www.sasanarakkha.org Issue 4 • July 2005

Sāsanārakkha Newszine

News and views from Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS)

A Lingering Aftertaste

By Lü Xiufei

Some alumni members of Introduction to Monkhood Programmes meet with participants of IMP4 and exchange notes on the changes in their lives that IMP has brought about- some drastic, others subtle; some inwards, others outwards. TURN TO PAGE 14

spiritual **self-defence**
enchantment... a sojourn in the forest
fantastic! interview with **sayadaw u tejaniya**

editorial

Ripples and Rumbles in SBS... and beyond

Sleepless in Sleepy Hollow. The final days of putting together *Sāsanārakkha* is one such situation, for those involved, within Sleepy Hollow—in which SBS nestles—and without. This issue has been especially so for *Sāsanārakkha*'s news team. We have had to put up with near impossible deadlines. A big *sādhu* to all in the news team, for rising to the occasion, sacrificing your time and personal commitments to do so.

Nevertheless, when we finally get to catch up on sleep, we sleep well, lulled by a sense of achievement. This holds true for every issue. Being lulled to sleep does not include our readers, I hope, as they turn these pages. Browse through to give you an insight into the events that have caused ripples and rumbles in SBS and beyond, this first half of 2005.

"Abbot's Address" gives you the facts of the rumble that sent out ripples near and far. The abbot's sojourn in a forest hermitage in Sri Lanka for a much needed recharge of batteries brought "Enchantment" to its writer, and should also do the same for you. The shepherd did not leave his flock (if you will excuse the allusion) unattended while he was away. Sayadaw U Tejaniya extended the boundaries of meditation practice for the monastics in SBS during this time—read "Fantastic" for more.

The ripples in the lives of past IMP participants, created by their joining Introduction to Monkhood Programmes (IMP), will surely interest and maybe surprise you. Will this interest create more ripples to flood SBS with applications to join the next IMP? (see p27). Read "A Lingering Aftertaste" and who knows—you may surprise yourself and create a ripple.

Hush... is that a ripple I hear?

We've Got Mail

✉ Thank you so much for your e-mails which I find are very useful materials to use with my Sunday school teenagers. Do keep them coming. I would also appreciate it if you could share any interesting articles or ideas to make the Dhamma more interesting, appealing and challenging for the teenagers of today so that they can be nurtured by the Dhamma and attracted towards Buddhism.

Lim Siok Hoon

Ven Kumara *replies*:
First of all, I think Dhamma teachers should realise that the Buddha taught the "standard" Buddhist teachings—such as the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, Three Universal Characteristics, Dependent Origination—only to his ordained disciples and lay people who can gain enlightenment with the understanding of those teachings. For others, his talks usually surround issues that apply to their worldly life.

Considering that, we should also speak to others about the Dhamma that is relevant to their lives—things that interest and matter to them. What would those things be? Let them tell us.

In a camp for teenagers that I conducted last year, the activity that was regarded as "the best one" was Dear Bhante. This was where participants wrote down their questions or problems and put them in a box during the course of the camp. Then on suitable occasions, I would pick some of them and try to answer according to the Dhamma as I understand it. I got this idea from Sumi Loundon who seems to have spent much time developing activities for young Buddhists. So, you may like to try a 'Dear Teacher' session.

Doing this effectively requires the facilitator to be knowledgeable and experienced in the Dhamma. Experience would have to come through our own practice. As for knowledge, I think one of the best things to do would be to read suitable suttas. *I find Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations to be reliable. My best wishes in your noble efforts.*

✉ Thank you for the thoughtful invitation to attend Wesak at SBS. I also want to say "thank you" for keeping me posted on activities at SBS via Unfoldment—something I look forward to receiving and reading very much. So too with *Sasanarakkha*.

Tan Yoke Sim

✉ Bhante Aggacitta has been in my *mettā* thoughts constantly as he is a very compassionate and open-minded person. I am impressed that he is very keen to teach early Buddhism, rather than those of the later and modern day teachers, placing great emphasis on the suttas.

Even when I was a monk some two decades back I had that dream, and now that dream is realised, too, in the *Sutta Discovery* series, which Bhante has fully supported. For this I am very inspired and grateful.

Piya Tan

✉ Bhante Aggacitta's good health is a treasure to all of us. Intense metta is going to him from here and all over the world

José Raymond Herrera MD

Editor's note: *The last two mails were written as a response to Ven Aggacitta's hospitalisation for a lung condition in the third week of June.*

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

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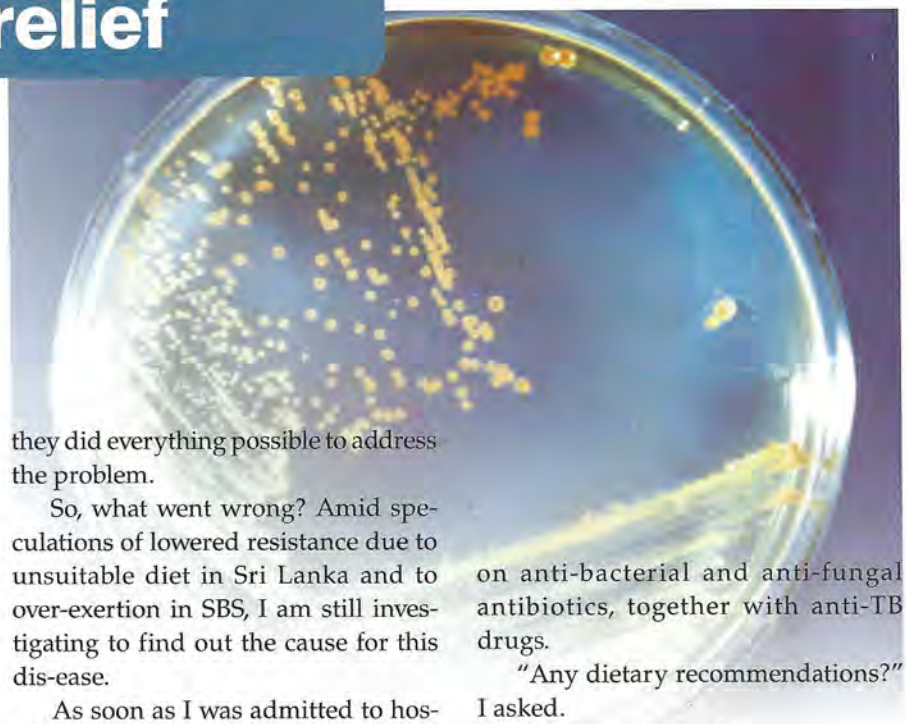
SANGHA speaks

Abbot's Address

cause for dis-ease sigh of relief



After having coughed out about two litres of blood in 1993 in Myanmar, I wasn't too alarmed to part with a quarter of the amount this time in Garu Kuti, SBS, Taiping. Nevertheless, this must have given everyone (including me) a surprise. On 11 June, I was last seen concluding TIMS's Saturday night meditation session in SBS, apparently in good health. But the following morning people were getting SMS messages that I was hospitalised.

SBS supporters in Taiping are noted for their devoted care of monastics. Some visiting monks have even commented on how they "mother" us with health food, nutritional supplements and other services. Moreover, we are pretty health conscious ourselves—practising yoga and *qigong* in addition to daily meditation and morning hikes to collect *piṇḍapāta*.

I would have thought that after recharging myself on retreat (21 April–18 May) in Na-Uyana Forest Monastery, Sri Lanka, I would be able to better handle the tight schedule that lay ahead: Wesak celebrations, SBSMC meeting, talks and discussions in Klang Valley, construction works in SBS and guiding resident monastics. Anticipating that the spicy vegetarian food in Sri Lanka might not suit my *pitta*-inclined constitution, I even arranged for organic food supplements to be brought along and offered daily.

In Na-Uyana, I was given VIP treatment befitting a visiting foreign *mahāthera*. The 'CEO' and meditation teacher, Venerable Ariyananda, ensured that all my needs were met. He even assigned Venerable Ariyadhamma Mahathera's retreat *kuṭi* for me to stay in. I was pretty impressed by the esteem the local forest monks had for seniority, showing respect according to the book, and beyond. When I developed an allergy to the bites of tiny gadflies (*ho-hap-patua* in Sinhalese) they did everything possible to address the problem.

So, what went wrong? Amid speculations of lowered resistance due to unsuitable diet in Sri Lanka and to over-exertion in SBS, I am still investigating to find out the cause for this dis-ease.

As soon as I was admitted to hospital, every attempt was made to stop the bleeding, locate its source and treat its immediate cause. Hooked up on saline for 24 hours and given anti-bleeding jabs periodically, I was lined up for an X-ray, bronchoscopy and CT scan. According to the doctor, the X-ray showed a large cavity in my upper left lung and haziness in the lower portion. The cavity is the damage wreaked by a suspected occurrence of TB in the early '90s while the haziness could be early signs of a relapse. A scope was inserted to get a clearer picture as well as to scrap a sample for biopsy, but the mass of jelly-like blood clots foiled the attempt. "One thing's certain, though," said the doctor with a big smile, "It's not cancer."

The next attempt was the CT scan, which showed a more detailed image of the cavity "with soft tissue component within it" as well as "faint opacities ... in the apical segment of the left lower lobe." These findings gave the consultant radiologist the impression of a fungal infection in the cavity and early TB in the left lower lobe.

Based on these impressions and pending the results (in six-weeks' time) of bacterial culture from a sample of my sputum, the good doctor put me on anti-bacterial and anti-fungal antibiotics, together with anti-TB drugs.

"Any dietary recommendations?" I asked.

"No," was the reply.

"Doctor, I coughed out about 500ml of blood. Don't you think my body needs some supplements to replenish that?"

"Well, OK. I'll give you some iron tablets."

With due respect and gratitude to the friendly young doctor, I was appalled by the overly specialised education and training he must have obtained in modern allopathic medical school. The impression I got was that the doctor was just interested in identifying the micro-organism responsible and prescribing the right drugs to exterminate it. Full stop. Shouldn't one delve deeper into the root cause of disease and rehabilitation needs? This is another cause for dis-ease, particularly for the majority of patients who are not well informed of, or open to alternative therapies.

When I was in Myanmar in the early 90s, treatment was not narrowly confined to prescribed drugs and supplements. Diet and lifestyle recommendations were also given profusely by the hospital medical staff and devotees knowledgeable in Burmese Ayurveda. One TB specialist told me, "TB germs

TURN TO PAGE 22

SANGHA speaks

was it a month... a year... or years?

Ven Dhammananda spends a month in SBS and finds a paradox—he revels in a free spirit of living and expression under a strict mentor with serious intent who is a friend with a bubbly smile.

At the end of December 2005, I was ordained by Sayadaw U Indaka in Kuala Lumpur in order to experience the life of a Theravadin monk and was given the name U Dhammananda. Sayadaw U Thuzana from Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre (MBMC) suggested that I go for training at SBS. Bhante Aggacitta accepted me for a month as a visiting monk. And what a month it was!

It is easier for me to speak than write so how shall I start? Here we go...

Ven Varadhammo from Penang was at SBS at the same time as I was. He is of 14 *vassas*—a tall, slim, tidy and humble monk with great heart and a bright smile. So we were five monks for a month.

Bhante is strict in following the *vinaya* rules, and sometimes I think he is harder on himself then on those he is responsible for. No monks can stay at SBS if they have 'illegal' items (like money) and every monk has to walk barefoot downhill for alms every day and then back up again, unless he is ill.

Though he is strict, I have found him very compassionate and very knowledgeable about DhammaVinaya. Bhante is astonishingly familiar with the vinaya rules in depth and detail. He is fluent in Pali, Burmese, Thai, English and Chinese. He not only knows the teachings well, but is also very familiar with their actual practice in different countries. He is also sensitive to and skilful in the cultivation of pure sila (morality) while being in different monastic communities, without compromising one's sila or creating friction with others.

After one early morning meditation I heard, "Dhammananda."

"Yes, Bhante." My heart was throbbing with thoughts, "What have I done wrong?"

"Where is your *saṅghāṭi*?" (Sanghati, the outer robe, is one of the three pieces of robe that *bhikkhus* should have with them at the end of dawn).

"I am so sorry. I have forgotten it," I responded. I had had this sanghati for a few days. How could I have forgotten it? I felt guilt for this offence and was blaming myself.

Then, Bhante gently smiled and asked, "What time is it?"

I replied, "6.30am."

"When is the end of dawn?" Bhante asked again.

"Ohhh!" What a relief! I still had time. "I will run to take it."

Bhante quietly continued his exercises. It was to save me from breaking the rule; not to blame me. His spirit of serious intent for the transformation of the mind and conduct along with his intelligent understanding of DhammaVinaya creates an atmosphere of personal and group inquiry, accountability and free spirit of living and expression in that very special four-star monastery, Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary.

On many occasions, with a light heart and a bubbly or shining smile, he compassionately and skilfully taught us to understand the letter and spirit of the monastic rules, to follow them and to know why we did so. Likewise, he taught us to be mindful in our speech and actions and to know what drives us to do certain things, to break the rules, etc.

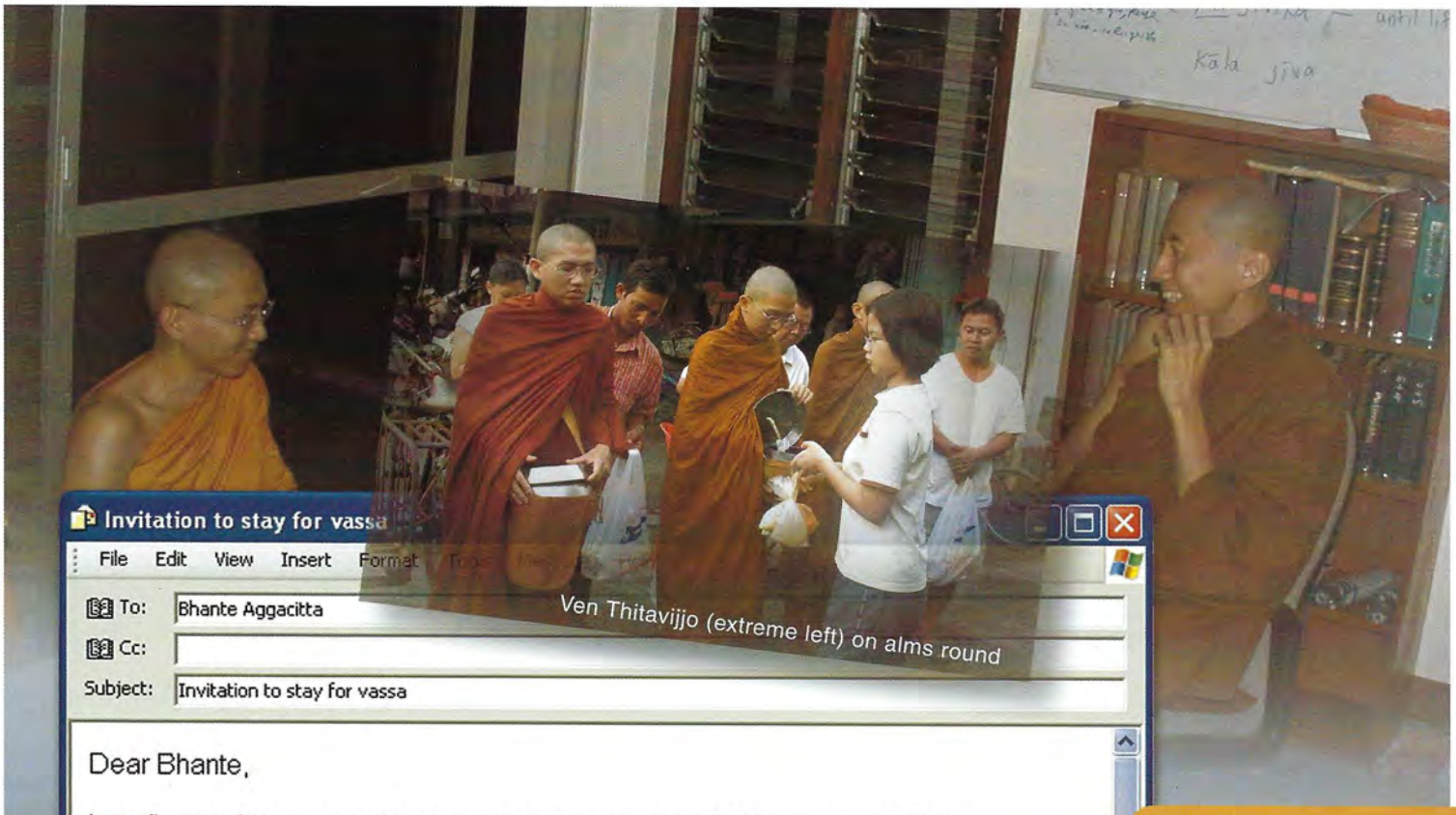
Bhante was the lawyer who knew our wrongdoings and he was also the good friend who would investigate with us the lessons to be learnt in our mistakes, as well as how to cure the offence. One example was the "Honey Story" from which I learned that a monk can grow to develop pure sila only if he is very honest to himself.

Bhante didn't push me for anything and yet I accomplished so much. I always had the space, free time and assistance that I needed.

The friendship, care, joy and support of Ven Kumara, Ven Balacitta and Ven Varadhammo were always tactful and beneficial. We shared great times which were mutually beneficial. There were many stories of sharing, learning, growth, and laughter from the heart. What a memorable time it was! I didn't want to leave. But I had to. Was it a month... a year... or years?

Effortless, intense, deep, insightful. I felt confident of what I had learnt through living and studying in the company of great monks whose very presence inspired me... guided by a good friend and mentor in the presence of Bhante Aggacitta. Hopefully one day I can return to The Sanctuary for longer periods of time. You all will be in my heart.

May other people from Malaysia and other parts of the world be able to experience time at SBS like I did. May the SBS spirit spread its wings in Malaysia and other parts of a needy world.



Ven Thitavijjo (extreme left) on alms round

Invitation to stay for vassa

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To: Bhante Aggacitta

Cc:

Subject: Invitation to stay for vassa

Dear Bhante,

I am flattered to receive the invitation to stay in SBS for the coming vassa.

For this year's vassa, I have not made up my mind yet. There are many things for me to clear off my table at the moment. Each time I want to start to get rid of the letters accumulated from the past seven months, or deal with any links such as bank accounts, student loans, etc., my mind would acknowledge, "thinking... thinking...". Then I put things aside for a while and return to my studies or to doing more fruitful work.

Bhante, the discussions that I had with you form my best experiences in SBS. I have downloaded some of the things from our discussions and imprinted them in my mind. They will form a useful guide for the rest of my monkhood life. I am not too fussy about the place I stay in, the food I eat, or whether or not I get to see devotees.

At this juncture there are just so many things for me to learn, and I must say I don't learn and follow blindly. Since arriving in London, I'm glad to say that there hasn't been a single day wherein I did not put in effort to work for the progress of my own purification, or for the benefit of others.

Not to plan too much is another of my guiding principles. As such, I don't have any plans as yet as to where I will be for the coming vassa. I will just let things fall into place. That's how I entered the monkhood; that's also how I am still in the Buddha Sasana.

The CDs of your Dhamma talks have been very well received here. I burnt quite a number of them to distribute to the English meditators here, and so far everyone is impressed. Don't be surprised you may have followers from this part of the world.

With deepest respect and loving kindness,
Thitavijjo

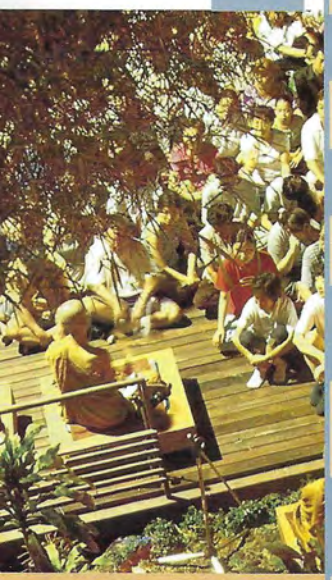
email from london

Ven Thitavijjo, a Malaysian monk of one *vassa*, spent 9 days in SBS in February 2005. He replies to an invitation to spend his second vassa in SBS.

Dhamma Talks

www.sasanarakkha.org/dhamma/

Topic/Speaker/Date	Synopsis
The Day the Earth Shook Ven Balacitta, 2 Jan	*Dāna, sīla and bhāvanā* can cushion one against the sorrow brought by a calamity, as in the Asian tsunami disaster
To Honour the Departed Ven Balacitta, 9 Jan	Practise dana, sila and bhavana; take refuge in the Triple Gem; then transfer merits to the departed
Six Worldly Right Views Ven Varadhammo, 16 Jan	Dana, belief in kamma, belief in the existence of heaven and hell, respecting one's parents, belief in rebirth, belief in the enlightened ones
Birthday Dana Ven Aggacitta, 23 Jan	Dana, as a practice of the *pāramī* of generosity, should be motivated by *mettā* and not by greed
How I Became a Monk Ven Kumara, 30 Jan	Ven Kumara recounts his passage towards renunciation
Remembering the Departed Ven Balacitta, 6 Feb	Merits, gained from the practice of dana, refuge in the Triple Gem, precepts and meditation, are transferred to the departed
Chinese New Year Special Venerables Aggacitta, Kumara, Balacitta, 9 Feb	Chicken tales to herald the year of the rooster
Advice for a Newly Wed Couple Ven Aggacitta, 13 Feb	Duties of the husband and the wife
Dana, Sila and Bhavana Ven Balacitta, 20 Feb	On the importance of dana, sila and bhavana
A Kammic Puzzle Ven Kumara, 27 Feb	Does intention outweigh action and its result?
A Good Man's Giving Ven Balacitta, 6 Mar	The kind of dana that generates great merits
Kalama Sutta Ven Kumara, 13 Mar	A guideline to determine what we should accept or reject among many contradicting teachings, and other lesser known sections of the *sutta*
Buddhist Jewel Ven Balacitta, 20 Mar	What makes a lay Buddhist an outcaste or a jewel?
A Bucketful of Rice Ven Kumara, 27 Mar	Eating in moderation is taught by the Buddha as a way to health and youthfulness
Ghost Stories for Qing Ming Ven Aggacitta, 3 Apr	Some stories and timeless advice related to Qing Ming, the Chinese festival for honouring the departed
A Lay Person's Path of Morality towards Light Ven Balacitta, 10 Apr	Observing the five precepts as the lay person's path towards his betterment
Living for the Good of Oneself and of Others Ven Kumara, 17 Apr	Do you live for the good of yourself and others, or for yourself but not others, or for others but not yourself, or for neither?
The Buddha as "Samma-sambuddha" & "Arahant" Ven Aggacitta, 22 May	The Buddha is a *sammā-sambuddha* because he discovered the Dhamma by himself. As an *arahant* he has eradicated all defilements, therefore has no need to hide from others and is thus worthy of our respect and offerings
Dana Ven Kusala, 22 May	Happiness in the spirit of shared dana
Super Right Speech Ven Kumara, 29 May	Besides the avoidance of lies, divisive speech, harsh speech and idle chatter, Right Speech includes engaging in the opposite. But what is Super Right Speech?
Consequences of Wrong Speech Ven Balacitta, 5 Jun	A look into suttas that spell out the ill consequences of indulging in wrong speech
Sappurisa Sutta Ven Balacitta, 12 Jun	How to differentiate between the true and the untrue people
What happened to Ven Aggacitta Ven Kumara, 19 Jun	As Ven Aggacitta's sudden health problem is of concern to us, Ven Kumara tells us what happened, and reminds us that ill health can happen any time
Making Right Aspirations Ven Balacitta, 26 Jun	Sometimes, our aspirations are motivated by *lobha* as we are not arahants. Such aspirations though should not be based on *akusala*



Note: Owing to some delay, the later talks may not be available on our website yet. To get them as soon as they are ready, join SBSmail by sending a blank mail to

sbsmail-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

spiritual self-defence

Ven Aggacitta

shares with you his personal encounters, as well as the experiences of those he personally knows, with unseen beings and shows how one can relate to them.

Just as there are various stances found in the self-defence techniques of Chinese *kungfu* e.g. praying mantis, drunken master, etc., there are five techniques available to us in the art of spiritual self-defence for defending ourselves against unseen beings, who can be troublesome and disturbing at times.

The five techniques are:

- Scarecrow
- Hard Heart
- Soft Heart
- Open Heart
- Clear Heart

Scarecrow

A scarecrow is a device used to scare away pests. Similarly, it is quite a common practice for people to seek devices that could help them when they encounter uncanny experiences. Most people go to the temple and ask for holy water, holy string talismans, amulets and Buddha images, some of which can be quite powerful and efficacious.

This seems to be validated by modern research findings. For example, a study by some Japanese scientists who obtained highly magnified photographs of the crystalline structure of frozen water before and after chanting, showed a change from a haphazard pattern to one that is ordered and harmonious in structure. The findings also include cases of wholesome effects due to positive thoughts directed to water. (For further information visit <http://www.masaru-emoto.net/english/entop.html>)

... do not underestimate the power of chanting. When you experience fear, you can derive strength from chanting.

In 1999, I was living alone in an orchard on a hill in Air Kuning. On one occasion, the caretaker there felt an eerie sensation and broke out in goose pimples. He became sick and went home. Soon he dreamt of a bald woman dressed in white who said she wanted to go up the hill to visit the monk living there but could not do so and requested his help to take her up. A few days later, he related the incident to me and pleaded for help. I asked him to collect some coconut leaves and two bowls of water (one for drinking, the other for washing). I chanted some *parittas* and sprinkled a little of the water on him. The moment the water touched his skin, he felt better. When I met him coming up the hill the next morning, he thanked me for he had completely recovered.

In Thailand, there are many types of talismans. Some are claimed to ward off black magic or bring blessings while others are used to cast spells on people. In Myanmar, there also exist spiritual cults. During initiation ceremonies, an initiate is usually inoculated with a herbal concoction that is supposed to allow the guardian spirits of the cult to recognise him as a member. Once done, the initiate is believed to possess certain magical powers such as the power to exorcise spirits.

It is sometimes not very good to collect talismans because of their links to spirits. In 1999, when I was in Sarawak, a devotee told me that when he meditated, he frequently experienced strange phenomena such as being bitten by cockroaches or seeing a giant standing beside him. Upon further enquiry, I found that he was an avid collector of talismans. The spirits of these talismans get jealous when a meditator achieves *samādhi* as this will make the meditator more powerful than they are. The spirits will therefore try to disturb and distract him. I advised him to return the talismans to the original owners. Subsequently, he could meditate without any further disturbances.

Hard Heart

This is to make your heart hard by chanting. Chants can be short like "Buddhaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi..." or long, e.g. "Itipiso Bhagavā Araham..."

In the commentaries, there is a story about a boy who was so tired he fell asleep in a pavilion of a charnel ground. He was awoken in the middle of the night by a *yakkha* who wanted to devour him. He was so frightened that he shouted "Buddho, Buddho..." Upon hearing this, the yakkha fled.

About 25 years ago when I was a *sāmaṇera* at MBMC in Penang, Ven Chamriang and I were sitting in the hall when a girl walked in, looking very dazed. She told us that as she was walking along the road, a person gave her a packet wrapped in leaves to hold and subsequently she felt 'in a daze'. She asked for our help. Ven Chamriang took the packet from her, passed it to me to throw away, and asked her to recite "Namo tassa..." followed by the Three Refuges. Once she had recited the verses, she said she felt better. When I returned to my *kuṭi*, I felt goose pimples all over and was very agitated. My heart was palpitating very loudly. I quickly recited the Three Refuges repeatedly and the unpleasant sensation passed.

Once in Kuala Kubu Baru, How Eng Keong (a devotee who can chant as well as a monk) and I were taking a walk in the jungle area. As we passed a particular bush, he suddenly felt prickly sensations all over his back. I asked him to do some chanting and he did so silently. The feeling passed. I was not disturbed probably because I was a monk. Therefore, do not underestimate the power of chanting. When you experience fear, you can derive strength from chanting.

Soft Heart

This refers to radiating *mettā* through meditation or chanting with an understanding of the meaning of the words you are chanting. To understand this, you have to know the story of the origin of Karaniya Metta Sutta.

Once during the time of the Buddha, a group of monks stayed in a forested area for a month. They

found it to be extremely conducive for their practice and decided to stay there for their 3-month *vassa*. During the initial month, the guardian *devas* of the area obligingly accommodated these virtuous and celibate monks. However, when the monks decided to stay on for the vassa, the deities felt that the monks had outstayed their welcome, and proceeded to try to drive them away by creating havoc in the form of scary noises, screams, bad odours and unpleasant visions. The monks could not endure such continuous disturbances to their practice and decided to leave after the vassa. They travelled to where the Buddha was staying and reported the matter to him.

However, with his psychic power, the Buddha foresaw that these monks would be able to achieve enlightenment if they stayed put and continued with their practice. He therefore decided to teach them Karaniya Metta Sutta and advised them to practise accordingly at every waking moment. Instead of teaching methods of admonishing or fighting off the spirits, the Buddha taught them to radiate metta instead. Consequently the devas' hearts were softened. Instead of disturbing the monks, they came forward to help them in various ways. At the end of the vassa, all the monks became *arahants*. This shows how metta can be used to overcome enmity.

Many years ago, Ven Sujiva stayed at an orchard in Air Itam, Penang. The owner warned him about the presence of civet cats (*musang*) in the area as they made odd noises at night. When he had settled down, Ven Sujiva began to practise *samatha* meditation on the 32 parts of the body. Soon he was disturbed by horrible screeching and the shaking of the tree under which he was seated. At first he decided to ignore them as advised by his host. However, the screeching and shaking intensified and he knew that these were not civet cats but something else. He then decided to radiate metta to all beings instead, particularly ghosts. The screaming soon ended. When he tried to continue with his samatha practice, the commotion would start all over again. In the end, he ended up radiating metta the whole night through.

Open Heart

This stance refers to sharing merits with every being. Five years ago, before I started SBS, a group of devotees and I travelled to Wat Pa Nanachat in Thailand to study how the Ajahn Chah forest monks managed their monastery. Two devotees who were sharing a room woke up in the middle of the night and saw a female spirit clad in white holding a child by the hand. They radiated metta towards her but that did not work. So they decided to try something else and offered instead to share their merits with the spirit. The spirit went away soon after that. Sometimes these beings appear to us because they are in need of our merits to ease their suffering.

On another occasion, a few monks stayed at the Balik Pulau Buddhist Hermitage in Penang, which is situated in a durian orchard. There was a kuti which was reputed to be haunted. At around midnight, the monk who stayed there saw an apparition. This young monk had the presence of mind to advise the spirit to visit a more senior monk in a kuti further up the slope instead. Strangely, the ghost actually complied with the request.

Soon the senior monk also saw the apparition. He radiated metta and shared merits with it. It left soon after.

Once, a Burmese monk who regularly practised such sharing of merits stayed at the forest monastery of Sayadaw U Jotika (author of *Snow in Summer*). Late one night after a Dhamma talk in the village, he went back to his kuti. Being tired, he went straight to sleep without sharing merits. In the middle of the night, he was awoken by the sound of heavy footsteps stomping away outside his verandah. He realised that he had forgotten to share merits with the beings around there and proceeded to do so. The stomping sounds began to recede and soon disappeared altogether.

Sometimes these beings appear to us because they are in need of our merits to ease their suffering.

Clear Heart

Clear Heart refers to *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation. A person who is mindful of all mental states and sensations when meditating will not be harmed or scared off by spirits. When his mind is strong and clear, he is aware of everything, even the feeling of fear, as it arises. If he then watches it, that will disappear on its own accord eventually.

One young engineer, who had been a meditator, died of cancer and was reborn in the spirit realm. He probably had a kammic affinity with another young man and would sometimes possess him and teach him the Dhamma, such as the Five Precepts and the practice of metta and satipatthana meditation. Although the young man was grateful for the Dhamma he received he was, of course, not too keen on being possessed constantly. At such times, he was not in control of himself. He went to seek Ven Sujiva's help (it was the same spirit who 'introduced' him to Ven Sujiva). Ven Sujiva taught him satipatthana meditation and told him to be fully aware each time he felt the spirit coming. In this way, he learnt to control the situation and the spirit could not possess him whenever he was fully aware.

Once Ven Sariputta, who had achieved *jhānas* and liberation, was meditating in the open on a full moon day when two yakkhas flew by. The first yakkha insisted on hitting the shiny, freshly shaven bald pate of the venerable even though his partner tried to dissuade him from doing so. As he hit the venerable's head, Ven Moggallana (a Great Disciple of the Buddha who was foremost in psychic power) heard the sound, as loud as a thunderclap, with his divine ear and saw the yakkha hitting Ven Sariputta's head. Later Ven Moggallana approached Ven Sariputta and told him what he had seen and heard. However, Ven Sariputta replied that all he felt was a slight headache at that time. Any ordinary mortal would have had his head smashed to smithereens if attacked thus. Such is the power of meditation—that a person who is totally absorbed in jhana cannot be harmed even when attacked by spirits.

Conclusion

So, which method of defence should one choose when faced with disturbances by spirits? Just as in the art of self-defence, a person must learn all the different stances to enable him to apply the appropriate one when required.

A yogi who was practising at the Mahasi Meditation Centre in Yangon, Myanmar, was frequently disturbed by screams in the wee hours of the morning. She radiated metta but that did not work. After several nights of this, she reported it to the teacher and he advised her to transfer merits instead as the spirits probably needed them. That worked for her because merits, especially those generated during meditation, are very powerful. In this instance, the Open Heart stance worked for her.

There is the story of another lady of Taoist/Buddhist faith from Melaka who used to be 'visited' by a Christian spirit who would instruct her to do some church work. Initially she obeyed but eventually when the spirit kept pestering her to become a Christian and to preach to her own family and friends, she wanted out. Someone advised her to seek help at the Brickfields Mahavihara Temple in Kuala Lumpur, so she decided to visit the Chief Reverend there. However, for two days, she was unable to meet up with him. She eventually spoke to a

samanera who did some chanting with water which he gave her to drink. This is the Scarecrow stance. That helped for a while but when her supply was depleted, the spirit returned. She had to return to Kuala Lumpur for replenishment. After a few rounds of this, she became very fed-up and decided to be more self-reliant. She asked around and some friends advised her to chant "Amitofor". That solved her problem. In this case, this lady chose to use the Hard Heart stance.

In 1984, Sayadaw U Pandita and I visited Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts, USA, which is situated at the edge of a forest. Since our sleeping quarters were not ready, as a temporary measure Sayadaw slept in the attic of the garage and I, in a caravan parked at the edge of the forest.

Sayadaw frequently heard scratching noises emanating from the ceiling of the attic, which was also used as a kitchen for Burmese food preparation. Once, when the cook's wife was preparing food alone in the kitchen in the after-noon, she saw the table legs suddenly fly off and she ran for her life. Sayadaw asked one of the founding members of IMS whether they believed in ghosts. She told him that apparently, there were some ghosts earlier but they were supposed to have been exorcised by some Christian priests. In fact this place was formerly a Christian seminary. It would seem that the earlier attempts to remove the ghosts had not been successful as they were still lurking around.

One moonlit night, I suddenly awoke and felt something moving around. It banged on the roof of my caravan. I looked outside and heard something thumping, repeatedly from end to end, on a fiberglass canoe overturned on the grass nearby. Under the bright moonlight, I could see nothing around the canoe. I chanted "Itipiso..." but it had no effect. I shared merits but still nothing happened. Thinking maybe it was a Christian ghost who probably did not understand Buddhism, I radiated metta, the universal language of loving kindness, and that solved the problem. When I stopped and tried to go back to sleep, the thumping started again. I ended up radiating metta the whole night through.

Once, when I was staying in a solitary kuti in the Sarawak jungle, I had a misunderstanding with the natives there and they used to get their children to surround my kuti and disturb me by making odd sounds when I was doing walking meditation outside my kuti at night. But that did not bother me. One day when I had collected my food, I had severe diarrhoea and vomiting which left me very weak and totally exhausted. I do not know whether it was due to food poisoning or whether I was charmed. I could not even do my regular evening chanting as I was thoroughly exhausted by then. So there I was, sprawled on my back trying to recite mentally.

Soon, I heard a sound like a battle cry and something was thrown from the top of the hill landing with a thud on the ground near my window. Then came some whispering sounds. Initially, I thought the natives were coming after me in my weakened state but I always bolted my kuti door as a precaution. However, I soon realised that the sound was not coming from outside but near my ear and it sounded more like group chanting in a foreign tongue with the background hiss of a tape recording. At that time I wanted to do a Hard Heart stance but my whole body felt paralysed and my tongue and lips could not move. Something had started to playfully pull and tug at all parts of my body. I radiated metta, thinking repeatedly: "May you be well and happy. I wish you no harm; please do not harm me...". That sensation lasted only about a minute. Suddenly, the voices shouted "Hah!" loudly and everything stopped. Metta truly works!

In conclusion, I would advise a person to learn all the five steps in the art of spiritual self-defence and be versatile in their use, in order to keep himself safe and secure. So do come and practise diligently so that we can always protect ourselves, our family and our friends.

IMPressive experience

KATTIKA gathers a wealth of experience and knowledge of monkhood and develops a sense of urgency to leave this endless cycle of birth and death. In joining IMP4, he has taken a firm, first step in his search for enlightenment.

Thump, thump, thump, went my heart as I arrived at Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) for the Introduction to Monkhood Programme 4 (IMP4). There was an incessant flow of doubtful thoughts in my mind as I questioned my reason for being there. However, deep in the recesses of my mind I knew this was a step onto the right path, the right way towards what I wanted to achieve in life—enlightenment, the cessation of suffering. In short, happiness.

Thankfully, doubts were cleared once I settled gradually into the routine, amidst the company of other eager, interested IMPians. It was a joyous feeling of camaraderie among people with like-minded thoughts of spiritual life. It is indeed true that spiritual friendship made up the whole of the Sasana as said by the Buddha. As a 'temporary Sangha', we learnt to wear our ever-falling upper robes, meditate and hike down the hill for *piṇḍapāta* (almsfood). The life of a monk slowly unravelled before us as we pondered the responsibilities and expectations of being a monk. Even though our temporary Sangha was made up of only 12 participants, it gave me an understanding of the importance of a Sangha and its ability to assist us in our own individual practice.

The IMP had been meticulously planned, as we learnt later, in great detail to focus on health and *vinaya* rules, and to discuss scriptural texts pertaining to monkhood practice and training. To complement our Buddhist education, there was also the inescapable three hours of daily meditation. Much as we disliked meditating, we were able to sustain our meditative momentum with our group energy. This highlights one of the important reasons for having a sizeable Sangha, where monks can encourage each other to create an atmosphere conducive for striving towards enlightenment.

Bhante Aggacitta conducted interviews on our meditation practice with much patience and gave us precise instructions. We were introduced to a variety of meditation practices: recollection of the Buddha, loving kindness, recollection of the loathsomeness of the body, death contemplation and *vipassanā*. Many of us gained insights into the suffering of eating as we ate mindfully. I mindfully endured the chore of the continuous chomping, swirling of the tongue and saliva flow before swallowing each mouthful of food. We answered insightful questions from Bhante Aggacitta about the reason behind our swallowing and why, even before swallowing the first mouthful of food, our hand reaches out for another mouthful.

The sharing of monkhood experiences was an important part of the IMP, as we were able to listen to and question monks who are very experienced in the ins-and-outs of

monkhood. Ven Varadhammo, a reclusive cave-dweller of Penang came to share his experiences with us. He spoke in detail about the dangers of sensual desire and his interesting experiences as a cave-dwelling monk. He spent the rest of the evening answering our endless questions. A popular question was one about finding the right time to renounce and the obstacles one comes up against.

A highlight of the IMP was the special show given by Bhante Aggacitta on the findings of recent scientific research on how thoughts and feelings affect the molecular structure of water. It validated many of our Buddhist practices such as sending *mettā* and maintaining wholesome thoughts. It is refreshing to see Bhante Aggacitta being open to such research and integrating it with the teachings of the Buddha. Monks here in SBS are amazingly open to new ideas. It is not a common sight to find Theravada monks practising yoga, *reiki* and *qigong*, as is done here. I am impressed by the way monks here have a concern for healthy living, for without good health, how can we practise the Dhamma?

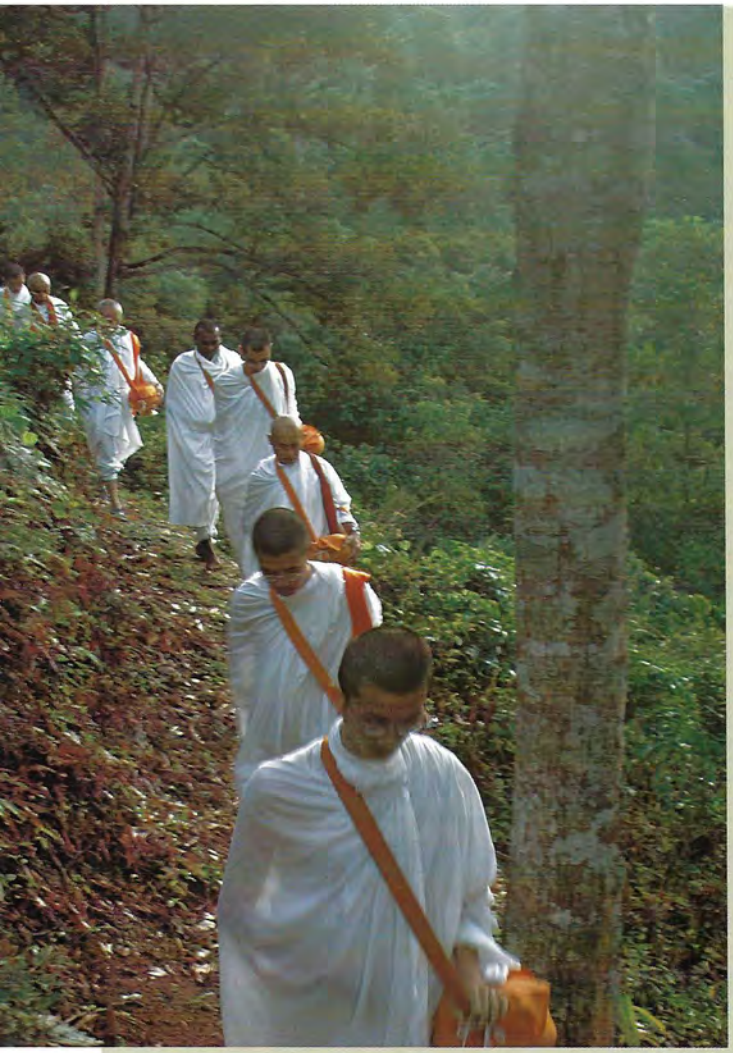
The IMP culminated in a thorough study of *The Broken Buddha*, an unpublished book. It raised many controversial but pertinent issues faced by Theravada Buddhism today, particularly in the way it is practised by the nationals of countries where it has taken deep root namely, Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. It introduced us to the many faces of Buddhism, the diversity of Buddhist practices and their ability to suit Buddhists of different mental dispositions.

Personally, the study of this text has helped me to better understand the vision behind SBS. While acknowledging its important role in the Buddhist scene, Bhante Aggacitta is charting a course which veers away from the traditional, nationalistic Buddhism of Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. He is moving upstream back towards strict vinaya adherence and scriptural practice. He "venture[s] to suggest that the comprehensive training advocated by the vinaya scriptures constitutes a holistic approach to the development of a well-rounded monastic." (*Role of the Sangha in the New Millennium*, 2003)

In a world of many Buddhist schools, Theravada Buddhism has a unique role to play in the role of Dhamma education. As Buddhist practices become steeped in rites and rituals, authentic Dhamma education can bring us back to true scriptural practice.

Many IMP participants are still not ready to take the step towards a commitment to monkhood, for we have many hurdles to overcome. Some have elderly parents to look after; others have attachments to their family and wealth. For me, parental objection prevents me from making the commitment. It is understandable that parents have great hopes for their maturing offspring as they make their way into society. However, when aspirations of monkhood are made known, most parents are filled with sorrow, indignation and fear. Their hopes and dreams for their children shatter. Most parents would consider monkhood only as an alternative for people who are old, have failed in life, or are escapists from mainstream life. It is not only non-Buddhists who succumb to this thinking; even Buddhist parents do. There needs to be Dhamma education on the benefits of monkhood for the wider society. The committing of oneself to a homeless life in order to seek the Dhamma should be looked upon as an honoured tradition.

Overall, I must say IMP4 at SBS has given me a wealth of experience and knowledge of monkhood. SBS is a heavenly sanctuary that allows wearied, *saṁsāric* wanderers a glimpse of life immersed in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. It has strengthened my sense of urgency to leave this endless cycle of birth and death. Determined must I be and perseverance must I have in my Buddhist practice to clear obstructions in my way towards enlightenment. It does not matter how many lifetimes I have to practise as I know I have already taken a firm, first step.



CONTINUED FROM FRONT COVER

A gathering of six participants of IMPs 1, 2 and 3 in SBS realised, in varying degrees, the words of the Buddha, as recorded in verse 204 of the Dhammapada:

> Health is the foremost gain;
> Contentment the foremost wealth.
> The trusted is the foremost kin;
> Nibbana the foremost bliss.

This gathering was timed to coincide with the last three days of IMP4. Ven Aggacitta led a frank review of each ex-IMPian's experience and its subsequent impact on their lives.

Must one aspire to be a monk to join IMP? In the words of Chandra, IMP3 participant, addressing IMP4 participants, "My goodness, come in here, must become a monk... No. It can help you to get some insight into the life of a forest monk." Although the programme's main aim is to provide a taste of monkhood by letting one live the life of a monk for 14 days, IMPians found that they gained much more than that. They have armed themselves with a wealth of experience with which to enrich their lives.

IMPians found that participation in the programme brought them closer to realising the importance of good health, contentment and good friends. Of course, none claimed that he was closer to Nibbana, but as meditation is a part of the IMP routine, each by default, had taken a step in the right direction.

'No medical certificates needed in the [SBS] Sangha," Jettha had written in his article on his IMP3 experience (Sasanarakkha Newszine Issue 3). For some, IMP has opened up in them an awareness of the advantages of a healthy body and lifestyle. Subhamitta of IMP1 has learnt that "physical health can boost mental health and spiritual practice."

Jettha, who was also here for the alumni gathering, had this to say: "Sitting cross-legged was a serious problem [for me]," he said. Undaunted, after IMP he practised sitting cross-legged, even in front of the TV. Now, this posture is no more a problem. "You just need to condition your muscles and nerves." IMP rejuvenated his muscles!

Chandra very expressively contributed, "*Piṇḍacāra*—my goodness! I was panting and sweating through my pants for the first few days." Walking downhill and back up again to collect alms food is part of the healthy practice of monks in SBS and IMP participants are not exempted. Now, upon his return here, he found that he is better conditioned to do the climb and experienced only slight breathlessness. Being now more particular about his food, opting for more vegetables and fruits, a diet that suits his physical condition, he has since lost "more than five kilos".

Jettha now lives his life guided by the "Eight Principles" from Samkhitta Sutta from which he has derived great benefit. Entertaining to secure business deals is part of a businessman's lot. A sociable and successful businessman, Jetta has almost stopped his social rounds of drinking and partying—"to seclusion, not to gregariousness". Chandra announced that he had, just before he came, given up his own company of which he is Chairman, to his son. "I'm not even its adviser. I've started giving up things, one by one, so much so that my family is scared." Contentment is, for these two businessmen IMPians, the greater wealth—"to shedding, not to accumulating"

Attending IMP1 cemented a bond of friendship between Sumana and Paññā—a meeting of wise friends that led the two *kaḷyānamittas* to attend a retreat in Myanmar together. Subsequently, both found their retreat experience in Myanmar very fruitful. It is IMP that has indirectly led them towards this path. Sumana points out, "Benefits may not be direct, but may be a condition for things to happen in the future." Paññā adds, "It is not easy to find someone with whom one can talk with on spiritual matters. The gathering of IMPians provides an opportunity to meet with people having the same spiritual awareness."

For some, IMP touched chords that are more personal. It realised in Sumutta a potential he did not think he had. Initially, he was hesitant to join IMP2 as he felt his command of English was not good enough to allow him to follow the programme which is conducted in English. During the programme he realised that he could follow the lessons and even read Dhamma books in English—something he had not thought possible before. Vidhuma, of IMP1, found a heightened awareness of the truth of suffering as he goes through life attending to aged parents, counselling sick or troubled friends and confronting his own mind.

Has IMP fired commitments to monkhood? Vidhuma had this to say. "IMP did not hit me with a big bang and I did not rush to take up robes. Rather, it stoked the flames of renunciation, keeping open the possibility of the day when I go forth. When I get caught up in the madness of the world, I reflect on my [IMP] experience [and feel] a sense of sanity, peace and freedom." For Danta, IMP3 "has opened up another option in life", a sentiment echoed by Chandra who told his family that if he became a monk, he would not be dying, but rather living a different life. For Jettha, monkhood is now a "real" rather than "remote" possibility.

Generally there was agreement that IMP fulfils its objective—to provide a taste of monastic life. Impians agree that they have become more knowledgeable in the DhammaVinaya. Sumutta has the last word when he says, "The most important factor [to consider] when it is time to go forth is to get a good teacher. SBS fulfils this."

Wisely cutting our coat according to our cloth, we deferred construction of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) Main Office. Now back to the grindstone, we have started work on its construction. After its completion, our office staff will not have to make do with a makeshift office anymore. At the same time, a farmyard and farmhouse are also taking shape.

not resting on our laurels —we're on the go again

along the long road to development

administrative hub and organic farm

By Wai Seng Moh

With the satisfactory completion of the facilities in Sangha Court in 2003, the development front had a much deserved break. SBS Sangha and Management Committee channeled their resources and energy to human resource development. After a break of 18 months (December 2003 – May 2005) and after checking our bank balance, we have begun work on the flagship double storey Main Office (MO) and Organic Farm Project (OFP).

Originally, MO was planned for construction at the same time as Sangha Court. However, due to insufficient funds, it was deferred indefinitely. In early January this year, SBS Management Committee (SBSMC) gave the go-ahead for the construction of MO, as there were enough funds to meet the operating expenditure of The Sanctuary. Subsequently, as has happened so often in the past, generous people who wish to remain anonymous came forward with pledges which covered the full cost of construction of MO. *Sādhu* and thank you!

The honorary building development consultant team together with representatives from SBSMC, Ven Aggacitta Mahathera (Spiritual Director), Ng Kian Chong (Chairperson) and Eng Lai Hiang (Finance Manager 1) met on 15 February 2005 to finalise details and draw up an action plan of activities and deadlines for immediate implementation. Although we had to make adjustments to deadlines to accommodate the personal commitments of those involved, we are still on target with our plan to get MO ready for Kathina 2005. Actual construction will commence on 1 June 2005. The contractor, TPG Bina Maju, has given its assurance it will complete the construction within 20 weeks as stipulated in the contract.

MO will sit on the same spot where the former office once stood and with its demolition, the latter is now only a fond memory. We managed to salvage and recycle some materials for other uses.

When completed, MO will straddle Jalan Vicara with an under passageway for 4WDs to drive through. The new MO will certainly provide a pleasant environment for the office staff and volunteers who come to offer their services from time to time. There will also be increased toilet

facilities. The upper floor of MO is a multi-purpose hall which can be used for Dhamma talks, meditation and even double up as accommodation for *yogis* in retreats and visitors during major events. Its balcony gives an exhilarating view of the surrounding scenery!

OFP had a halting start several years ago but was abandoned later . In March SBSMC decided to revive the ailing project.

OFP includes the construction of a farmhouse sited near the Four Great Kings' Shrine. Designed like a Malay farmhouse on stilts, it will have a packing area, a store and public washrooms on the ground floor. Upstairs are two rooms with separate entrances—workers' quarters and a dormitory for *yogis* or guests. The construction of the farmhouse started in April and is expected to be completed in June. SBS will employ two Myanmar general workers to work full time on the organic farm and orchard.

A sub-committee has been established to manage the organic farm as well as take charge of the orchard comprising mainly durian, together with *petai*, banana, *guava*, *rambutan* and *cempedak-nangka*. The composition of the sub-committee is as follows:

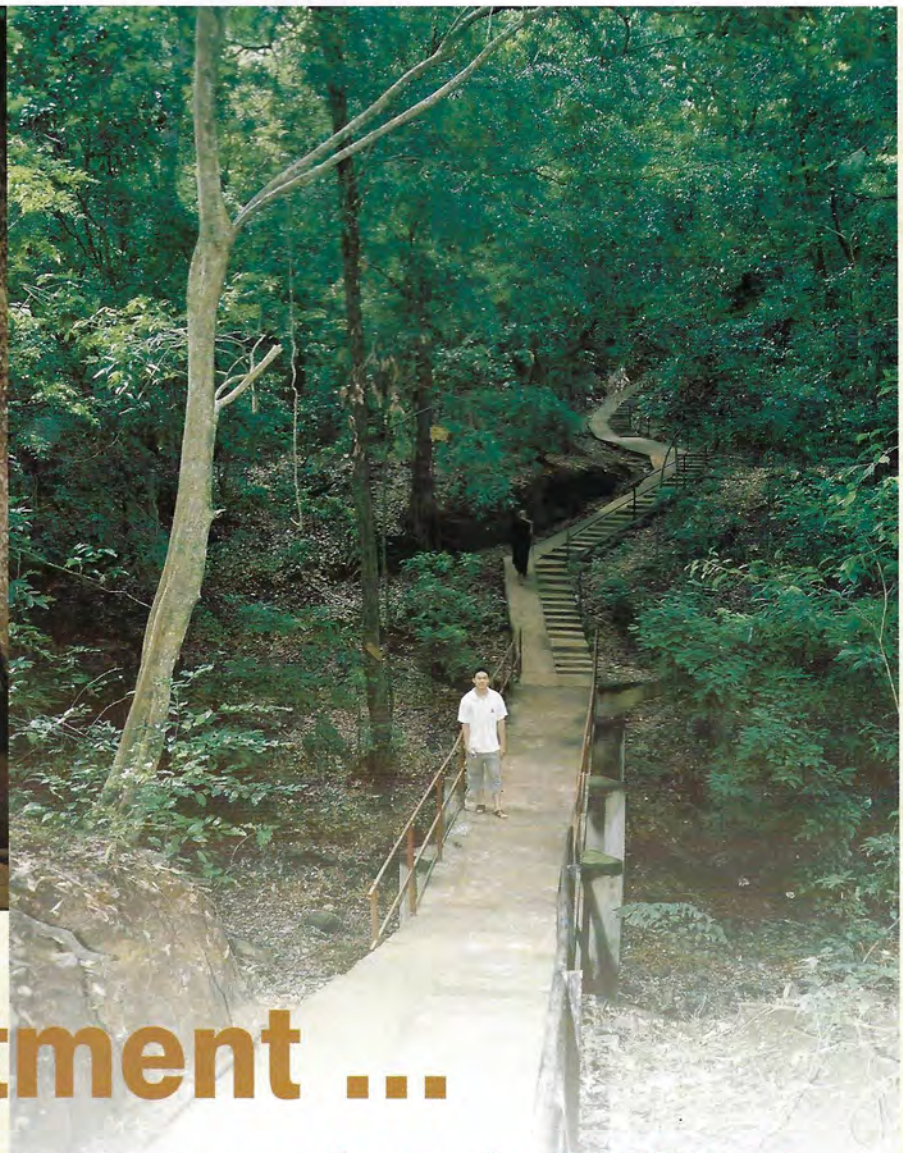
Farm Director: Chui Sheng Bin
Farm Manager: Chen Sew Kian
Farm Supervisor: Ong Poh Cheng
Marketing and Finance Manager: Yee Ah Huah

Tan Joo Lan and Tan Siew Luang, members of Centre for Environmental, Technology and Development, Malaysia (CETDEM) are providing guidance and expertise to the project. They visited us in April and met with the project sub-committee. To further expose the members of the sub-committee to an organic farm environment and enable them to acquire hands-on experience, the CETDEM duo arranged a May visit to Titi Echo, a commercial organic farm in Seremban.

On 18 June, they made a second follow-up visit. This time around, it was to give "feet on" experience to our organic farm team. The members spent the whole morning making a compost heap the proper way under the guidance of their CETDEM instructors. Piling layer upon layer of banana peel, soya cake, sugar cane straw, chicken dung, soil and what have you into a one-metre square frame, the amateur farmers happily stomped and stamped on the pile to compact it, imagining they were squashing grapes to make wine. In the afternoon Tan Siew Luang gave an overview of organic farming with a slide show and a talk.

The main purpose for reviving the OFP is to provide organic produce for the *dāna* team cooking for the monastics, SBS supporters and friends. We hope they will, in return, donate generously towards the cost of maintenance of the farm. Any donations received in excess of what is needed for farm and orchard maintenance will in turn be donated to the SBS general fund.

So make sure that on your next visit to SBS, you get some organic produce to take home. We look forward to your support!



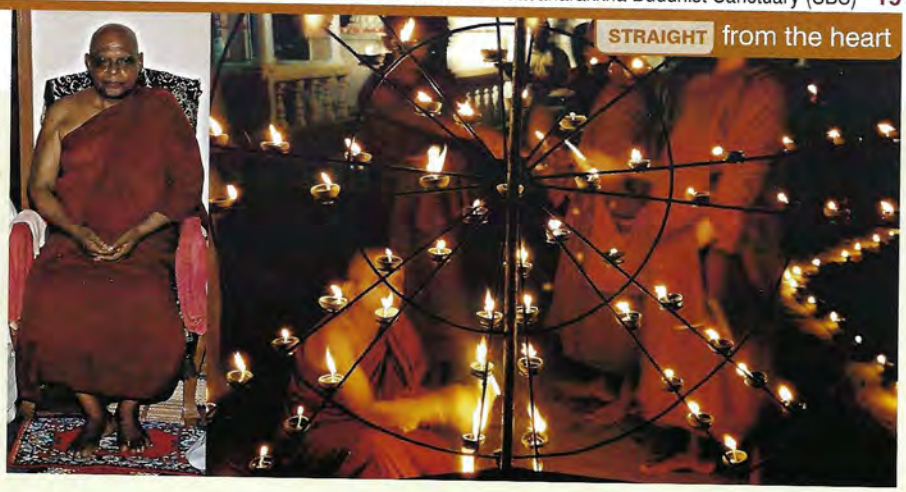
enchantment ...

a sojourn in the forest

In search of quiet bliss deep among trees, Jettha, Lai Hiang, Chin Suey and Maxine followed Ven Aggacitta and Ven Balacitta to Na-Uyana Arannya, a forest monastery in Sri Lanka, for a month-long meditation retreat. JETTHA recounts their experiences.

Getting there

Prior to my participation in IMP3 in December last year, I had hardly had any contact with monastics, let alone practised meditation in the forest. I was all the more surprised (though inwardly happy) when Bhante Aggacitta asked me at the exit interview of IMP3 whether I could join him in a meditation retreat in a forest monastery in Sri Lanka in April/May 2005. Despite my busy schedule and not being sure if I could make it, I promised that I would try. Before I knew it, I was on a flight to Colombo with Bhante Aggacitta and Bhante Bala and three other *yogis*—Eng Lai Hiang, her nephew Chin Suey and Maxine Cheong. How time flies.



We arrived in Colombo International Airport at about 10.45am on 21 April and were received by two very kind and friendly venerable monks and a *kappiya* who quickly laid out our lunch at the airport restaurant before solar noon. We soon learnt that based on government time, Sri Lanka is two hours behind Malaysia, but 1½ hours based on 'monastery' time.

After lunch, we all packed ourselves into a rickety van and headed for the monastery, situated in the north central region of Sri Lanka, approximately 150km north-east of Colombo. Though not a long distance by our standards, our journey on the narrow and winding road took almost four hours, complete with some near misses with other vehicles!

It was the first time I met Chin Suey who is just 20 and before long, during our bumpy ride, I learnt of his love for automobiles... couldn't help thinking why he was on the trip with us.

The monastery

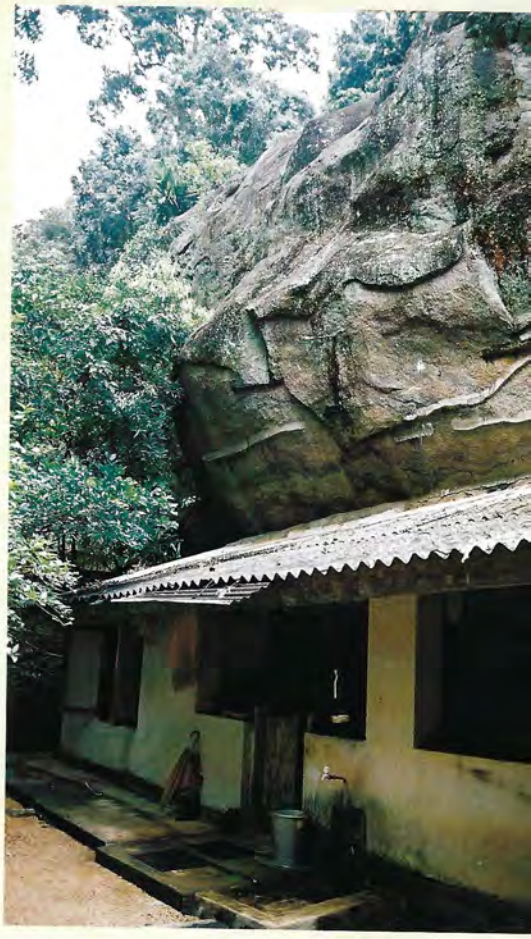
I was eagerly looking forward to seeing the monastery, to live there for a month and experience life in the forest as a yogi... a month of solitude amongst monks, cut off from all forms of communication.

Na-Uyana Arannya (see insert on p21) was not what I had pictured in my mind—it was more, it was simply nature at its best. The chirping of the birds in the morning is unlike any I had heard before... it was joyful waking up every morning to this beautiful orchestral symphony in the forest.

Its 'CEO', Ven Ariyananda, is a highly respected meditation master. The monastery is extremely well organised for training forest monks. We were so lucky to receive meditation training from him. One cannot help feeling the sacredness of the monastery with the presence of some 70 very disciplined and serious but friendly venerable monks. We did not have the chance to see them all together except on one evening when everyone gathered to celebrate the birthday *pūjā* of Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera, head of Shri Kalyani Yogashramaya Forest Sangha, who was ordained in Na-Uyana and who now resides there.

Although some monks practise meditation alone in the forest, or in their *kuṭis*, there were usually about 20 others who would meditate in the main hall. It was interesting to see some monks practise sitting under mosquito nets, on rocks or cemented seats under the trees and adjoining oblong sand path, long enough for some 20 steps of walking meditation.

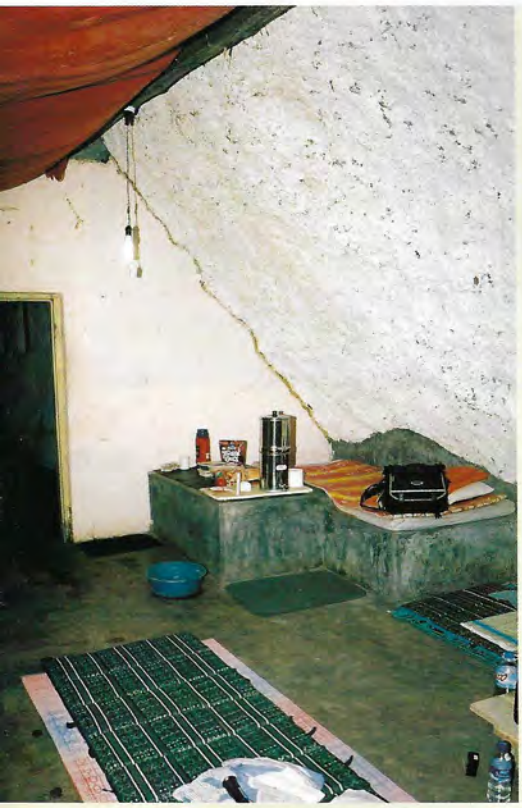
Every evening, all the monks gathered in the meditation hall to do the evening puja and they have a unique practice of transferring merits from one group of monks to another, usually from the junior to the senior, and vice versa.



Board and lodging

There are clusters of kutis, altogether 80 units spread all over the forest, some of which were purpose-built while some older ones were set into very large overhanging rocks and caves. Being monastic dwellings, they are simple and bare yet functional and quaint. Like SBS, the water supply is from mountain springs.

Chin Suey and I were lucky to share a kuti with an attached toilet though it took us a few days to get used to the smell and cold shower, bucket style! Although there were beds (meant for monks only), we were forbidden to use them and had to sleep on the cold damp floor which gave me backache and was a real hindrance to my sitting meditation. As for food, we had the same vegetarian meal as the monks, provided by the local laity at *piṇḍacāra*.



Daily programme and meditation practice

The day in the monastery starts at 3.30am with the first meditation session beginning at 4.00am. Though there are five meditation sessions covering seven hours, there are breaks for breakfast, cleaning, sweeping, lunch and tea. Meditation sessions were not compulsory so one needs much self discipline to abide by the daily meditation schedule. We also had the choice of meditating in the hall with some of the venerable monks, in our kutis, or in the forest.

Ven Ariyananda held interviews every afternoon from 4.00pm to 5.30pm for those who needed them.

The preferred mode of meditation in Na-Uyana is *samatha* under the Pa Auk method. I was told that during the early days of the monastery, monks were sent to Myanmar, Thailand and India to seek and determine the most suitable method. They decided on the Pa Auk method.

As Lai Hiang, Maxine and I had experience in *vipassanā*, the meditation teacher advised us to start our daily meditation practice with vipassana and only to switch to samatha when we had calmed our minds. I found this to be very effective and could switch my mind from one to the other quite easily.

Chin Suey decided to continue *mettā* meditation which he had learnt in SBS. Being a good-natured young man, he really enjoyed meditating with guidance from the teacher.

However, I found it difficult to practise meditation in the kuti with Chin Suey. He just loved to talk! And when he was not chatting, he would be munching on cornflakes!

Insect Attack

A few days into the retreat, we hiked up the forest to seek Bhante Aggacitta and were shocked to see his arms and hands badly bitten by gadflies even though his kuti windows were fixed with mosquito netting.

Apparently, these flies were so tiny they could pass through the mosquito netting. Subsequently, Bhante had to move to another kuti to avoid these tiny insects and his sores were duly treated with herbal wash

na-uyana arannya senasanaya

Nestled deep in a forest thickly populated with thousands of ironwood (Latin name: mesua ferrea) trees, Na-Uyana Arannya (Ironwood Park Monastery) was offered by King Uttiya to the Sangha some 2,300 years ago. Remains of this ancient monastery can be found amongst the outer wall of some caves. Carved on the wall are ancient writings in Brahmi script, records of its establishment. It must have been a thriving monastery during ancient times but fell mysteriously to ruin due probably to famine or disease. An ancient *stūpa* was recently discovered on the site and a new one has been built on it—some parts of the ancient stupa still stand around the new one.

The history of the place is rather obscure. Some 51 years ago, a local monk, Ven Bodhirakkhita decided to build his *kuṭi* where the cave inscriptions were found, and to stay there for the next 40 years. During his early years in Na-Uyana, animals such as bears, leopards and monkeys would surround his kuti and keep him company.

On 6 June 1997, one Ven Kondañña decided to establish a Sangha in Na-Uyana but he soon fell ill. The present 'CEO', Ven Ariyananda then took on the former's mantle in 1999, accompanied by 12 other venerable monks. They were subsequently joined by another six monks some six months later. At that time, there were only four kutis and some of the monks had to put up in some of the caves and under giant ironwood trees. There are now 80 kutis sprawled all over the forest. Some of the kutis are set into cave walls and giant overhanging rocks.

"The aim of the monastery is to train monks in the forest tradition to serve the community," explains Ven Ariyananda, a dynamic monk in his late thirties who is also the leading resident meditation teacher. He adds, "I strongly believe that meditation will calm the minds of the venerable monks, thus making them wise and virtuous." The monastery is held in high esteem in Sri Lanka and it is very difficult for a monk to secure a place there. Those who wish to stay on to practise meditation for life are allowed to do so indefinitely. The monastery also provides meditation training to the laity, for which there is a long waiting list.

prepared by the local venerable monks.

Night Visitor

One evening, after our meditation session, a snake followed us into our kuti. We turned everything inside out but there was no sight of our companion. Chin Suey was unable to sleep that evening and was about to pack up when I reminded him that the snake was probably too small to do us any harm. Our companion was no longer than a pencil! Nevertheless, he kept the lights on until dawn!

Somehow, I think it was his practice of metta meditation that drew all kinds of insects and snakes into our kuti, and encouraged forest monkeys to hang around us outside.

Going home

Troubled by my backache, I could not concentrate on my meditation and my mind was quite restless. Because of that, I decided to leave half-way through the month-long retreat I had initially planned for. Nevertheless, it was a great experience and I learnt much about life in a forest monastery.

I must thank Bhante Aggacitta for the opportunity, and Bhante Ariyananda for having us at his monastery and for imparting to us yogis some valuable meditation practices. Chin Suey was so glad to leave with me and even happier to leave the snakes behind!

ABBOT'S ADDRESS FROM PAGE 3

are all over the place. More than 90% of the population in Myanmar have TB germs in their lungs, just waiting for the opportunity to be activated. The moment one's resistance is low, due to malnutrition or over-exertion, they will create havoc." In other words, suitable nutrition, fresh air, sunshine, proper exercise and a stress free lifestyle all help to strengthen one's immune system. This at least is some semblance of a more holistic approach to the treatment of disease.

Narrow specialisation seems to be a modern trend and a necessity as the boundaries of knowledge melt away with ever new discoveries that dazzle our already congested mind crammed with information overload. However, the human being comprises not only myriad physical organs and tissues that are interrelated parts of a whole, but also mental, emotional and spiritual aspects that interact with his environs—internal and external, near and far, physical and otherwise, perceptible and imperceptible. So however limited or incomplete our specialised knowledge of the parts may be, we should always attempt—according to our own capability—to syncretise and apply it to the human being as a whole.

I like to think of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary as an evolving paradigm, on one level, of this principle. Here we endeavour to merge the multifaceted, interactive needs of the individual and the community. As I have often said, while our primary objective is to provide modern facilities for the proper training of well-rounded monks, we also recognise the necessity to reciprocate—within the limits of the DhammaVinaya—the material support so generously given by our faithful lay benefactors. To this end, we have been doing our part for this first half of 2005, as outlined below:

Nurturing personal needs

- Personal retreats for Ven Balacitta and myself in Sri Lanka, and for Ven Kumara and other resident monastics in SBS under the guidance of Sayadaw U Tejaniya from Shwe Oo Min Dhammasukha Tawya, Myanmar
- Uposatha Dhamma talks for monastics to reiterate the importance of holistic Dhamma practice as frequently outlined by the Buddha in the "gradual training" (*anupubbasikkhā*)
- IMP4 held from 4-17 April. A few participants stayed back to continue living the monastic life in SBS
- Revival of organic farm to produce healthy fruits and vegetables for monastics and lay supporters.

Reciprocating lay support

- Ongoing Saturday night meditation classes for the public in SBS
- Sunday Dhamma talks in TIMS
- Outreach programme starting from the South (Buddhist Fellowship, Singapore; Metta Lodge, Johor Bahru in January), baking on home ground (Sutta Study-cum-Meditation Camp in March) and lingering in the Klang Valley (Monash University Malaysia Campus, Sun-

A Field of Merits to Reap

in The Sri Gunawardana Yogashramaya

The Sri Gunawardana Yogashramaya is a hermitage in Ambalagoda, Galduwa, Sri Lanka. It is appealing for funds to finance the construction of a two-storey meditation centre, complete with hostel facilities for monks. The estimated cost of the proposed centre is USD 60,000. This hermitage is one of 150 branch hermitages spread out in Sri Lanka, established under the Shri Kalyani Establishment of Yogi-Hermitages.

Founded 54 years ago by the late Ven Kadavadduwe Jinawamsa Mahathera, this string of hermitages is the success story of the founder's effort in successfully reviving the forest tradition in Sri Lanka.

"Without desire for material gains, but only a wish for pure Dhamma, and a strong determination to defend the Sasana, the Shri Kalyani Establishment of Yogi-Hermitages has for 50 years been carrying out a great service to the Sasana."

Handbook for The Shri Kalyani Establishment of Yogi-Hermitages in Sri Lanka,
18 June 2001

Any financial donation towards the Galduwa Hermitage can be debited in beneficiary of the following:

The Secretary
Board of Trustees
Sri Gunawardana Yogashramaya

Bank name and address: **Seylan Bank, Ambalangoda, Sri Lanka**
Account no: **2501780**

Note: As part of a study tour just before starting SBS, Ven Aggacitta visited the late Ven Kadavadduwe Jinawamsa Mahathera, who passed away in 2003.

way; Moult Residence, Astana Mount Kiara, KL; 23rd INCOVAR Camp, SJBA; Bandar Utama Buddhist Society)

- Construction of new Main Office (MO) with a multi-purpose hall (MPH) upstairs to better accommodate lay visitors, guests and resident yogis
- Incorporating a spacious guest room and public washrooms in the construction of a double-storey farmhouse (next to the organic farm). Together with the new facilities in MO/MPH, this will also help to accommodate our loyal supporters who wish to meditate and observe Eight Precepts in SBS.

All these should evoke a sigh of relief—that while we are busily growing in our own specialised fields, we are also sharing our knowledge and resources with the community in an interactive, holistic way.

What better proof is there of our boundless interdependence and mutual support than the overwhelming response to my recent health crisis? Mahasadhu to the many great beings—individually or in groups—who were radiating metta and healing energy to me. I never felt any mental or physical pain while I was in hospital. In fact I had never felt more energised before and was amazed that I was not even assailed by drowsiness while practising Dhamma therapy (through meditation) despite my blood loss and being drugged by medication.

Aaah, what a relief in an encounter with dis-ease!

sāsanārakkha buddhist sanctuary

KATHINA

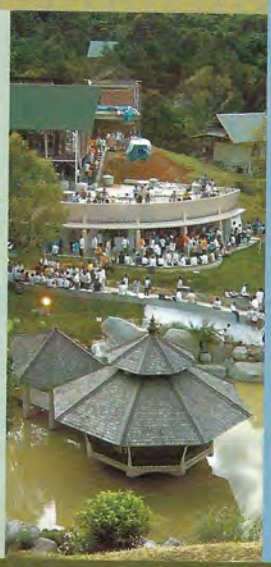
sunday 6 nov 2005

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

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

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 Family Group
	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 this day
- facilitate your hotel booking if you so require (please confirm by 1 Oct 2005)

Important note:

- To facilitate arrangements, please contact SBS office at least one month before your arrival date (Tel: 05-8084429)
- Wear suitable walking shoes, preferably sneakers.
- Bring a torch light if you intend 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 Family Group**

REACHING out

rebottling old wine

By Lim Lay Hoon

A *sutta* study camp with a difference—participants were treated to a different presentation of a sutta under the guidance of a skilful teacher.

"Amazing! Excellent!" That, in a nutshell, was how Judy Chuah described the 5-day Sutta Study-cum-Meditation Camp held at SBS from 13-17 March 2005.

Twenty privileged and blessed participants had the opportunity to attend this maiden camp which was organised as part of SBS's Outreach Program for 2005. SBS is now five years old, having been nurtured by Buddhists from all over Malaysia. This camp is a token of appreciation for its supporters—SBS is mindful of the fact that for a bird to fly it needs both wings to flap. Besides, now that the development of major "hardware" is over, it is time to focus on the "software".

As facilities in SBS are limited, only 20 applicants were accepted for the camp. They comprised Buddhists at different levels of practice and knowledge. None of them knew what to expect of the camp, not even the organisers! Most camps have focused only on either sutta studies or meditation. This camp however, had an interesting array of activities—sutta study, talks, discussions, meditation, chanting, yoga, and *qigong*.

Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta (MN 38) was chosen for study and discussion. "It is an interesting sutta that deals with rebirth, human conception, dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) and the gradual training that leads to liberation."

Ven Aggacitta explained that this sutta would be suitable because Qing Ming was just around the corner and he wanted to take the opportunity to scrutinise the Theravadin beliefs of rebirth and the afterlife.

Just before the 'guinea pigs' broke camp, all gathered for an appraisal session. Listening to their enthusiastic feedback, one can understand why Judy was feeling over the moon.

Yeo Khee Aik of Penang, found the sutta interesting and practical. Eng Kwan Hai of Kuala Lumpur elaborated, "This one sutta alone encompasses all of Buddha's Teachings from the theory of Dhamma to concepts and to discussions on ultimate liberation."

Lee Theng San of Buddhist Wisdom Centre then added, "It is a comprehensive sutta (discussion) in that it covers the Theravada and other schools of practice."

Rather than be a sage who preached from the stage, Ven Aggacitta adopted a student-centred approach in conducting the sutta study sessions. It began with communal reading of the sutta. This approach was much appreciated by those who had attempted to read suttas on their own and found it quite a challenge. Low Ming Pow, who is always interested in learning from reading *suttas* spoke from experience when she said, "Reading the suttas on one's own, one can get bored and lost because of the repetition. However, because of the style of presenting the sutta and the way the content was delved into, it was as if everything opened up and I had a different and refreshing perspective on suttas." Armed with a new-found technique of studying, analysing and understanding suttas, Ming Pow is inspired to learn more suttas after the camp!

Small group discussions followed the reading. Ven Aggacitta explained his rationale for this. "Small group discussions allow and force one to think, as opposed to listening to the teacher all the time," he said. This strategy proved to be effective for Cheong Thoong Leong, former General Administrator of SBS, who found the discussions very lively and interesting while Maxine Cheong, an articulate participant from Petaling Jaya, found the participants so recep-

"Although the questions asked could be energy sapping, I've learnt and benefited a lot from the sharing sessions and questions."

—*Ven Aggacitta*

tive and so much in harmony that it inspired her to open up. As a result of the uninhibited sharing of views, participants learnt a lot and managed to look at things from different perspectives.

One participant noted that Ven Aggacitta did not just prepare his lessons but also did thorough research to answer questions. Of this, Ven Aggacitta said, "Although the questions asked could be energy sapping, I've learnt and benefited a lot from the sharing sessions and questions."

During interviews for guidance on meditation, participants found Ven Aggacitta a skilful and compassionate teacher.

While all participants concurred in their views on the sutta study and discussions, it was not the same for the other activities. There was a dichotomy of views with regards to the practice of noble silence, especially during the time allocated for formal meditation. While seasoned yogis preferred more silence, others could not curb the enthusiasm that spilled over from the sutta discussion sessions. Views on the morning and night exercises were even more diverse.

Ven Aggacitta closed the camp with this exhortation, "I hope that as a result of the sutta camp you can make greater progress in the understanding of the Buddha's teachings in theory as well as in practice. Don't forget the gradual training. Don't forget to balance your practice of *samatha* with full awareness and don't forget to apply in your daily life the techniques you have learnt."

SENT

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Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

Just send a blank mail to

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a 'cool' experience

By Lindy Bak

PBUM Dhamma Study Group comes for a visit and is surprised to meet a 'cool' monk and a 'cute' one.

It all started when I had to sing "Guardian of the Sasana" during a Dhamma study session by the Dhamma Study Group of Universiti Malaya. At the study session, everyone was raving about Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) being a beautiful place to visit. Soon after, I managed to gather nine people for a two-day trip to SBS.

When we arrived there after an almost vertical uphill ride in a 4WD (what an adrenaline rush then!), we were awed by the breathtaking scenery overlooking the whole of Taiping town. Everything around there looked so natural and we were amazed by the glimpse of a dragon fruit plant and a yam plant with huge leaves. Yes, yes—city kids like us don't really get the chance to see much of this.

We met Ven Aggacitta in his *kuṭi* together with a few adorable cats. The conversation with the Abbot then was brief, and from his firm tone, one would expect us to describe him as someone strict—on the contrary, we thought of him as a 'cool' monk. It was not only his calm and confident look, but also the charisma he exuded when he talked. This feeling was affirmed when we hiked downhill to town for *piṇḍacara*. Unfortunately, one of the girls in the group slipped into a tiny drain and was told by Bhante to check her feet for leeches! As we were tottering behind Bhante Kumara, Bhante Aggacitta overtook us with steady steps together with Ah Boy, the faithful dog.

We also had the privilege to meet this 'cute' monk, who, with his warm smile, welcomed us to The Sanctuary. Bhante Kumara guided us through *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation and also walking meditation which were new experiences for some of us. He was patient and understanding with us. He made us feel at ease and encouraged us to be open with our problems during the session. We could see how concerned Bhante was about health as he emphasised the importance of proper sleep and the dangers of electromagnetic waves from hand phones and computers. It was truly enlightening to listen to him, especially when some of us actually do suffer from chronic sleep disorder.

Our trip was made even more meaningful when we had the chance to meet nice, friendly devotees there. We accompanied the bhantes for pindacara at the market one morning and saw how much respect the people have for the monks as they bowed with reverence. Young or old, people generously donated and we were humbled by the sight. We were touched by the thought that some of these people possibly earned only a meagre income, yet made that effort to give away something to the monks, a sight hardly seen in the cities. We also had the chance to chat for a while with some of the devotees during *dana* and found them friendly and cheerful people.

This trip to SBS is a memorable experience that we will cherish for a long time. For the rest of you out there who have not been to SBS, I suggest you go check it out and experience for yourself that beautiful feeling. *Ehipassiko!*

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

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

Introduction to Monkhood Programme

2-15 December 2005

Learn meditation, discipline, Buddhist teachings based on early scriptures, Pali chanting and more!

What more?

- Talks & discussions on DhammaVinaya & relevant issues
- qigong/yoga session
- Pali pronunciation workshop
- alms gathering & other ascetic practices
- nature walk
- riverside breakfast and more

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
- Agree to stay for the whole two weeks of the programme
- Willing to observe all the stipulated regulations
- Able to communicate well in English
- Aged 17 and above; completed Form 5

Fully sponsored by SBS & supporters
Medium of Instruction: English
Application Form & Details:
Contact: Uttara Ong (SBS Administration Office)
t. 05-808 4429 f. 05-808 4423 e. office@sasanarakkha.org
Closing Date: 11 November 2005

Interested but wrong timing? Subscribe to SBSmail egroup to receive announcements of IMP and other SBS updates. Send a blank email to sbsmail-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

UNFOLDMENT

Things have been unfolding naturally since the idea of setting up a local monk-training centre crystallised. Let us share with you some happenings of the past six months.

SBS unfoldment

1 Jan New Year dana is offered to Ven Aggacitta at Buddhist Fellowship, Singapore. After the *dāna* Ven Aggacitta gives a short *anumodanā* Dhamma talk based on Sappurisadana Sutta (AN 5:148).

3 Jan Metta Lodge, Johor Baru, hosts Ven Aggacitta for lunch dana. After the offering, Ven Aggacitta gives a short Dhamma talk based on Cakka Sutta (AN 4:31). Later in the evening, Ven Aggacitta delivers a public talk "Spectrum of Merits" at the same premises. The talk will be edited and published for free distribution in the near future.

4 Jan Ven Dhammananda, a newly ordained American monk, comes to SBS for a month to learn about monkhood. (see story on p4)

5 Jan Ven Pannyavaro and his *kappiya*, Andrew, both from Australia, come for a visit to SBS together with Frida Tan and Sabrina of Peace House, Penang.

7 Jan Ven Varadhammo from Penang arrives for a month's stay.

11 Jan Michael Woo donates a portable electric sewing machine to SBS.

Sim Beng Shin, Chief Editor of Pumen magazine (published by Fo Guang Publications), and Ong Wan Kah, its Marketing Executive, interview Ven Aggacitta for the publication.

17 Jan Venerables Aggacitta, Varadhammo and Balacitta undergo cleansing therapy for three days under the guidance of Venerable Dhammananda.

Uttara Ong reports for work as the new Administration Assistant of SBS.

24 Jan In today's Uposatha Dhamma talk for monastics, Ven Aggacitta stresses the importance of daily practice according to the gradual training (*anupubbasikkhā*) mentioned frequently in the *suttas*, in addition to participating in intensive meditation retreats that are the vogue nowadays.

25 Jan Chiu Sheng Bin and KL Gan come to work on the fruit trees at SBS. They also set up two compost heaps which will provide good quality top soil for planting flowers and other plants.

Two Sri Lankan monks, Ven Seelananda and Ven Narada Thero come to visit SBS.

26 Jan Ex-IMPians (Introduction to Monkhood Programme Participants) meet for the first time in BWC, PJ, while Ven Aggacitta is there. Three are from IMP1; two from IMP2 and four from IMP3. They have an enjoyable informal discussion and make plans to hold an ex-IMPians' gathering at SBS to coincide with the last 3 days of the forthcoming IMP4.

30 Jan A Gelugpa lama, Dagyab Rinpoche, his wife and niece visit SBS. The couple are residing in Germany while his niece lives in Darjeeling, India. We are told that the Tibetan word *lama* actually means 'master' and not 'monk' as is popularly understood.

31 Jan Lim Kim Wui from Kuala Lumpur hiked up to SBS without any prior notice and requests to stay. After a short interview, Ven Kumara approves his request. The newcomer seems genuinely keen to obtain proper monkhood training in SBS.

1 Feb SBS receives a complimentary CD-ROM of Piya Tan's Sutta Discovery Series, sent through the Buddhist Fellowship in Singapore. Sadhu to Piya for his commendable Dhamma work there. (see letter on p2)

9 Feb Ven Thitavijjo, a Malaysian monk of one vassa, arrives at SBS. He was recommended to come here by How Eng Keong (our PJ representative), who was with him as a temporary monk in Thailand. (see email on p5)

11 Feb More than 15 Myanmar factory workers volunteer to transport and stack granite rocks in gabion cages by Jalan Sima. Supervised by Dr Soo, this erosion control works is being carried out to repair the landslide that occurred several months ago.

15 Feb SBS Building Development Team meet in the office of SBS's consultant architect, Jade Saw, to finalise plans for the construction of Main Office.

20 Feb Ven Dhammavuddho from Vihara Buddha Gotama, Temoh, visits Ven Aggacitta in SBS to discuss plans for an informal gathering of Malaysian Theravada monks who are not members of the Malaysian Thai Sangha Council.

24 Feb Hor Tuck Loon and friends donate a digital recorder-player (iRiver Multi-codex Jukebox H320) to Ven Aggacitta. Now Dhamma talks can be clearly recorded to produce quality CDs for free distribution.

5 Mar Members of the SBS Organic Farm Project meet with Ven Aggacitta to discuss the details of this project.

9 Mar During the Uposatha ceremony today Ven Aggacitta reminds the monastics of what is expected of monks as exhorted by the Buddha in Maha-Assapura Sutta (MN 39).

11 Mar A used Toyota Land Cruiser 4WD, donated by an anonymous donor, arrives in SBS.

12 Mar SBS holds its first Sutta Study cum Meditation Camp for its lay supporters as a token of gratitude for their generous and faithful support. This admission-free camp allows SBS supporters the opportunity to enjoy a taste of Dhamma in The Sanctuary which they helped create. The camp commences today and will end on Thursday 17 March. (see story on p24)

19 Mar Fifty-one members of the Dhammikarama Temple BGX Youths & Sunday School in Penang come for a visit. Ven Aggacitta delivers a talk to them: "Mutual Care, Sure Spirituality".

20 Mar Four members of the BMS Dhammaduta Youth group come up to record messages from Ven Aggacitta & Ven Kumara for the event, One Voice: A Sharing of Minds, to be held at Dewan Asoka, Buddhist Maha Vihara, Kuala Lumpur on 30 April.

29 Mar The existing building which has served as Main Office has been completely demolished to make way for the new administration block.

4 Apr Introduction to Monkhood Programme 4 (IMP4) starts today. There are 12 participants making it the largest IMP ever. (see story on p12)

7 Apr Liew Hee Nam starts his job as General Administrator of SBS.

9 Apr As part of the IMP programme, Ven Aggacitta delivers a presentation on evidence showing the effect of prayer, music and words on the quality and structure of water.

15 Apr Seven ex-IMPians arrive to join the current IMP participants in their programme. (see cover story)

16 Apr Tan Siew Luang and Tan Joo Lan of Centre for Environment and Technology (CETDEM) visit the SBS organic farm to share their knowledge on organic farming.

17 Apr Today is the final day of IMP4. Ng Kian Chong and Ven Aggacitta deliver speeches at the closing ceremony which is attended by SBS monastics, 12 IMP participants, 7 ex-IMPians and 10 devotees. Magha (Steven Low) applies to be a postulant

while two other IMP4 participants also stay on for a coming meditation retreat guided by Sayadaw U Tejaniya.

18 Apr Two Burmese monks, Sayadaw U Candima and U Paññadipa, accompanied by a recently ordained Malaysian monk, Ven Khemananda, pay a visit to SBS. The two sayadaws are staying in the Buddhist Hermitage in Lunas as meditation teachers.

20 Apr Postulant Lim Kim Wui leaves SBS with Ven Aggacitta's consent.

Ven Aggacitta and Ven Balacitta leave for PJ en route to Sri Lanka for a month-long retreat. (see story on p18)

While in PJ, the abbot goes to Monash University, Sunway to deliver a talk on "The Purpose and Meaning of Life".

22 Apr Sayadaw U Tejaniya arrives at SBS, accompanied by U Paññavaro and kappiya, Hirok Ghosh. The sayadaw is here for his own retreat but is also willing to guide the resident monastics.

7 May Sayadaw U Tejaniya gives instructions on meditation to about 40 devotees in the evening.

8 May A group of about 10 members of Pertubuhan Alumni Buddhis Universiti Malaya come for a visit and have a discussion with Ven Kumara. Sayadaw U Tejaniya holds a meditation discussion with 36 devotees at 3.00pm in Sangha Classroom.

11 May Sayadaw U Tejaniya, Ven Paññavaro and Hirok Ghosh leave for Sarawak.

16 May Ven Kusala is here to stay as a visiting monk.

20 May Ven Kumara leaves for Fraser's Hill on the invitation of UKMBA to give talks and lead chanting for their Wesak camp.

21 May It is Wesak Eve and the annual lamp lighting ceremony is held in the evening. Torrential rain starts to fall at 6.45pm and stops only at 9.15pm. (see accompanying story)

22 May Ven Induragare Dhammapala comes on a study visit as part of his research for his PhD thesis on meditation.

24 May Ajahn Mahañano brings Luang Por Liem, abbot of Wat Pah Pong (where Ajahn Chah was abbot), here for a visit with an entourage of six other monks (including Ven Jutipañño & Sripañño) and a *meichi*.

27 May A group of seven members from the Chinese Herbs Association come to discuss how they can help SBS. They pledge to part-sponsor a future project in SBS.

28 May Nine members of PBUM DSG come for a weekend visit.

2 Jun Ven Aggacitta leaves for PJ and gives a talk "Abhidhamma Inquiry" at the Moult residence.

3 Jun While in PJ, Ven Aggacitta delivers a talk "Live Wisely" at the 23rd INCOVAR Camp and later another talk "What is it that is born?" at Bandar Utama Buddhist Society.

4 Jun Another talk is given by Ven Aggacitta at BWC on "Dhammacakkhu (Dhamma Eye)" before he returns to SBS.

5 Jun A group of 25 Myanmar workers volunteer their much welcomed 'brawny' services to till the organic farm and to fetch and carry construction materials.

6 Jun Ven Balacitta recited the Patimokkha in English (KR Norman's translation). Ven Aggacitta talks on MahaGosingha Sutta (MN 32).

7 Jun Ven Kusala checks out and Sumutta Chu Leng Hock, a participant of IMP2, begins his 20-day stay as an 8-precept holder.

Vibrant rain brings a freshness and vigour to the air, cleansing hearts and minds in readiness for devotees to reflect upon the significance of Wesak.

I had longed to visit Sasanaranakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS). Its beautiful theme song "Sasanarakkha" always gave me a picture of a peaceful haven in a forest. Furthermore, as a Taipingite, I think it would really be a waste if I did not visit it.

I finally found the opportunity to explore SBS this Wesak Day. I arrived in SBS on 21 May, in time to offer my help with the preparations for the lamp lighting ceremony that evening.

Mr Liew drove us up in a Kembara. The roads were winding and in the heavy rain, driving was a challenging task. However Mr Liew managed to send us safely up, thanks to his F1 driving skills!

When the rain stopped, we began the task of candle arrange-

a deluge of blessings

By Yong Poh Lain

Together with all the other devotees, we waited in the rain for almost an hour as there was the inevitable rush to get a seat each time a vehicle came to pick up the devotees. I know now how refugees trying to escape from an impoverished country feel.

At last, we managed to climb in and were transported to the tents where food and drinks were being passed around to alleviate our hunger and thirst. Ten minutes later, the rain stopped and devotees proceeded to light all the candles along the slopes.

About 4,000 candles were lit to dispel the thick darkness of ignorance and to pave the way for the spread of Dhamma, compassion and wisdom. Bhante Aggacitta delivered a Dhamma talk in Hokkien. He noted that the heavy rain might be a sign of blessings for this ment. Placing candles along both sides of the road was not that difficult, but to arrange the words, "Happy Wesak 2005" on a small slope needed some effort.

By 6.45pm, most of the devotees had gathered at the foot of the hill, near the Hokkien graveyard. The 4WDs started to fetch the elderly and helpers to the top of the hill. Teenagers and young adults like me chose to walk up in order to light the candles along the roadside. To our dismay, rain suddenly began pouring down again like cats and dogs. Jason, Mabel and another female devotee had to huddle under a single small umbrella.

Wesak Day as it would wash away our physical and mental impurities (to banish the three evil roots) and would purify our minds and actions. This positive view of the rain helped to relieve the discomfort of the devotees, some of whom were truly wet.

This first visit to SBS was a valuable experience and left me with lots of special memories. The success of its Wesak Celebration was attributed to the efforts of many helpers and the programme was simple yet meaningful and memorable. I already am looking forward to my next visit!

8 Jun Venerables Cattamalo, Dhammapala, Mahapañño, Thavaro come to consult Ven Aggacitta on some Vinaya and Sangha matters.

10 Jun Ah Leong brings granite slabs engraved with SBS road names to be used as signage.

12 Jun Ven Aggacitta coughs out about 500ml of blood and is admitted to Ipoh Specialist Hospital (ISH). (see "Abbot's Address" for more.)

14 Jun Recommended by Ven Tejadhamma, Venerables Gunodaya and Subodha, both Mahayanist monks from Taiwan, are here to enquire about the setting up of a monastery, particularly with regards to a workable balance of power between monastics and laity. The discussion between them and Ven Kumara also touch on some issues in the DhammaVinaya such as intermediate life.

17 Jun Ven Aggaccitta is discharged from ISH and checks into a nearby Ayurvedic healing centre to continue his treatment.

18 Jun Tan Siew Luang and Tan Joo Lan of CETDEM are here for the day. In the morning they teach our organic farm committee members how to make proper compost. In the afternoon the former gives a talk on organic farming. (see story on p16)

19 Jun Ajahn Javana comes for a visit with Bagan Serai devotees.

20 Jun Ven Aggacitta has a consultation with a senior Ayurvedic physician and is impressed by his explanation and recommendations.

23 Jun Ven Aggacitta goes to ISH for a follow-up appointment with the lung specialist. His health suffers a setback due to long exposure to the low temperature there and to the lung capacity test that injures his lung.

25 Jun Members of SMJK Hua Lian Buddhist Society, together with 2 teacher advisers, visit SBS. Ven Kumara guides them on the practical basics of meditation.

30 Jun Ven Aggacitta returns to SBS.

... This targeting is not good for the yogi. I began to realise this. So I changed to emphasise the mind. The mind is more important. The object is not important.

Year by year, my instructions change a little. I'm not rigid. When I see a weak point, I change the instruction, so that it becomes more helpful to the yogi.

FROM BACK COVER

"Why"?

Yes. Why you are watching this. Most people don't know the reason. For most people, they are just following orders.

Okay. I see.

They don't use their intelligence.

I see what you mean.

This is a problem. I want to share this first. Any instruction I give the yogi, I start by telling them this. Because you meditate with the mind, you need to understand some things about the mind. You must know.

That should come first.

Yes.

And in terms of method...

I'm not into methods. I only say that it is satipatthana. What the Buddha taught is satipatthana.

I've heard some Malaysian yogis saying that in the Shwe Oo Min (SOM) centre, they practise watching the solar plexus. I personally, having practised under your guidance, find that to be a misrepresentation. It is not very accurate. Do you have any comments about that?

In the past, when I was learning, my teacher also taught me many ways. Among the things that I like is watching the solar plexus.

So earlier on when I started teaching meditation, what I advised the yogis to do was to watch the solar plexus. By paying attention to the solar plexus, you can know mental feelings more, and slowly you can begin to see mental activities. When I find that the yogi's mindfulness is somewhat strong, I try to guide him from the solar plexus to the feeling.

But slowly I realised that this is not for everybody. Some people try to target the place. They try to find where. I know that this is a weak point. This targeting is not good for the yogi. I began to realise this. So I changed to emphasise the mind. The mind is more important. The object is not important.

So, when a person says that what you teach is watching the solar plexus, it is not very accurate; but for some of them, you do teach this way...

Yes.

... but for others not necessarily so. It could be more of mental states or something else.

Yes. I observe the yogis and, gradually, I've become more and more open about my instructions. Before, I was a little bit...

Narrow?

Narrow. Now, I understand more. Having got more experience teaching yogis, having had many, many discussions with them, my understanding has become wider.

Year by year, my instructions change a little. I'm not rigid. When I see a weak point, I change the instruction, so that it becomes more helpful to the yogi.

Can you give us an estimate of how many Malaysian yogis you have taught?

I think somewhere around 50. Last year was when a lot started to come.

So, having interviewed them, do you notice any general characteristics about these Malaysian yogis?

Yes. Malaysian yogis are very good in faith, and their *viriya* is also very strong. By viriya, I mean forcing viriya. *[Laughter]* Their forcing viriya is very strong. Another weak point about Malaysian yogis is too much belief and thinking about ghosts and devas. I have seen that this is something that has caused the most problems among the Malaysian yogis.

One difficulty I face with Malaysian yogis is that... for a lot of Malaysian yogis, what they understand is to focus very hard on the object, with a lot of viriya, a lot of effort. Heavy concentration creates problems. This is a weak point of most Malaysian yogis.

...my idea is that I'm not teaching. My motivation is to help the yogi. I don't want to be some *sayadawgyi* (great venerable teacher).

...I want to help. I want to know the weak point of the yogi. I want to know what he needs and try to give him what he needs. This is more beneficial for the yogi.

On this weak point of trying to force their attention on the object, what do you suggest they do about it?

I think the understanding, the information that they get is not enough. But they know this (i.e. pay close attention to the object), so they just try to do this. They don't have enough information. So now I want to try to share this right information through a book.

So that they can get a more complete idea on how to pay attention to their meditation object?

Yes. Also, they think that cittanupassana (awareness of mental states) is very 'high level'. But I think it's not very high lah! *[Laughter]* It's just because they have less experience.

What I advise is to start with *kayanupassana* (awareness of the body) but you can continue with any obvious mental states or *vedana* (mental feelings). So, you can start [by watching these] together. Not separately. In the beginning you don't have to watch just the mind only; you cannot.

So, you don't really teach that way?

Some people can easily know about the mental states sooner. In that case, he or she can start watching them sooner. Sometimes, there are some yogis who have practised for a long time and already have enough *samadhi*, so it's better to go immediately to the mental states.

So, for some yogis, you start straight with mental states.

Yes, because it depends on his level, his understanding.

Also, my idea is that I'm not teaching. My motivation is to help the yogi. I don't want to be some *sayadawgyi* (great venerable teacher). I don't want this. I want to help. I want to know the weak point of the yogi. I want to know what he needs and try to give him what he needs. This is more beneficial for the yogi.

U Zin, you mentioned, some time after coming here, that your mind is more peaceful now. You said that you've been very busy teaching and that is not good. I understand that you're doing something about it. Can you share what you intend to do, so that perhaps yogis who intend to go there can know what to expect? Is there anything for us to know in advance so that perhaps we can help in some way?

I started last year.

What did you try to do?

Now I've found my way, a balance between the outside situation and my mind. I've found the way myself now.

Before, there were fewer yogis. So, I could handle it. But gradually things went out of control: too many yogis. So I couldn't balance. So, I had to find my way.

So, you're not changing how the centre is run, like limiting the number of yogis or how long the yogis can stay?

This I cannot control. *[Laughter]* Because now with the Internet, the whole world knows. Like now there are many westerner yogis, Canadians, Europeans (Pause) many people and I've no way to tell them when to come.

So, you're not limiting the length of stay, such as to three months as is the case for Burmese yogis?

This is for local yogis only because there are too many of them. For foreign yogis, if you really want to practise, it depends on you. If you continue to practise, we don't ask you to go. If you are not practising, then go. It's better that way. Otherwise, it's a waste of time.

I notice that, for myself and many other Malaysian yogis that I've observed, there seems to be a lack of joy in our practice.

Yes, not satisfied.

We are too serious.

Yes, no *piti* (joy).

(Pause) Which is actually an enlightenment factor?

No piti and no *passaddhi* (calmness).

I notice that when there's a lack of joy, the mind is simply not relaxed enough. I notice that you're more relaxed than I am, and you seem to be more mindful than I am. So, I'm beginning to try to change my way. Do you notice this of other yogis too?

Like you? A lot!

Should we 'enjoy' our meditation?

People force because they are not satisfied and want something. By 'joy' I mean being happy, being contented—contented with yourself, believing in yourself, having faith in yourself. If you have right practice, then this happens.

If your practice is without enough understanding, or not complete in understanding, then it becomes like your case, not happy to practice[1]. You need to learn more about meditation. You must learn more about your mind. If you really, really watch, you can see what is happening in your mind, everything, then you can see your weak point.

And then I can adjust...

Adjust yourself. Actually, what you need is to have more understanding. Then you can do this. You're satisfied with yourself, you're satisfied with your practice, you enjoy your practice. 'Enjoy' means have faith, confidence.

A person who understands very well that this practice is beneficial will never lack interest. I'm always interested in watching myself. Fantastic. If you see that your mind is walking the Noble Eightfold Path, this is a meaningful life.

[1]This bit 'not happy to practice' was added later when the draft transcription of this interview was sent to U Tejaniya to go through with his translator, Moushumi Ghosh. At first I disagreed and thought it was a mistake. But upon brute honest self-introspection, I realise, "Wow! He's right. I'm not happy to practice. I do want to practice, but deep down inside I'm not happy to." Such an eye opener this is for me. In fact, for this retreat, I do notice that I've been more contented. No wonder it has been more pleasant too!

Yes, I agree. *[Mild laughter]* It is a meaningful life.

You would never get bored. Never. You know the present moment, the benefit of just being mindful. If you can see this clearly, you would never be bored with the practice. Why you are mindful and what you get from this—if you really understand that, you would never be bored. All the time, it would be fantastic, fantastic.

So, there will always be this joy.

Yes. I'm not enjoying, but joy comes automatically. You understand?

Yes, I see what you mean. Thank you, U Zin. Bhante Aggacitta observed that many foreign monks who go to Myanmar or many foreign yogis who go to Myanmar and become monks, go only to meditation centres and learn how to meditate. But as monks, meditation is just one part of the Buddha's teachings. Normally these monks, after learning meditation, do not learn other essential parts of the Buddha's teachings. They seem to be satisfied with just that. Do you think that is a problem, and if you do, is the Shwe Oo Min centre doing anything about this for the sake of the Sasana?

This is a weak point about SOM. What we can do is only emphasise how to meditate. As for other things, it's our weak point, but it's something they should do [i.e. learn other essential parts of the Buddha's teachings].

What would you suggest to these monks when they are about to leave the centre, so that they would try to learn other aspects of the Buddha's teachings?

I say *vinaya* is also very important. But you can be aware of yourself, watch yourself in whatever you do, and slowly you will understand what you should do. If you want to live your life as a monk, you must learn about a monk's life. If you don't do this, and only meditate, this is not enough. For lay people, this is not a problem.

But if they are not from traditional Buddhist countries, when they go back, they have nowhere to go to learn. They can only try to read on their own. What do you think they should do?

You must learn. Come to Myanmar or do whatever that is best. No matter what, you must learn. This is your choice [of life].

U Zin, you're now working on your book, which contains what you want to share with yogis. What is your main motivation for writing this book? I'm asking this because earlier on, as I understand, you had no intention to give talks, you're not writing any books—there aren't any books from Shwe Oo Min at all. Then suddenly I heard that you're coming up with a book. What motivated you to do this now?

It's because of what I've learnt from my experience with yogis. Even some yogis who have practised for a very long time still do not have enough understanding about the mental states, and how to watch their mind. They are not skilled enough. So I want to share this mental attitude. The sooner the yogi gets a better understanding of this, the more he can benefit.

This is not my choice. Some Malaysian yogis come for interview and then they want to know more. So when other people have their interview, they also sit in and take notes. Then they wanted to make it into a book for the sake of others and I agreed.

The only thing that I've done is a leaflet on "What is the Right Attitude for Meditation", the 27 points. Then, I noticed that it brought a lot of benefit for the yogis. When the yogis read it, they also become very interested in the practice. For old yogis too, they can change their attitude, they can know their mind. So, it's very beneficial to them.

So that's my motivation—to provide more information to yogis.

Alright. I think that's enough for this interview. Thank you very much, U Zin, for sharing your time.

As Sayadaw U Tejaniya does not speak fluent English, this interview was assisted by Hirok Ghosh. For the most part, the teacher preferred to express what he wished to say in English directly albeit not always very fluently (which explains the promptings). At such points, I have tried to render what the teacher said in more comprehensible English to make the transcription more readable. To minimise possible errors in doing so, we are fortunate to have Moushumi Ghosh, the sayadaw's preferred translator, to go through the transcription with him.

Glossary of Non-English Words

Terms below are in Pali unless otherwise indicated. Words that are italicised (e.g. *Theravāda*) means they are also defined here.

Abhidhamma A later collection of analytical treatises based on lists of categories drawn from the teachings in the *suttas*, probably added to the Canon several centuries after the Buddha's life.

Akusala unwholesome, unskilful

Anumodanā "rejoicing after"; appreciation, approval or encouragement of another's good deed

Arahant liberated person who has eradicated all mental defilements

Ayurveda (Sanskrit) ancient medical treatise of the Indian art of healing and prolonging life

Bhante Venerable sir (often used when addressing a *bhikkhu*)

Bhāvanā meditation, development, mental cultivation

Bhikkhu *Theravāda* Buddhist monk

Cittānupassanā repeated observation of the mind

Dāna act of giving, an offering

Deva deity

DhammaVinaya "Doctrine & Discipline"—term used by the Buddha to denote the 'religion' he founded

Ehipassiko inviting to come & see

Jhāna meditative concentration

Kaḷyānamitta a friend who is beautiful in virtue

Kamma volition; action

Kappiya(kāraka) steward for monks

Kaṭhina 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

Kuṭi small house or hut

Lobha greed

Mahāsādhu great *sādhu*

Mahāthera a bhikkhu of twenty or more years' standing

Mahāyāna "Great Vehicle"; a major school of Buddhism emphasising universal salvation (especially through faith) and social concern

Meichi (Thai) Thai nun

Mettā loving-kindness

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

Nikāya collection (of *suttas*)

Pūjā honour; respect; devotional offering

Pāli ancient Indian language in which *Theravāda* scriptures are preserved

Pāramī altruistic meritorious deed that will conduce to the attainment of enlightenment

Paritta protection; protective chant

Piṇḍacāra Buddhist monks' practice of going on alms round

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

Pitta (Sanskrit, Ayurvedic) bodily "fire"

Qigong (Chinese) exercise that generates and mobilises qi

Qing Ming (Chinese, 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 of the Gregorian calendar

Reiki (Japanese, lit. universal life force energy) form of energy healing on mind and body

Sādhu well done, excellent

Sīla morality, virtue, precept

Sīmā monastic boundary to territory

Samādhi concentration

Sāmaṇera novice Buddhist monk preparing to become a *bhikkhu*

Samatha tranquillity

Sammā-sambuddha completely self-enlightened one

Saṁsāra rounds of birth & death

Sāsana (the Buddha's) teachings or dispensation

Satipaṭṭhāna establishment of mindfulness

Stūpa (Pali: thūpa): Originally, a burial mound enshrining relics of a holy person, such as the Buddha, or objects associated with his life. It has evolved into tall, spired monuments found in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar; and into pagodas of China, Korea, and Japan.

Sutta discourse

Theravāda "Doctrine of the Elders"; a major school of Buddhism claiming to go by 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

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

U Zin (Myanmar) respectful address for a young monk

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

Vinaya monastic law and regulation

Vipassanā insight (meditation)

Viriya energy, effort

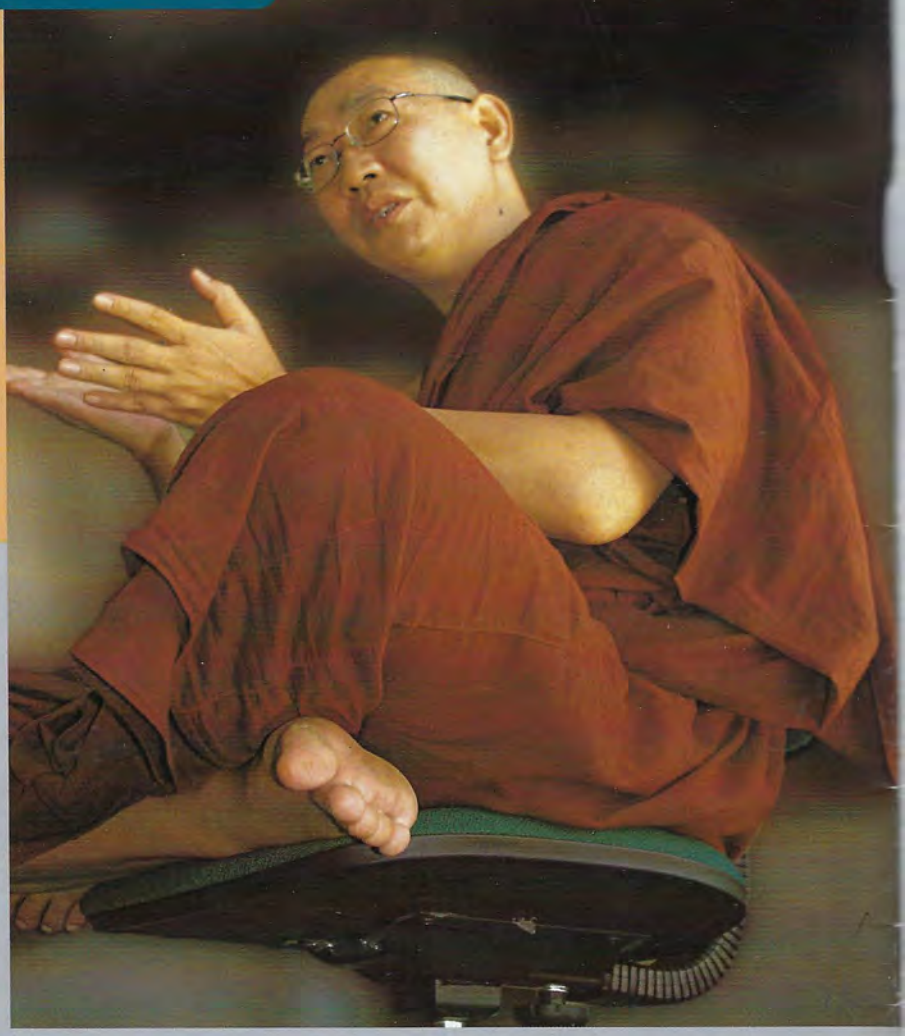
Yakkha (usually) demon

Yogi one who strives for spiritual goals; meditator

FANTASTIC!

an interview with sayadaw u tejaniya

Sayadaw U Tejaniya, successor to the late Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw U Kosalla, was here last year and is here again for a retreat.
Ven Kumara Bhikkhu, who is under his guidance for the second time, interviews him for the benefit of the readers.



Kumara Bhikkhu: U Zin, thank you very much for granting us this interview. Let us start with something light. You came last year for your retreat. What made you decide to come here again this year?

U Tejaniya: This centre is very similar to forest monasteries in Burma. I wish to spend time in a forest monastery. The last time I came, I actually did so without having planned to. When I was here I realised that I actually like this place a lot. I found that my meditation practice here was good. I realised that the setting here is truly a forest monastery setting, which was what I wanted.

U Zin, we have definitely benefited from your presence here and your teaching. We are glad that, besides having your own retreat, you have been willing to share some of your time with us, to guide us in our practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*. I hope that through this interview, we can also allow other Malaysian *yogis* to benefit from your knowledge and experience.

Many Malaysian yogis are familiar with the Mahasi method, the Pa Auk method and the Goenka method. Can you briefly tell us the difference between what you are teaching and the typical Mahasi method?

Actually, I do not give preference to any method or technique. I don't want to talk too much about this. I just want to share with the yogi or help the yogi to understand the right attitude on how to practice and my understanding about it, so that they can bear this in mind.

I've gone through the life of a yogi and have experienced much. I have realised that *cittānupassana* (awareness of mental states) is very important. If you have this information, this knowledge about the right attitude first, your meditation will be better.

I learnt a lot about this from the late Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, so that I could apply this attitude in meditation. It benefited my practice a lot. I did try to learn from other meditation teachers too, but they don't talk about this.

Can you give an example of this knowledge?

They talked about looking at this object or that object, but they don't emphasise how to do it: what state of mind, what attitude to have when you watch the object, why you are watching it...

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LAYOUT AND DESIGN Hor Tuck Loon
PRINTER Setiakawan Printers
Special thanks to Lim Kooi Fong for the use of his office for layout work

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