and unencumbered mind, one develops a luminous mind. This will lead to the attainment of knowledge and vision which, according to the commentary, means the Divine Eye (*Dibbacakkhu*).

3. Consciousness of Feelings, Perceptions and Thoughts

Feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*) and thoughts (*vitakka*) are clearly known as they arise, persist and disappear. By being conscious of these three mind states one is actually developing the concentration that leads to mindfulness and full awareness (*satisampajaññā*). The Buddha said the mind is the forerunner of all things; that everything is mind-made (Dhp 1). So, if one really watches one's mind, one will clearly be aware of each thought, word and action before one speaks or acts.

4. Contemplating Rise and Fall of the Five Aggregates

When one watches the arising and passing away of the Five Aggregates—matter, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness—one is developing the concentration that leads to liberation, the destruction of all mental defilements.

Samadhinimitta of Fifth Base of Liberation

Having discussed the four kinds of development of concentration, we are now in a better position to consider the options that can qualify to be a samadhinimitta—"cause for concentration to occur" or meditation subject—in the context of the fifth base of liberation.

Table 2 above summarises the type of concentration, its meditation subject and its respective goal according to Samadhibhavana Sutta.

If we regard the bottom line criterion for all the bases of liberation as the attainment of concentration, any of the four options listed in the table are valid. However, it seems that only the fourth type of concentration leads directly to liberation. Alternatively, one could hypothesise that the final steps leading to liberation—"dwelling diligently, ardently and resolutely here [in this base of liberation]"—refer to the fourth type of development of concentration.

In other words, the samadhinimittas of

- jhana
- perception of light
- consciousness of feelings, perceptions and thoughts

can only bring one to the fifth base of liberation. After that, one "dwells diligent, ardent and resolute in this base" by developing the concentration associated with contemplating the rise and fall of the Five Aggregates. Only then, according to this hypothesis, can one attain liberation.

On the other hand, if one properly learns the samadhinimitta by contemplating the rise and fall of the Five Aggregates, properly attends to it, properly maintains it, and properly penetrates it with wisdom, one can experience the meaning and the Dhamma, resulting in joy, rapture, tranquillity, happiness and concentration. This is the fifth base from which one can gain liberation by continuing to be diligent, ardent and resolute.

An interesting observation here is that, as usual, the meditation subject leading to the attainment of jhana is not mentioned. Could this mean that if any valid samadhinimitta has been properly penetrated with wisdom, then jhana will eventually occur as the fifth base of

liberation? One is tempted to speculate that the narrow definition of jhana in the commentaries inevitably led to the non-canonical classification of samadhi into *appanā*, *upacāra*, *khaṇika* and *lokuttara* in order to explain away resultant anomalies such as this.

Summary

From the above discussion, we can make the following summary:

- Attaining enlightenment requires samadhi.
- Besides meditation, there are other ways of attaining samadhi.
- All the ways mentioned require the experience of the meaning and the Dhamma connected with the Four Noble Truths.
- The required level of samadhi has factors that correspond to those of the first or second jhana.
- We need to review our current understanding of jhana by researching on its descriptions, scope and samadhinimitta as found in the suttas and on the practical experience of Dhamma practitioners.
- After the required level of samadhi has been attained, one must continue to dwell diligently, ardently and resolutely in order to attain liberation.
- One way of dwelling diligently, ardently and resolutely is by contemplating the rise and fall of the Five Aggregates because it is classified as a development of samadhi that leads to liberation.
- We must also bear in mind that there may be other ways of dwelling diligently, ardently and resolutely in order to attain liberation—ways that we are not aware of—because the process of attaining enlightenment can be highly individualised and very mysterious.

Conclusion

We have listened to many Dhamma talks. Some of us have given Dhamma talks, recited the Dhamma and reflected on it many times. Many have frequently attended intensive meditation retreats and tried to maintain regular daily practice. Yet we have still to attain liberation. This should not be a cause for despair, but all the more reason for continuing to pursue *all* these options whenever possible. Then one fine day we can touch the right base of liberation, wherein dwelling diligently, ardently and resolutely our unliberated mind comes to be liberated.

In my opinion, we should particularly try to develop the samadhi on consciousness of feelings, perceptions and thoughts as much as possible since the mind is the forerunner of all our mental, verbal and physical actions. A well-guarded and alert mind will not only be beneficial to our worldly interactions, but will also conduce to the successful development of the other types of samadhi, culminating in liberation. SBS

A historic occasion... Perpetuating the Buddha Sasana in Malaysia

First Bhikkhu Ordination Ceremony in SBS

SBS cordially invites all Malaysian Buddhists to witness the sprouting of the Sasana root in Malaysia this August 8, 2004. Come and be a part of this historic occasion, the first Bhikkhu Ordination Ceremony in SBS. We look forward to having your company to rejoice together on this momentous day.

PROGRAMME

9.00am	*Ordination Ceremony*
10.00am	*Speech by Chairman of SBSMC*
10.05am	*Speech by Guest of Honour*
10.20am	*Collecting Pindapata*
11.00am	*Dhamma Talk*
12.00pm	*Lunch*

Important Note

- *To facilitate arrangements for out-of-town visitors, please contact SBS office at least two weeks before your arrival date (Tel: 05-8084429)*
- *Please be at the Hokkien Cemetery car park by 7.00am*
- *Wear comfortable footwear, preferably sneakers*

CONTINUED FROM FRONT COVER

The two-week programme was pushed back a day so that participants could vote in the general elections. But I was more concerned that my Indian barber had refused to shave my head—he would only trim my hair as short as his electric clipper would allow. I forgot to ask him why, but when I wanted to pay him double for the special haircut, he only accepted his normal rate, preferring to top up with merits.

From seven registered participants, the number petered down to four came D-Day. This left two old men—Khantibala Wong Tin Song and I, and two university undergrads—Samanta Koh Meng Hock of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Sumutta Chu Leng Hock of Universiti Malaya. We were however joined by Ven Kavissara, a young monk from MBMC; in the second week by Cheong Thoong Leong, former General Administrator of SBS who had returned as an Eight Precept holder. Ours was a small, enthusiastic group headed by Khantibala Wong, former President of Buddhist Gem Fellowship.

Four days into the programme, we got into a groove: woke up at 4.30am, group meditation at 5.30am, *qigong* or free-style exercise at 6.40am, down the hill for *piṇḍacara* at 7.15am, breakfast by the waterfall at 8.30am and hour-long lectures at 10.30am, 2.30pm and 3.45pm. We attended group meditation again at 7.00pm, followed by evening *pūjā* and yoga/qigong exercises. Surprisingly, the most trying activity was wearing my robe and getting it to stay on without dropping all over; everything else was a breeze.

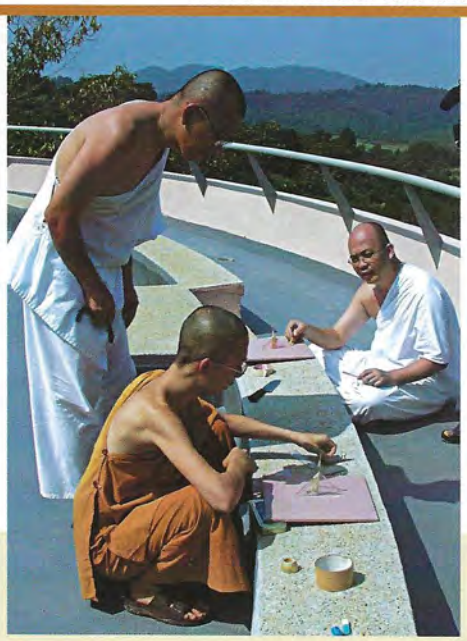
Still, as we got into the second week, the excitement and novelty of being a monk had worn off. Fatigue from waking up early and the daily "long march" for pindacara then set in, to the extent that sometimes I would get through the day in a half-daze. But undaunted, I watched the unpleasant mental states with detachment.

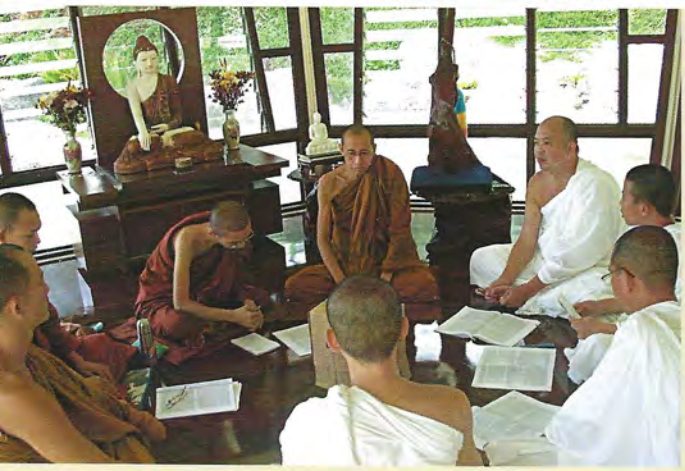
I truly enjoyed the daily breakfast by the waterfall after pindacara. IMP2 coincided with the Qing Ming festival, which made the daily pindacara more fun as we watched filial loved ones praying at the Hokkien graveyards which is at the foothill. I sort of liked the walk downhill for alms and the hike up again. I came to look upon the blood-letting by leeches from our toes and feet as a daily routine of blood donation, while we hurried through a path in the neighbour's durian orchard. I did not mind the leeches, but it was tough walking bare-foot on the stony road. Soon, where possible, I was veering away from the road edge onto smooth, soft grass.

It was a good taste of monastic community living. Everyone pitched in—the participants as well as the three resident monks. The Abbot, Ven Aggacitta, and Ven Kumara gave lectures and led in discussions. The former picked out the stars and constellations in a clear night sky while the latter helped us make sundials to determine solar noon, when the sun is at its highest. Ven Kumara also taught us his special interest—qi gong. After only one session, I could feel the "qi" from my fingers. Ven Balacitta taught yoga at night—special because it combined exercises with meditation. He also led us down the hill for pindacara. He donated the most blood to the leeches since he headed the single-file group. Thankfully, he had also discovered the best leech repellant—dish-washing detergent!

We, the "Fantastic Four", prepared the seating area, cut fruits and dished out the soup for lunch. Other chores included cleaning the common areas—lecture rooms, library, walkways, Sima Hall, Sangha Central Facilities and toilets—and our *kutis*. In addition, we carted topsoil from the forest for planting the Bodhi tree on Wesak Day, and assembled new DIY furniture for the library. We carried out our daily chores with joy as we fully appreciated the beautiful, functional facilities that had been painstakingly built in SBS.

Throughout the programme, the Abbot constantly emphasised the study of the DhammaVinaya, monastic community living and service to lay supporters. He advocated reform in the Sangha—screening would-be monks and proper monastic training under a teacher for five years. Although many Malaysian monks prefer meditation, other monastic skills and duties are also necessary. It is interesting to note that most monks in the established Buddhist countries such as Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka start off with basic training in DhammaVinaya and pastoral work





before embarking on intensive meditation practice. In Malaysia, however, many monks begin as meditation monks and bypass other formal training.

The central theme of the training programme was critical analysis, tolerance and support of different Theravadin traditions. It emphasised on learning the Buddha's true teachings unravelled from the contradictory interpretations and practices found in commentaries, local traditions, and rites and rituals. This is only possible if monks study and understand the DhammaVinaya. IMP is broad based because it covers study, conduct, monastic chores, meditation, counselling and teaching.

It was, therefore, no surprise that we had talks from two respected monks holding different views—Ven Dhammavuddho who places emphasis on learning the suttas for liberation, and Ven Mangala who stresses the practice of meditation according to the Abhidhamma approach. Mr Yap Hock Heng, a counsellor at Than Hsiang Temple, and Mr Lim Teik Leong, a public speaking instructor and retired English drama lecturer of Universiti Malaya, also gave informative lectures. Public speaking and counselling are skills that monks need if they decide to specialise in propagation and counselling work after their basic training.

I enjoyed the main reading *The Broken Buddha*, a critical review of Theravada Buddhism today. It revealed the blind spots in my practice. Coincidentally, my friend, Keat Hoe, who had also read the booklet, mentioned that it had a similar effect on him too. Acts of "merit chasing" and "selfish giving" that many Theravada Buddhists practise today are two very striking weaknesses of devotees. On a positive note, however, even if one starts with "merit chasing", given time and wisdom, one eventually progresses to more noble, selfless giving.

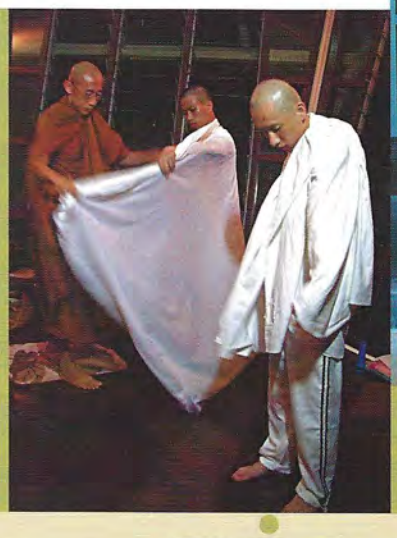
My fellow participants and I have gained immensely from IMP2. Ven Aggacitta is both a strict Vinaya Mahathera and a liberal monk whose wisdom and spiritual maturity permeate IMP2 and SBS. When the time comes for us to be monks, there is no doubt where we will enrol. The seeds will continue to be sown as long as IMP continues. As for the trees and forests that spring forth, I quote the opening line of Jean Giono's nifty story "The Man Who Planted Trees" (1999, Shambala):

> For a human character [or IMP] to reveal truly exceptional qualities, one must have the good fortune to be able to observe its performance over many years.

How true! SBS

Editor's note: *The first IMP was held from 25 November to 9 December last year. Read about it in "Winged Seeds" in our previous issue published in January, 2004.*

IMP comments



bits & pieces

Participants give you their evaluation of IMP2

The second Introduction to Monkhood Programme was held from 20 March to 9 April, 2004. Four participants took part in the programme. A fifth, Ven Kavissara, joined as part participant and part observer.

We bring you some of the comments from the participants.

Khantibala

Vidhuma

Samanta

Sumutta

Sumutta Chu Leng Hock

Besides talks from SBS monks, it was a good idea to get monks from other places to give us talks. It would be better though if we had been supplied with handout notes. Talks should be longer, say about 1½ hours. I suggest some sessions of informal discussions with Sangha members. My faith in the Triple Gem has become stronger.

Khantibala Wong Tin Song

The programme gave a proper perspective on the forest tradition and proper conduct based on the Vinaya. I was able to experience the way of life of a recluse away from worldly matters. The experience has given me more food for thought on the possibility of becoming a monk some time in the future.

Samanta Koh Meng Hock

It definitely gave me an insight into the life of a monk. Besides, it gave me a chance to enjoy a time of seclusion after a year of taxing study in university. It also gave me the opportunity to know people, monks as well as participants, who are knowledgeable in the Dhamma. I will treasure this always.

Vidhuma Chiu Sheng Bin

We received systematic and well presented all-round training. It gave me a chance to share, serve and cooperate within community living. A few sessions of informal discussion would have been beneficial. The broad based activities have given me deeper insight into what it is to be a monk. The daily walk for *piṇḍacāra* could be a bit tiring for some.

Ven Kavissara

Great benefits, both in spiritual and moral development. It has made me more health conscious as I received much benefits from the sessions related to health, such as "Health and Monkhood", yoga and *qigong*. I also gained new knowledge on meditation practice. Having more guest speakers share their experiences of Dhamma practice would make the programme more interesting. Fruit flies can be a nuisance to some though. Maybe more insect-repelling trees such as the neem could be planted. SBS

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

Sásanárakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

Introduction to Monkhood Programme 3

26 November – 10 December 2004

(10 – 20 December, optional meditation retreat)

Learn **meditation, discipline, ascetic practices, Buddhist teachings based on the Pali scriptures** *and more!*

Activities

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

General Programme Components

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

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 the 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 **13 Oct 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 **15 November 2004**

Contact persons **David Chang (SBS General Administrator) Programme Co-ordinator 2** T. 05-8084429/3 F. 05-8084423 E. office@sasanarakkha.org
Doreen Lim Organising Secretary T. 04-8277 118 F. 04-8277 228 H/p. 019-569 4599 E. sukhihotu@pd.jaring.my

After last year's buzz of activity—constructing the buildings in the Sangha area—the relative freedom from the noise of construction these past few months has been a pleasant contrast. There was one important, although mini project though. A specially designed concrete structure was built in the Sangha area to receive the Bodhi tree.

some breathing space

along the long road to development

construction of the bodhiyangana

By David Chang

While a mature Bodhi tree (ficus religiosa) may be sacred and inspiring to Buddhists, its roots are notorious for damaging building structures by growing tenaciously between cracks and crevices and even upheaving floors and foundations. So even before planting the Bodhi sapling, we had already planned to safeguard the surrounding buildings by constructing a giant reinforced concrete pot underground. The pot measures 4 x 4 x 2.8 metres with an average thickness of 0.3m. Sitting above it is an octagonal wall supporting a reinforced concrete slab 0.6m wide and 5.2m in diameter. With a pebble-wash finish, it has been specially designed for meditators to sit on.

Although it appeared to be a minor job, construction took about six weeks to complete. A backhoe was used to excavate a trench around the exact spot where the sapling would be planted, sacrificing a durian tree in the process. Care had to be taken to minimise caving in of the trench walls during and after excavation. Where the soil had caved in, formwork was then built to line the trench in preparation for placing reinforcement bars and for concrete mixture to be poured in to form the walls of the square pot. After the walls were finished, it was filled with earth, leaving the formwork buried underground.

The Bodhiyangana—by definition a terrace surrounding the Bodhi tree—was built only after the completion of the underground pot. In SBS, we have a two-tiered design: the raised octagonal seat above the underground pot and a peripheral walkway paved with large round pebbles. While the seat can be used for sitting meditation, devotees can circumambulate the Bodhi tree along the pebble walkway—with an additional health benefit of foot reflexology!

In order to create conducive conditions for the proper, non-destructive growth of the Bodhi sapling, a pit measuring approximately 2 x 2m in depth and diameter was dug after the durian tree had been felled and uprooted. Then throngs of devotees took the opportunity to collect topsoil from the nearby forest to fill up the pit as a form of Bodhi tree *pūjā*. Some who could not do the laborious job themselves bought and donated bags of organically treated soil. So the planting of the Bodhi sapling is truly a community project in terms of effort and sponsorship. SBS

a royal sapling

with its roots in Bodhgaya

By Chiu Sheng Bin

To mark Wesak 2004, SBS plants its Bodhi tree—not just any Bodhi tree, but one, so we are told, with roots in Bodhgaya

The Bodhi tree planting and *pūjā* at SBS was the finale of Wesak 2004 both for Taiping Insight Meditation Society (TIMS) and Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS). The Wesak Eve offering of lighted candles and guided meditation held in SBS and Wesak Day *dāna* were activities organised by TIMS. All these activities were attended by large crowds.

After the Wesak Day dana in the Grand Pavilion of the Hokkien Cemetery, about a hundred devotees went up to SBS to participate in the ceremony to plant the Bodhi tree at 2.00pm. This Bodhi tree has a "royal" pedigree and boasts a lineage worthy of the red carpet welcome to house it in its specially prepared home in SBS. This particular sapling is a direct descendant of the original Bodhgaya Bodhi. Let me trace its roots. It was grown from a seed of the present Anandabodhi tree in Jetavana Monastery, Sarvasti, India. This tree was grown from a cutting taken from the Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. [*This is according to the 1999 edition of Eicher Guide*, Walking with the Buddha—Buddhist Pilgrimages in India. ***Ed.***] The Anuradhapura tree in turn was grown from a cutting taken by Emperor Asoka's daughter, Ven Sanghamitta, to Sri Lanka in 3rd century BCE from the original Bodhgaya Bodhi tree.

Following the Dhamma talk given on Wesak Day after *piṇḍacāra*, birds, numerous frogs and crickets were released by the side of the pavilion. Four tortoises were released later at a more suitable site. One bird walked away rather than flew, probably due to clipped wings. Ven Aggacitta, the Abbot, then spoke on three types of objects of veneration mentioned, according to the Jataka Commentary, by the Buddha: his relics; things used by the Buddha such as his alms-bowl and the Bodhi tree; and symbols such as the Dhammacakka. Such is the status of the Bodhi tree—recommended by the Buddha as a suitable object of veneration. The Abbot also stressed the importance of making offerings with respect, willingness and joy to gain higher merits. He concluded by encouraging devotees to meditate on the arising and dissolution of mind-matter phenomena, as *vipassanā* meditation is at the highest rung of the merits ladder.

TURN TO PAGE 29

fresh blood new profiles

in the SBS Management Committee 3 (2004 – 2006)

SBSMC2 was automatically dissolved when a new General Committee (GC) of Taiping Insight Meditation Society (TIMS) was elected at its 15th AGM on 21 March 2004. The new GC immediately nominated eligible candidates for SBSMC3 whose appointments were eventually confirmed as shown on this issue's back cover. Minutes Secretary *Anne Saw Lay Ean*'s first task was to get to know the "freshies" and write an article about them.

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) has certainly grown and expanded since my last visit for Kathina in 2001. I never thought that I would eventually be part of the team in this mega project. I hope that I will be able to contribute my share of work on the SBSMC and be a useful member of the team.

My spiritual teacher's words have had an important influence on me, "Practice is important but so is support for the local monastics. This is also practice." Most of my service so far has been food *dāna* to the monastics and offering of requisites. To undertake this task as Minutes Secretary to the SBSMC3 is another offering to the monastics. So here I am.

Curious about the reasons why some of the new members of the SBSMC3 (2004 – 2006) have joined the team, I spoke to some of them.

Yeo Khee Aik's main inspiration comes from the Abbot, Ven Aggacitta. They were schoolmates from primary to secondary school but since then had gone their separate ways. Now that they have met up again, he is inspired to take up the post offered to him—Finance Manager 2. Before his retirement his work involved dealing with finance and funds. Thus he fits

"Practice is important but so is support for the local monastics. This is also practice."

nicely into this niche in the SBSMC3. He was impressed with the setup and more so the peace and tranquility, during his first visit to SBS last year. He saw the tremendous support of the laity in Taiping, which was another source of inspiration for him.

Affinity and the call to do service for the Sasana were Wong Mun Yee's reasons for taking up the post of SBS Representative for Brickfields. He finds SBS a great place to calm the mind. He feels comfortable with his post and will give his best.

Even before joining TIMS as an associate member two months ago, Kevin Chuah had already been requested by Ven Aggacitta to consider the post of Administrative Manager 1. "Why not give it a try?" he had said. This spirit and attitude landed him where he is now. He wished he could be this lucky at work to reach the top position this fast. Kevin works for Nationwide Express as the northern Regional Manager and is at present very involved with planning and launching Nationwide Express's expansion programme into warehousing and logistics. Kevin indicated that his past experience as a volunteer has been in fund-raising for temples. Hence, he needs to learn his new volunteer role in SBS, and is hopeful that he can contribute as he gets more familiar with the responsibilities of his new post.

Major (Rtd) Chong Yin Choon is still getting adjusted mentally to shoulder his new responsibility as Administrative Manager 2. He is still not too confident of being able to give his best. He is still coping with change and adjustment in his personal life, as he lost his wife not too long ago. He is a newcomer to the Buddha Dhamma, having been brought up as a Taoist and is trying to find the bridge between these two religions.

Ronnie Foo, the new Head of Building and Infrastructure Maintenance Section, with tongue-in-cheek, said that he has Lim Lay Hoon to thank for this post. It all happened on a beautiful day at a local supermarket where a friendly conversation with her led to a "booby-trap" that landed him the job. It was he who roped in Major Chong as well. He was frank about having reservations about being able to deliver, but will do his best.

Cheaw Hon Ming seems to be well-tailored for the post of Vice Chairperson 2. His knowledge of Buddhism dates back to his younger days. He is also keenly in tune with nature, a quality that is endearing to SBS.

"When my cousin, Judy Chua, asked me if I would offer my services to SBS I had no idea what it was or where it was located. I had heard about it earlier through a fellow nature lover, who told me that it is a good birding place. Well, what a coincidence! But it was not the birds that attracted me to SBS. It was an answer to a calling.

"As with many Chinese families, I was exposed to a mixture of Taoism and Confucianism with a vague idea of Buddhism. While in college I joined its Buddhist Society which organised Sunday trips to the Brickfields temple and exposed me to the teachings of the Buddha.

"I became very interested in nature and very actively took part in most of the activities of the Malaysian Nature Society, serving as Chairman of the Perak Branch for four consecutive terms from 1997 to 2001. Although I became much removed from Buddhism I never really let it go. On a trip to north Thailand I visited a cave complex where I saw the Buddha's teachings on nature written on signboards placed along the track. I wished then that the same could be done in Malaysia.

"My cousin's call has awakened me to the realisation that it was the missing piece in the big jigsaw puzzle of my life. I felt it was time I went back to the Buddha for guidance. As I am still very involved with nature, I will try to find time to help realise the noble plans of SBS. Guided by the teachings of the Buddha, I will try my very best to contribute positively to the betterment of SBS."

We all have our different reasons for being part of the SBS team. We also have fears and reservations about being able to deliver what is expected of us. However, I believe I speak for everyone when I say that we all have a stake in the Buddha Sasana and will do our part in its perpetuation. SBS

treasuring the sangha treasure

Wrong conceptions righted, joy and laughter, respectful closeness—these were the key

By Benny Liow

The Kota Kemuning Buddhist Centre (KKBC) organised its first major weekend seminar, "Towards a Positive Sangha-Laity Relationship", at its centre in Shah Alam from 17 - 18 April, 2004. The programme was conducted by Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara from Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) in Taiping. More than 70 participants attended the seminar.

The aim was to create awareness and understanding of the importance of the Sangha, the monastic community. Even though the Sangha is the third of the Three Jewels, many Buddhists either do not know much about monks, or worse still, have a distorted view of them. This is particularly true of the Theravada Sangha in Malaysia. While there are more than a hundred Theravada monks—mainly Thais and some Sri Lankans—throughout the country, their contact with the Buddhist lay community is limited to chanting during funerals or prayers and blessings during religious festivals at temples. As Buddhist education becomes more widely available to the Buddhist community today, a question commonly asked by new Buddhists is, "What is the role of monks in modern society?"

It is for this reason that KKBC decided to organise a seminar to address the issues of Sangha-laity relationship and to clear common misconceptions about monks. Consequently, the seminar covered three topics: the origins of the monastic community; the roles of monks in modern society; the relationship between the lay community and monks.

Ven Aggacitta spoke on the first two topics while Ven Kumara took the third topic. Despite it being a hot afternoon, the presentation on the origins of the Sangha elicited endless questions from the audience. The one hour allocated for Q&A was packed with

notes of the Kota Kemuning Seminar conducted by Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara.

questions—much to the relief of the organisers who were initially worried there would be few questions from the floor!

In the second session, Ven Aggacitta's explanation on the role of the Sangha in modern society was best exemplified by the way he related to the lay audience during the seminar—warm, approachable and joyful. The Sangha, he explained, is the spiritual mentor and also a moral conscience for society. A community of well-practised monks becomes an inspiration for the laity to follow in the path of Dhamma practice. Like the first session, the one hour allocation for Q&A was fruitfully utilised as participants wasted no time in raising their hands to ask another question as soon as one question was answered.

Ven Kumara had the challenging task of engaging the audience on the third topic, "The Way of Relating to the Sangha". The crowd for this session was much bigger as the regular Sunday crowd who did not register for the seminar also attended the talk. Speaking with calm and poise, young Ven Kumara clarified and explained numerous issues related to the topic—what offerings lay people should or should not make to the Sangha; the need to understand the Vinaya so that we can help the monks maintain them in their practice; and how lay followers should develop a healthy closeness to, yet maintain a respectful distance from, the monks.

The seminar ended with a lunch *dāna*. Again it was the first time many of the participants got to experience this age-old practice of offering food to the Sangha—the incomparable field of merits! For KKBC it was a rare honour as it gave us the opportunity to express our support for the noble efforts of Ven Aggacitta in founding SBS as a training centre for monastics in Malaysia.

Personally, I think the seminar has achieved its objectives in more ways than we had expected. Subsequent feedback from the participants revealed that they found the two-day seminar intellectually stimulating, interesting and informative. Secondly, we managed to clear a misconception that only Tibetan rinpoches and Mahayanist monks know how to smile and laugh with the laity! At least they now know that even a Burmese-trained meditation monk, a veteran of 24 years' standing, is capable of very human qualities—spontaneous laughter and joy. It is through such mutual Sangha-laity understanding that the Buddha Sasana will be prolonged for the well-being and benefit of all sentient beings. SBS

STRAIGHT from the heart

can we see everything?

By Eng Kwan Hai

When we really understand all that we see, our mind can then free itself from delusion

What do we see and why do we see at all? Unless one is born abnormal, we all have two eyes well positioned on our face. This allows us to see all objects that are 180 degrees in front of us. The other 180 degrees behind our face, we cannot see. Generally we sleep eight hours in the night. This makes up one third of our day of 24 hours. And for the other two thirds of the day—or 16 hours—that we are awake, we only see half of the world. This means that we only take in one third of the things we can possibly absorb within a day!

We should recognise the fact that we do miss out on many events in a day. There are so many things that we do not see and do not know. So what do we really see and know about the world we live in?

What little we see is not the whole world but is like the little bits and pieces that can be seen by peeking through a window into the reality of the world. However, to us those little bits and pieces appear to be the whole world. Our understanding of the world then is just like a cupful of water that, in comparison to the waters of the ocean, is in fact inconsequential. Similarly, what we know when compared to the vast amount of knowledge that exists in the world is also inconsequential. So, can we not see this as a cue to be humble and careful with our strongly held personal opinions?

Are we not all in some kind of delusion and living in a state of ignorance? We are filled with likes and dislikes that are merely projections of our own conditioning. Ideas are presented to the conscious mind and are received and passed on to the unconscious. Immediately they are accepted or rejected according to the ruling belief or idea.

This is not understanding; it is ignorance, but few will see it as such, because a belief or an idea is a reality to most of us. We have yet to know what an idea really is, or how it has been formed in the mind by our environment, by imitation and so on. It is because of this misconception that we have so much confusion and antagonism in the world, leading inevitably and subsequently to war and misery.

Humankind is divided by so many factors: by religion, nationality, groups, beliefs and ideas. This happens because humans cannot and will not see how false these divisions really are. Our ideas and our fears are made up solely in our mind, and what is made up in our mind is not real; so both our ideas and fears have no foundation in the Truth.

When we truly know and understand what a belief or an idea is, the mind will then have the opportunity to free itself from the delusion created by our misconception of reality. Only in that freedom will Truth manifest. When that happens we begin to see things as they truly are: Real.

You see? SBS

sāsanārakkha buddhist sanctuary

KATHINA

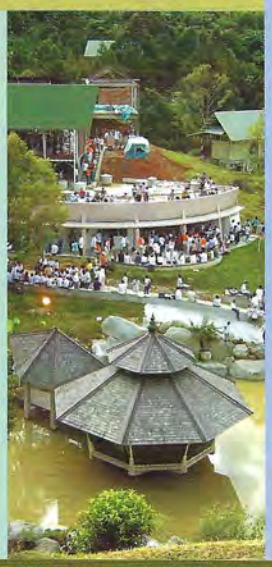
sunday 14 november 2004

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

Experience 2500 years of Theravada Buddhist tradition at the edge of the forest

AM	7.00	*Offering kathina cloth to Sangha*
	7.10	*Speech by kathina sponsor*
	7.20	*Awarding kathina cloth to qualified bhikkhu*
	7.30	*Speech by Guest of Honour*
	7.40	*Sewing kathina robe (monks only)*
		Breakfast for devotees
	8.30	*Presentation by Dhamma Rejoicing Team*
	9.30	*Offering kathina accessories*
	10.15	*Collecting piṇḍapāta*
	11.00	*Dhamma talk*
	11.45	*Lunch*
PM	1.00	*Break*
	2.00	*Continue sewing kathina robe (monks only)*
	4.00	*Refreshment break*
	4.30	*Continue sewing kathina robe (monks only)*
	7.00	*Spreading kathina*

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



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

The Kathina Ceremony Organising Committee will be most happy to:

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

Important note:

- To facilitate arrangements, please contact SBS office at least two weeks before your arrival date (Tel: 05-8084429)
- Wear comfortable footwear, preferably sneakers.
- Bring your own torchlights if you want to come up early to witness the offering of the kathina cloth.

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

Organised by SBS Management Committee and sponsored by Dhamma Rejoicing Team

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.

unfoldment

1 Jan Ven Aggacitta gives an evening Dhamma talk based on Vimuttayatana Sutta (AN 5:26) and Yuganaddha Sutta (AN 4:170) in Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Penang.

2 Jan A nun of the Mahayanist tradition, Ven Shih Liao Guo, and her disciple, both from Yueyang in China, pay us a visit.

3 Jan Ven Aggacitta gives an evening Dhamma talk entitled "Morality and Practice—The Buddhist Way" in Universiti Sains Malaysia main campus, Penang.

5 Jan Judy Chua brings Ven Thubten Chodron, a nun of the Vajrayana tradition, from the United States for a half day's visit.

7 Jan Ven Kumara leaves for Petaling Jaya (PJ) to attend a two-day course on OpenOffice.org.

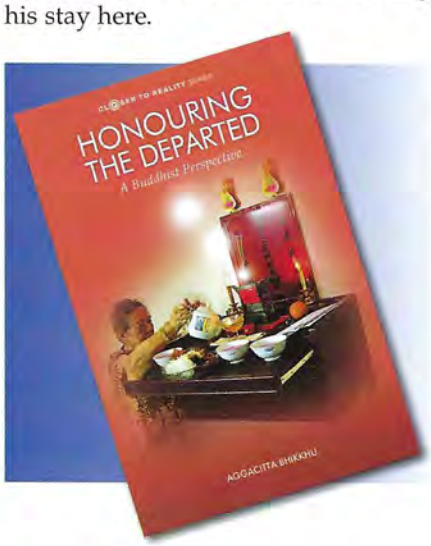
11 Jan SBS Management Committee (SBSMC) holds its monthly meeting in the newly completed Publication & Meeting Rooms building for the first time.

16 Jan *Sāsanārakkha* Newszine #1 (formerly called "newsletter") arrives in Taiping. It will be packed for distribution to various states and should reach our readers before the Chinese New Year.

19 Jan SBS monastics hold a Dhamma discussion at the request of Yeoh Kar Kheng, a pioneer participant of Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP). The topic: investigation of the notion of *paññavimutta* found in Kitagiri Sutta (MN 70), Susima Sutta (SN 12:70) and Paññavimutta Sutta (AN 9:44).

20 Jan Caga Kuti is put to good use for a week as Lim Poh Teik, an SBS supporter, occupies it for his personal retreat.

22 Jan Tan Siew Kia of Singapore puts another kuti, Ekagga Kuti, to good use, occupying it for his personal retreat. He volunteers to translate Venerable Aggacitta's forthcoming book, *Honouring the Departed*, into Chinese during his stay here.



26 – 30 Jan While in PJ for his annual medical checkup, Ven Aggacitta delivers Dhamma talks daily after lunch

dāna at several devotees' homes as well as at Bandar Utama Buddhist Society, where he is accommodated.

29 Jan Ven Aggacitta visits Nibbanavihara, Kajang, and has very interesting and fruitful discussions with the Abbot, Ven Kai Chao, and the resident monks.

30 Jan Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma Talk entitled "Selflessness is a Universal Virtue" for members of Persatuan Buddhis Universiti Malaya at the university's main campus in PJ before returning to Taiping.

2 Feb An anonymous supporter donates a PABX system and an accompanying lightning isolator.

3 Feb Dr Soo Kian Sin, our geotechnical engineering consultant, leaves for Kuala Lumpur (KL) after spending three days in SBS supervising slope erosion control works. In the final two nights Ven Aggacitta introduces him to *vipassanā* and *mettā* meditations.

Although Dr Soo has been volunteering his expertise to us since the physical development of SBS was first conceived, his interest in meditation has just sprouted. How strangely the results of kamma unfold!

6 Feb SBS monastics hold a *sutta* discussion on the introductory section of Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22).

8 Feb Mr and Mrs Tee bring Ven Rahula from Bhavana Society (Virginia, USA) for a brief stay.

Mr Tan Kah Hock of Taiping Candles donates 20kg of fish food for our fish in the sima pond.

10 Feb Ven Jutipañño, Ven Jutidhammo, Ven Dhammika and Phra Sanit together with some devotees of Dhamma Light Monastery, Api-api, Johor, are here for a day's visit. Ven Balacitta shows them around SBS.

15 Feb Ven Sujiva comes for a day visit, brought by Hor Tuck Loon. After paying his respects to the Abbot, who is in the midst of a monthly SBSMC meeting, he is taken on a tour of SBS.

20 Feb Aunty Lim and friends donate a Seiketsu Blood-circulator and Footsole Massager to SBS monastics.

22 Feb A group of volunteers headed by Lim Poh Eng attempt to clear the sima pond of sludge and dead leaves but cannot do a thorough job without emptying it.

24 Feb A set of books published by the Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, India, arrives in SBS. *Sādhu* to Malaysia Vipassana Meditation Society for this precious gift of the Dhamma.

27 Feb Today's sutta discussion is on Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22), dealing with mindfulness of breathing.

12 Mar SBS monastics continue to discuss Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22), covering the conclusion to the section on breathing and the sections on postures, full awareness and 32 parts of the body.

14 Mar The monastics are fasting today and the next two days as part of their health regime.

19 Mar SBS monastics hold a sutta discussion based on the section on contemplation of the elements found in Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22).

21 Mar IMP2 begins today with four participants and one observer. Between today and 4 April, they will be involved in a programme of interesting activities designed to give them a feel of monkhood. See cover story and "Bits and Pieces" pg 16 .

23 Mar Ven Xiang Lung from China and three devotees make a visit to SBS.

25 Mar Teh Yik Ming visits and donates one used table fan for the main office.

28 Mar In view of IMP2 and Qing Ming Festival, Sunday dana is held at Kew Ong Yah Temple (Temple of Nine Emperor Gods) today, as the Hokkien Cemetery is very crowded.

30 Mar Cheong Thoong Leong, our former General Administrator, is here for a three-month meditation retreat. He observes Eight Precepts starting today and follows the monastics and IMP2 participants for *piṇḍacāra*.

3 Apr Ven Dhammarakkhita Thera, a Sri Lankan monk based in Australia, makes a visit to SBS and is housed at Hitesi Kuti for the night.

9 Apr Chiu Sheng Bin and Tan Heng Ghee come all the way from Penang to dress diseased durian trees and prune trees with the help of Neoh Hock Tuan, a local devotee. They also spruce up Bodhi saplings in preparation for the planting of a Bodhi sapling within the newly constructed Bodhiyangana at

Sangha Court. The event is scheduled for Wesak Day next month.

11 Apr About 40 volunteers help to dig for topsoil from the nearby forest and fill up a pit of diameter 6 feet and depth 6 feet for the planting of a Bodhi sapling on Wesak Day, 3 May.

17 – 18 Apr Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara conduct a seminar "Towards a Positive Sangha-Laity Relationship" in Kota Kemuning Buddhist Centre at the society's invitation. See "Treasuring the Sangha Treasure" on pg 22.

18 Apr A group of local devotees take Ven Balacitta to visit Ven Ajahn Suk, an austere meditating monk staying near Kampong Bong, Grik.

Ven Ngawanglelek Gyatso (Polish), Ven Sadragiri (Indonesian) and Ven Zhen Zhong (Malaysian) come to SBS for a visit.

Ven Aggacitta meets with Dhamma Rejoicing Group leaders who are spearheading the fund-raising campaign for Kathina 2004. He then leaves for Kuching, Sarawak, for a week-long Dhamma Tour.

19 – 22 Apr Ven Aggacitta goes on a short retreat at a beach house in Lundu, Sarawak. The house belongs to Victor Teo, President of the Kuching Bhagavan Buddhist Society (KBBS). Sarawak Rep. Tan Guan Soon gallantly acts as the resident *kappiya*.

23 Apr Ven Aggacitta gives an evening Dhamma talk on "How to Get Enlightened" at the Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association, Kuching.

24 Apr Tonight is the turn of the Kuching Buddhist Society to host Ven Aggacitta's Dhamma talk on "Worthy Wishes, Worthy Deeds". The talk ends with an intriguing Q&A session on when conscious life begins in a foetus.

25 Apr Ven Kai Tak, the Spiritual Adviser of KBBS, meets Ven Aggacitta at the society's premises during lunch dana. Later in the evening, Ven Aggacitta leads a Dhamma discussion on meditation practice and ends with a talk on "Fundamentals of Buddhist Meditation and How to Apply Them in Daily Life".

The SBS monastics are invited to Triyana Dharma Cakra Vihara near TIMS for pindacara. Ven Kumara gives a brief talk on the benefits of offering dana to the Sangha.

Two monks from the Taiping Buddhist Association come for a visit to SBS.

26 Apr Ven Aggacitta returns from PJ with the Anandabodhi sapling that will be planted at SBS. Sadhu to Uncle Tan Guan Chye for helping to source for it from TW Lim of Klang.

27 Apr An anonymous donor and friends donate a 50kg safe, five stainless steel soap dispensers and 10 units of "Environment-Protective Torch Lights".

2 May Dr Soo brings about 1kg of signal grass seeds to be planted at remedied landslide slopes.

TIMS holds a candle lighting ceremony to mark Wesak Eve. 4,000 candles donated by Taiping Candles for devotees to sponsor light up the approach road to SBS all the way up to the Buddha Shrine. There is not enough space on the open deck of the shrine to accommodate the 400 odd devotees.

3 May It is Wesak Day. This morning, the monastics attend a special pindacara organized by TIMS at the Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion. To mark the occasion, captive birds, frogs and tortoises are set free. Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk about the significance of the Bodhi tree and on Velama Sutta (AN 3:193).

In conjunction with this auspicious day, a special ceremony is held in the

An Enlightening Experience

By Lim Puay Aun

Joining in the candle lighting ceremony, a first time visitor to SBS sees the light in more ways than one

Candles lining both sides of the paved path up to SBS greeted me as I walked past the large group of people gathered at the foot of the hill waiting for the ceremony to start. It was Wesak Eve, a very important day for Buddhists everywhere. This is the day for Theravadins to commemorate the birth, enlightenment and the subsequent *parinibbāna* of the Buddha.

We decided to walk on ahead to the top instead of waiting for the start of the ceremony with the rest of the devotees at the bottom of the hill. I was not sure what to expect as I had never been to a Buddhist sanctuary before and my preconception led me to expect a Buddhist temple with incense burning everywhere and monks meditating. Well... shows how enlightened I was!

Anyway, preconception took a back seat as I started climbing up

TURN TO NEXT PAGE

candle along the road leading up to the shrine sparkled into life. Each devotee was given a chance to light several candles before passing on the candle lighter to another person as the crowd made its way from the foot of the hill up to the shrine.

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the slope. After one minute of brisk walking I was already sweating and panting, wondering how much longer it would take. I was accompanied on the walk by my wife, my cousin and my aunt who had invited me along. As the slope was quite steep, 4WDs ferried the elderly and young children up. Anyway the walk up, although tiring, was very scenic as I managed to get a good view of the Air Kuning Reservoir and a panoramic view of Taiping town. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the view is better than the one from Maxwell Hill.

All the way up, red candles lined the path and as we got closer to the sanctuary these were replaced by yellow candles which I figured were laced with citronella from the scent in the air. I was told, all in all there were 4,000 candles.

The sanctuary was totally different from what I had anticipated. It used to be a durian orchard and as such still had plenty of durian trees all along the slopes, some fruiting. Little wooden chalet-like cottages dotted the hill slopes.

We finally reached the open-air Buddha Shrine and its open deck—a wooden platform on steel supports, perched on a slope. Before long we could see the people who had witnessed the ceremony at the bottom of the hill, walking up lighting candles along the way. The trail of lighted candles kept growing longer and longer as candle after

Eventually as the crowd began to swell, the whole shrine area was bathed in the soft glow of candlelight. Of the estimated 400 people present, only about 100 were lucky enough to find comfortable space on the open deck. The monks, led by the Abbot, Ven Aggacitta, made their way to the platform. They then led the crowd to take the Three Refuges and Five Precepts. This was followed by a talk on the significance of Wesak.

The Abbot then led us in a *mettā* meditation session. We were guided to focus on good thoughts, spreading loving-kindness all around, near and far. We pictured in our minds, happy and healthy relatives and friends sitting before us. This lasted for about 15 minutes. This, I felt, was the highlight of the night as the peaceful environment and the tranquillity of the air followed by the calming voice of the Abbot made me feel at peace.

After the session the night was capped by refreshments, then the devotees started to descend the hill, some on foot and others by 4WDs. All in all, it was an "enlightening" session and I have no doubt that I'll return next year... and maybe even sooner if the opportunity arises. SBS

Editor's Note: *It had been a rainy week prior to this event—sunny mornings with afternoon thunderstorms and intermittent rain till nightfall. Miraculously on Wesak Eve, only after the 4,000 candles had been systematically arranged, did it start to pour at 4.30pm and stop at about 5.30pm, giving time for devotees to assemble at the foothill at 6.45pm. A feathery drizzle hovered for a while just before we started to light the candles at about 7.30pm, but the sky cleared during the ceremony and the moon could even be seen emerging from the clouds. At about 10.15pm, only after the last load of devotees had been safely sent downhill, did it start raining cats and dogs throughout the night.*

The next day, Wesak Day was unusually sunny, except for the momentary drizzle when the Bodhi sapling was being planted. For about an hour, the newly planted sapling was bathed in bright sunlight, then a torrential shower followed. One can't help but wonder at these miraculous coincidences!

afternoon to plant a Bodhi sapling—a direct descendant of the Bodhgaya Bodhi tree—at SBS. A special structure called a Bodhiyangana has been constructed around the spot where the Bodhi sapling is to be planted. It is strategically located at the NE side of Sangha Court, which is surrounded on the other three sides by a classroom, Publications & Meeting Rooms and library. See stories on pg 18 .

9 May Volunteers organised by Ooi Teow Keat come up to excavate sand clogging the "spillway creek" to pave an uneven terrace leading to Titi Sangha. Another group of volunteers, using two 4WDs, help to transport nine loads of rocks from a site several kilometres away. The beautiful rocks are donated by the landowner for the construction of stone steps leading up to the Bodhiyangana and for landscaping the surrounding area.

SBSMC3 conducts their introductory meeting in SBS.

12 May Work commences on the construction of stone steps and a low rock-pitching retaining wall in the vicinity of the Bodhiyangana. The project is sponsored by Tan Chong Sin.

14 May SBS monastics hold a Dhamma discussion on the section dealing with charnel ground contemplations in Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22).

16 May A group of volunteers headed by General Administrator David Chang go up in two 4WDs and several motorcycles to Khemarama to salvage as many fittings as possible and transport them to SBS. Khemarama was Ven Aggacitta's first residence in Taiping, located on another hilltop SW of SBS. Ven Kusala was the last resident there and since he left for Myanmar in mid-2002, the kuti has been ransacked several times.

18 May Teh Yik Ming donates six units of Elianware Stationery Cabinets for the Sangha cassette tape library.

19 May SBS monastics make a day trip to Penang in the evening to attend the wake of the late Ven Phra Wong of Balik Pulau Buddhist Hermitage who passed away unexpectedly on Tuesday, 18 May.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

At 2.00pm, Ng Kian Chong, the Chairperson of SBS, ceremonially dug a hole. Assisted by others, he planted the Bodhi sapling. When the Sangha started chanting, it drizzled. This shower of blessing had often, during past meaningful ceremonies at SBS, descended on devotees. After the temporary shower, if it was day time, the sun would burst forth giving SBS an ambience of joy and hope. Half way through the chanting, I remembered to remove my slippers and cap in respect. However, most of the crowd were too engrossed in the joy and excitement of the ceremony to remember.

The ceremony ended when the three monks bowed respectfully to the Bodhi sapling after the chanting. Then, what started as casual watering of the newly planted tree turned into an impromptu ritual when enthusiastic devotees lined up to water the plant. The spontaneous rush of participation was a pleasant surprise. Perhaps this indicates the need for more simple rituals in which all devotees can participate, such as lighting candles, bathing the Buddha image and releasing animals.

This ceremony does not tell the full story of all the preparations, the emotions and experiences that culminated in the actual planting.

Ven Aggacitta personally supervised the construction of the Bodhiyangana, a two-tiered terrace surrounding the tree, and an underground reinforced concrete pot to restrict the roots from damaging nearby buildings in the future. The sapling was planted with top soil from the forest, covering a pit measuring 2 x 2 metres in depth and diameter. Devotees had toiled to dig and transport topsoil from the nearby forest to fill up the pit. Filling the big hole was no small task. (See story in "Keeping in Shape", pg 18.)

Heng Ghee painstakingly marked the centre point for planting the sapling and left nothing to chance. Even sourcing for a suitable Bodhi tree is a story in itself. One seedling had already been prepared a month earlier but fell from favour when the sapling of Bodhgaya lineage was found. Quality control at SBS was really tight!

I appreciate the fellowship and chance to do good collectively, bearing in mind that it discourages falling into woeful states in future lives, just as I appreciate regular exercise to avoid falling sick. I often visit hospitals—as nothing beats the sight of the suffering of sick people to remind myself to exercise and live a healthy lifestyle. This is equally true of our hearts and minds, which we have to constantly cultivate with spiritual activities to gain spiritual health. SBS

nurturing durians, making friends

By Chiu Sheng Bin

I made a follow-up visit to SBS on May 28 – 29, 2004 with the following objectives in mind:

1. To inspect diseased durian trees
2. To obtain a census on the number of marketable durian fruits
3. To bag some ripening cempedak-nangka fruits
4. To weed the areas around the durian trees in the section directly above the waterfall.

It was a tiring but exciting trip. The best part was that I befriended a few devotees who turned up to volunteer their help and I also joined in the Friday night meditation session on the open deck.

On the first day, Ronnie Foo helped the whole day in doing the fruit census, identifying diseased trees and removing excessive fruits from diseased and weak trees. We even had to discard all the developing fruits from two badly diseased trees. In the afternoon, I chanced to meet two teenage boys who had hiked up to SBS and got them to help bag 20 cempedak-nangka fruits.

On Saturday, Lim Lay Hoon recruited two of her ex-students from the Methodist School—Lai Shu Zhan and Shirley Yeoh Phaik Gaik—to help. She also managed to get her fellow teacher, Mr Yap Kun Chin, to lend a hand for almost the entire day. See how many new friends I made just by volunteering at SBS! The two girls tied raffia strings around the stems of treated diseased trees and bagged 20 cempedak-nangka fruits. The newspaper bags prevent insects from damaging the fruits.

It was also quite a thrill to pick durian fruits as they fell. I managed to collect one that fell as we were working under the tree. I found another one just as David and I stepped outside the Dhamma Workers' Quarters on the way to dinner. Both were excellent quality fruits.

We identified 36 sick trees and treated most of them with the help of the two SBS General Workers—Kumar and Veeran. We counted 97 good-sized fruits on 16 trees making an average of six fruits per fruiting tree. This is actually not the major fruiting season for durians in Taiping as the main season falls in October/November.

This season, Ms Chen has organised to sell the fruits to devotees and supporters (in all, there are 25 supporters of the SBS orchard who pay a monthly sum to maintain the orchard—*Sādhu*!). So, if you want to buy the fruits that are priced at RM4 – RM6 each, be sure to place an early booking with Ms Chen! But don't worry if you miss out this season; there will be plenty at the year-end season. In fact, Ms Chen will definitely need help to deliver the fruits to Penang and KL devotees at that time.

In total, we bagged 40 cempedak-nangka fruits on five trees near the Sangha Central Facilities area. They are excellent quality fruits that will be sold to SBS devotees when they ripen. All proceeds from fruit sales will go towards maintaining the SBS orchard, such as purchasing fertilisers and weeding.

So, as you can see, from the nurturing of fruits and trees, I have reaped the simple joy of making new friends and acquaintances. What a wonderful trade-off! SBS

20 May Construction works around the Bodhiyangana end today, while materials are being mobilised for another piece-meal project—extension of Jalan Bodhi up till the paved walkway leading to the open-air Buddha Shrine. Again, this project is virtually sponsored by Tan Chong Sin, with help from volunteers in transporting sand and aggregates from the foothill.

Ven Kumara leaves for Kuala Lumpur en route to China tomorrow morning. He will be there for about a month to undergo *qi gong* treatment for a chronic digestive ailment.

23 May Using two 4WDs, volunteers transport sand and aggregates from the foothill up to SBS for the construction of the Jalan Bodhi extension. Concreting will start tomorrow.

28 May Chiu Sheng Bin from Penang is here again to tend to the neglected durian trees in SBS. It is a tiring but exciting trip. He befriends devotees who have turned up to volunteer their help and joins Ah Eng, Ah Chuan and Ah Beng to meditate in the open deck at night.

With the completion of the Jalan Bodhi extension today, devotees can now have safer and more convenient access to the open-air Buddha Shrine.

Ven Aggacitta is in PJ to work with Hor Tuck Loon on this issue of *Sāsanārakkha*. While there he gives short Dhamma talks after lunch dana daily. SBS

Glossary of Non-English Words

Italicised words in the explanations below, e.g. *Theravāda*, are separately explained.

Abhidhamma Pitaka Basket of Higher Dhamma dealing with the analysis of mind, matter and their interrelated processes

Appanā absorption

Arahant liberated person who has eradicated all mental defilements

Bhāvanā meditation, mental cultivation or development

Bhikkhu *Theravāda* Buddhist monk

Bodhi enlightenment

Bodhisatta one who aspires to become a Buddha

Brahmacariya "Holy Life"—the celibate life of monks or Eight Percept holders

Dāna act of giving, an offering

Deva deity

Dhammacakka Dhamma Wheel

Jhāna meditative concentration

Kalyāṇamitta good companion, virtuous friend

Kamma volition; action

Kappiyakāraka steward for monks

Kathina firmness, stability, durability; special ceremony held after the *vassa* where lay Buddhists offer robes and other requisites to monks and where monks traditionally cooperate to make a special robe called the kathina robe

Khaṇika momentary

Kuṭi small house or hut

Lokuttara supramundane

Mahāthera great elder, a *bhikkhu* who has twenty or more years of standing

Mahāyānist advocate or follower of Mahāyāna—"Great Vehicle" —one of the two main traditions of Buddhism, the other being *Theravāda*

Mettā loving-kindness

Nibbāna state of perfect peace, bliss and freedom from all suffering; the ultimate aim of Buddhism

Pāli ancient language in which *Theravāda* scriptures are preserved

Paññāvimutta liberated through wisdom

Pāramī altruistic meritorious deed that will conduce to the attainment of *Nibbāna*

Parinibbāna the final passing away of an *arahant*

Pāṭimokkha monastic code comprising summary of major rules and etiquette

Piṇḍacāra Buddhist monks' practice of going on alms round

Piṇḍapāta lump (of food) dropped (into an alms bowl)

Pūjā honour; respect; devotional offering

Qi essence or energy

Qigong set of physical routines/ movements that generates and mobilises *qi*

Qing Ming (lit. pure brightness or clear-bright) a Chinese festival now most commonly associated with honouring ancestors and the departed. It usually occurs on 5 April in the Gregorian calendar

Sādhu well done, excellent

Sakadāgāmi Once-returner (one who has attained the second stage of enlightenment)

Samādhi concentration

Samādhinimitta cause of concentration, focus of concentration, meditation subject

Sāmaṇera novice Buddhist monk preparing to become a *bhikkhu*

Saṁsāra round of birth and death

Sāsana (the Buddha's) teachings or dispensation

Sīla morality, virtue, precept

Sotāpanna Stream-enterer (one who has attained the first stage of enlightenment)

Sutta discourse

Theravāda "Doctrine of the Elders"—one of the two main traditions of Buddhism, the other being Mahayana. It claims to be the earliest, most authentic extant record of Gotama Buddha's teachings and stresses on striving for one's own liberation as the priority in spiritual practice

Theravādin advocate or follower of *Theravāda*

Upacāra access

Uposatha the Buddhist Sabbath; a day of religious observance and ritual for the laity and the Sangha respectively

Vajrayāna "Diamond Vehicle"—a Buddhist tradition peculiar to the Tibetans, considered a subset of Mahayana

Vassa abbreviation for vassāvāsa, which means "rainy season residence"

Vicāra sustained thought

Vinaya monastic law and regulation

Vipassanā insight (meditation)

Vitakka thought; initial thought

Yogi one who practices meditation

Abbr.	Text	Reference according to
AN	Anguttara Nikaya	Book number:(Chapter number.)Sutta number
Dhp	Dhammapada	Verse number
DN	Digha Nikaya	Sutta number
MN	Majjhima Nikaya	Sutta number
SN	Samyutta Nikaya	Samyutta number:Sutta number
Ud	Udana	Sutta number

All references are based on Vipassana Research Institute's Chattha Sangayana CD-ROM (V. 3.0)

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