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Sāsanārakkha Newszine

News and views from Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

Wishing you a Great New Year!

IMPeace

By VEN NYANASANTI

I witnessed a *catch-22* recently. Twenty-two people volunteered to catch the monastic train(-ing) at Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary and spend two weeks exploring and experiencing life in the Sangha.

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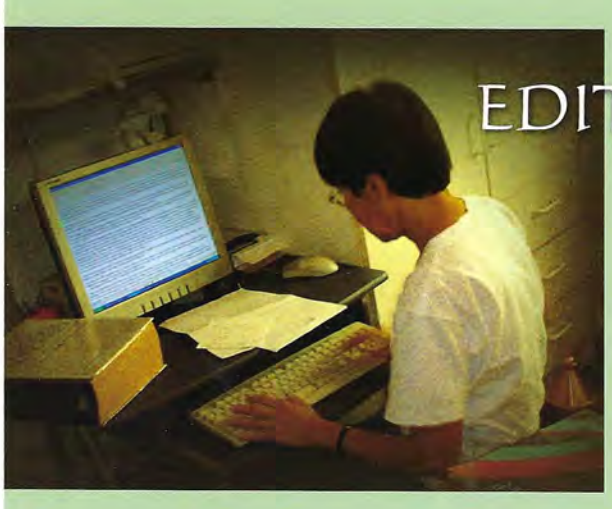
No BOOT CAMP This

Going GREEN

40 Nights in CONFINEMENT



EDITOR's Thoughts

Not Old Hat

ONCE again we bring you write-ups on Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP), Kathina, Teenage Dhamma Camp, Development, and more.

You are thinking: "same old thing"?

Right and wrong. The events may be the same, but read about them and you will find many 'firsts'.

For the first time, you get glimpses into IMP through the eyes and minds of non-participants: "No Boot Camp This" and "IMPeace". You can't wait to register for the next one? Information about IMP6, to be held in April 2006, is found in this issue.

News about an effort to get members of the Theravada Sangha in Malaysia to meet annually is of course, new(s).

What else can Kathina be about, but *kaṭhina* celebrations? Age-old traditions have to carry on. But then, this year's kathina celebrations also bring you news about some things done differently—for the devotees. Instead of being pampered with 4WDs as in past years, devotees walked up a large stretch of the way along a path known as the '*piṇḍacāra* trail'. Aching feet were soon forgotten when they saw what was in store for lunch. In past years, they had to make do with packets of cold fried rice. Downright unimaginative, don't you think? This year, read about Food Court in SBS in "Staying Connected With You".

Another 'first' was when we held a Dhamma Camp for teens schooled in Mandarin. The writer gives us his story straight from the heart in "Learning to Live Life".

Read about what's new on the development front in "With Laity in Mind" and "Organic Farm".

More than just these 'firsts', we also bring you some thought-provoking and inspiring articles. Two of them—"40 Nights in Confinement" and "The Deal" will set you thinking.

So, let us think.

We've got MAIL

✉ It was during one of my rare occasional visits to Buddhist Gem Fellowship (BGF) that I first set eyes on *Sasanarakkha*, sitting among a host of Dhamma literature on a rack. The quality of the cover layout was good... that was why it attracted my attention and as I read through its contents, it gave me a deep sense of pride that Buddhism locally has indeed evolved to an enviable standard. The very idea that we are training our very own monks for our own community has until now remained a Malaysian dream among Buddhist circles. To be a trailblazer is no simple task and you must have braved a lot of setbacks, not to mention negative comments from countless 'Dr NOs' in the initial stages when the idea was first conceived but the important thing is, you pulled it through, from conception to actualisation... you have achieved what you really set out to do.

I attended a meditation talk recently and as I was taking the lift down, I overheard one of the 'old guards' say to her buddy "Ven Aggacitta's lecture is just like that. What she means is... "a high standard" because the speaker also gets the audience to participate so that one does not go off to sleep! By the way, the speaker was a very articulate 'white' monk who had admonished the audience for keeping 'perfect silence' when it was question time. Here, I am afraid yours truly did not speak up because my rudimentary grasp of the subject did not permit me to poke holes with intelligent queries. I know you do not seek praise but I could not keep mum because I would want these words to serve as an encouragement for you to carry on, in dark moments which plague all of us.

BORN AGAIN BUDDHIST

✉ Reading Ven Kumara's report on your latest health status is indeed heart warming. I am glad that your health is progressing on a very positive course. I look forward to meeting with you, Ven Aggacitta, in early December during the IMP5 programme and to benefit from your wealth of knowledge, wisdom and experience. I must take this opportunity to express my most sincere thanks to you for allowing me to spend a week in SBS in the last week of June 2005. Although my original intention was to offer any service possible during the week's stay, to my embarrassment, what I benefited and learned far outweighed whatever little I could offer! I certainly look forward to opportunities to do more for SBS in support of your dedication in setting up this remarkable Sanctuary.

LAM YOK HWA

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abbot's address

Blessings in Disguise

I am an avowed optimist with a simple motto: Every obstacle in life is a blessing in disguise. Yes, why allow ourselves to drown in negative thoughts and emotions because of life's difficulties? How wonderful if we could programme our minds to look at each obstacle positively: as a lesson to learn from, an opportunity to develop some quality one is lacking in, a stepping stone to spiritual growth and emotional maturity, etc.

Take for instance, my recent ill-health that landed me in hospital for a few days in early June 2005. Some people criticised the publicity through email and SMS, fearing that a suspected TB relapse would tarnish the image of SBS because it might require SBS residents to be quarantined or tested for TB infection.

Let us evaluate this criticism in the light of what actually happened. Although I was a TB suspect since I coughed out blood in 1990 in Myanmar, no TB germs were ever found despite many attempts to culture the bacteria from my sputum samples. Even this time around, with the latest lab technology available in Malaysia, the result was negative.

Moreover, X-rays showed that since the '90's there was a large cavity (7x5cm bulla) in my left lung which all the allopathic doctors who examined me declared as a lifelong scar that was impossible to be healed. In the most recent episode when I was hospitalised, the chest specialist confirmed that diagnosis and added, after scrutinising the X-ray and CT-scan reports, that the suspected 'fungal ball' then growing in the cavity might not be eradicated even though I might get symptomatic relief.

Strangely, as I mentioned in my previous address, I felt very spiritually energised throughout my short stay in the hospital despite being drugged by allopathic medicines. I was not at all concerned about the outcome of my illness, but took the opportunity to meditate and rest with mindfulness and full awareness as much as I possibly could, regarding this as a bonus to my well-deserved month-long Sri Lankan retreat in April and May 2005.

Dissatisfaction with allopathic medicine treatment also prompted me to explore and undergo alternative healing therapies which are more holistic in nature. These included *ayurveda*, iridology and nutritional immunology.

Thus these therapies, together with meditation (Dhamma therapy) and the *mettā* and healing energy that many beings—because of the publicity through emails and SMS—were sending to me, produced miraculous results.

About 2½ months after being discharged from the hospital, I saw the chest specialist again. Comparing the first and latest X-rays taken in the centre, he proudly declared, "I performed a miracle. Now your lungs are cleared. The cavity is almost completely healed and the fungal ball has disappeared! You're 99% cured!"

"No-lah, doctor," I protested. "It's not only you. Many people have been praying for me and I've also been taking herbal supplements."

So I want to take this opportunity to rejoice in the success of your metta/healing directed to me individually or in groups. Sadhu, all you lovely beings, sadhu! By the power of your healing merits may your physical and psychological wounds be continually healed!

But these were not the only blessings I graciously received. During the entire duration of my recuperation, everyone advised me to rest and cooperated to create conditions conducive to rest. Consequently I was relieved of many time-consuming duties such as teaching, preaching, pastoral service and even hiking for alms, thus giving me lots of private time to meditate and catch up on health, spiritual and scriptural research—subjects that I have always had keen interest in but yet lack the time to pursue in SBS. However, sometimes I had to sneak off from my 'rest curfew' (at the consternation of concerned devotees) to deal with site issues (at the bidding of site staff) concerning the construction of Main Office (MO) and Farmhouse (FH). There were a few minor setbacks because of the strain, but eventually things turned out fine on site and inside (my body)!

So who in heaven or on earth could ever deny that that was a great blessing in disguise?

We also bumped into several obstacles in the construction of MO. You can read on page 16 how a boulder uncovered in the excavation pit and low load-bearing soil underground led to the construction of a lower ground floor with an additional floor space of over 100 square

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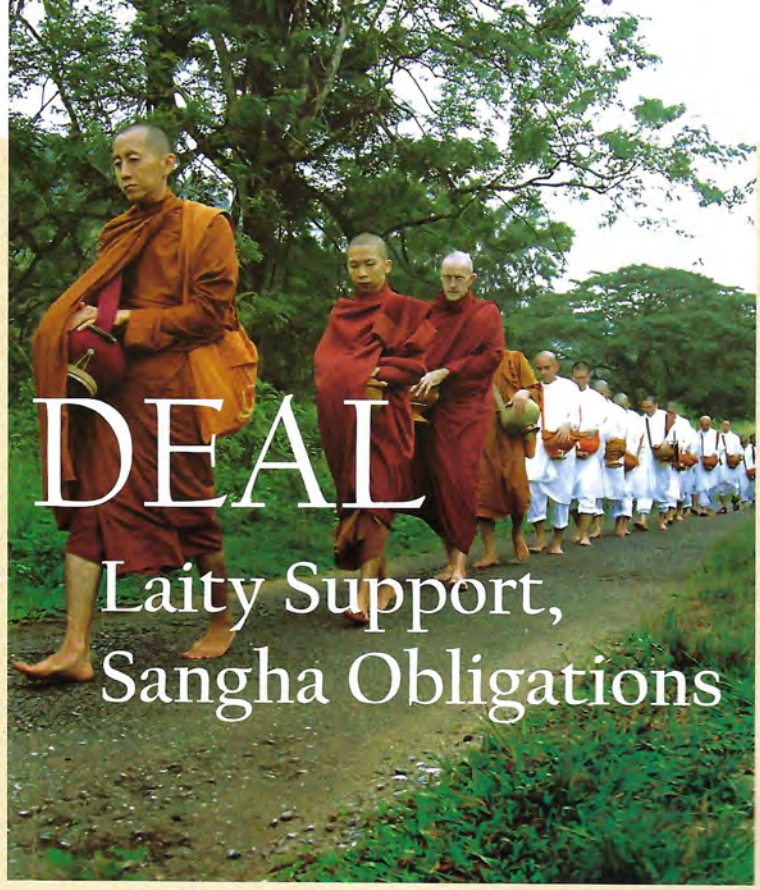

THE DEAL

Laity Support, Sangha Obligations

ASHIN VAMSARAKKHITA's visit coincided with Introduction to Monkhood Programme 5. He writes on why the kind of efforts by Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary and other similar places are crucial to the health of the Buddha Sasana.

I had not yet had the opportunity to experience the reputed quiet seclusion of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS). So when a time slot opened I took it immediately with Ven Aggacitta's kind permission.

Resembling a classic Japanese wood carving of a monastery, SBS sits safely perched on picturesque hill slopes. Its seclusion is well-guarded by a steep and winding access road. The air is clear and clean. The view and vista of a distant, miniature Taiping and environs are breathtaking, a quiet reminder of both how close, yet far away *saṁsāra* can be.

My arrival corresponded to the equatorial early evening's darkness. After paying respects to the venerable, there was the dusky trek to the topmost *kuṭi*. This would be a literal preamble to the gentle 'fitness regime' that is the norm at the centre.

SBS has given a new meaning to the letters "IMP". Any knowledgeable English speaker seeing this letter grouping immediately imagines a somewhat mischievous little creature whose delight is to wreak havoc for all around. Not so at this centre! The participants in the IMP program (also known as IMPians; not imps) are anything but the 'little rascals' conjured up in the mind.

The words that comprise the program's acronym immediately set one straight about its intent and the motivation of those joining it. Introduction to Monkhood Program is a comprehensive and diverse two-week opportunity to examine and temporarily experience a form of monkhood. While not formally undergoing the higher ordination of a *bhikkhu*, participants undertake Eight Precepts and wear white robes.

Under the auspices of the resident monks, they are guided through a tour, sampling many components of a monk's life. This would include meditation, chanting, Vinaya study, a variety of discussions on topical studies and so on. Also mandatory is participation in the daily ritual of *piṇḍacāra* (alms round). The early morning trek up and down the steep hilly trail not only provides a modicum of healthy exercise but also vividly brings to life the sweet interdependence of the laity and the Sangha.

My arrival also corresponded with the tail end of such a program with its new 'record number' of interested students. One of the topics on the docket for discussion, in my estimation, best exemplifies an important part of SBS's 'mission'.

The subject of discussion was the as yet unpublished (I believe) book by S. Dhammika, *The Broken Buddha*.[1] Each student was responsible not only to read the entire text but also to summarise and present one or more sections for the group at large in a round table forum. In this way, I benefited from the collective work of the participants and only needed to skim the book to acquire a good grasp of the book's message.

On a general level the book is a reasonably accurate, although one-sided, treatise on what has gone wrong with Theravada Buddhism. I say "one-sided" because the author uses a series of incidents under topical headings to illustrate a number of failings in present day Theravadism. There is no attempt at all to give a balanced 'what's working' perspective in the piece. There is no dispute with any of the Buddha's core teachings. The author only examines where and when 'the rubber meets the road' so to speak. Theravadin practice, as it manifests today, is generally woefully lacking in its integrity to the Buddha's actual teachings.

Ranging across topics such as, how a far too liberal interpretation of the Vinaya has fostered laxity, laziness and boredom in some monks in the Order, to the arrogance and entitlement which has been systematically bred into the members of the Sangha; to how the qualities of charity and compassion for the poor and less fortunate have been suppressed or outright eliminated from the Theravadin mind set—the book paints a bleak picture of an ever more aloof Sangha and a servile and gullible laity.

The essential upshot of the book is that 'the deal' between the Sangha and the lay supporters has been severely compromised or broken, if not abandoned altogether throughout the Theravadin family of countries. 'The deal' is this. Monks are to be honoured and freely supported for

all the four requisites necessary for a comfortable and healthy lifestyle. In return monks are to

1 conduct themselves, at all times, in accordance with a strict interpretation of the Vinaya
2 practise meditation diligently with a view to attaining the deepest possible experiential understanding of the Buddha's teachings
3 study the *suttas* and other teachings of the Buddha
4 when ready and invited, speak and teach the Dhamma to the laity, via talks and meditation instruction, or any other way deemed appropriate by qualified senior monks, or
5 any combination of the above, always inclusive of (1).

Pride, one of the last fetters to go in the process of enlightenment, must be watched carefully lest it billows into a flash fire of idiotic and unbecoming behaviour. The realisation that all privilege and honour are only given to the monk as an 'agent' of the Buddha, not to the person himself in the robes, is a helpful antidote to this toxic pride.

If this deal is followed as well as humanly possible, the Sasana will flourish. Everyone wins. The laity receives proper, suitable and inspirational Dhamma teaching with which to assail and lessen its suffering. The Order is maintained in strength, faithful to its initial structure and purpose, which the Buddha intended. Individual monks can live healthy and productive lives in service of the highest and noblest of undertakings—the quest for freedom and authenticity. Win, win, and win!

Whether one agrees with the premise of *The Broken Buddha* completely or partially is not necessarily the point. The importance of its presence in the curriculum of the IMP is three-fold.

Firstly, it serves as an educational wake-up call for the participants as they return to their lay lives. Evidently, there are monks who are not upholding their end of the bargain between themselves and the laity. It behoves the laity to develop a more discerning and perceptive eye regarding the placement of their support. Their support is voluntary and they have a right to receive 'value' for their hard-earned donation. Respectfully holding the Sangha accountable to 'the deal' is not an unfair expectation. Moreover, I would say that is its obligation. If a monk or a vihara is not keeping up to its end of the deal, take the support elsewhere. At the end of each IMP, I believe a few more 'discerners' returned home with a clearer understanding of what a good monk is.

Secondly, any IMPian who does decide to take up the robes will have a clear idea of what is expected and how he is to behave as a monk. Hopefully, he will shine as an example of one who truly lives "The Dhamma".

Thirdly, self-examination and self-awareness is at the heart of the process leading to liberation's wisdom. Any book such as *The Broken Buddha* must foster a critical look into one's own actions and ideals. Not a bad thing to do. In fact, it is an ongoing essential process if one is to avoid a paralysing complacency, which strangles any possibility of growth towards freedom.

When my time at The Sanctuary drew to an end, I wended my way down the steep switch-backs to the valley below. I reflected on how important and precious places like SBS were to the preservation of the Sasana. I was slightly miffed by the bold one-sidedness of Dhammika's book. I have seen many beautiful and inspiring things as a Theravadin monk. I have seen people's difficult lives dramatically change through meditation practices taught by the Buddha. I have heard profoundly marvellous talks by some of the greatest teachers alive today. I have witnessed these same monks lead exemplary and pure lives, which inspire deep faith in their followers. The present forms of the Buddha Sasana may have some loose cannons and imperfections as do all human endeavours, but what works must be protected and discernment must weed out that which does not serve.

I glanced back up at SBS, now a miniature and distant woodcarving. I realised ideals are sometimes hard to keep but like the daily trek back up to The Sanctuary, a little patience, a little persistence and a little care go a long way to taking one to the topmost places in the world.

[1] Editor's note: At press time, we found that it is already published on the Web.

ABBOT'S ADDRESS **FROM PAGE 3**

metres. The voluminous excavated soil was then transported to the FH area, thus giving us more flat space that is lacking in the hilly SBS terrain.

Many hitches in the FH construction have also transformed the building into a gracious guest lodge with a panoramic bird's eye view of Taiping. There is a suggestion that the existing Dhamma Workers' Quarters (DWQ) be converted into a dormitory for ladies while male guests and yogis can stay in FH with our resident male staff. Any votes for this?

On 21 July five monastics entered the vassa in SBS but only three managed to complete the retreat until Kathina Day on 6 November 2005. While it was regrettable that a *bhikkhu* and a postulant had to leave prematurely due to personal reasons, we were soon blessed with the arrival of two new residents who eventually enrolled to become postulants. Both are now IMPians, having participated in IMP4 and IMP5 respectively.

Incidentally, we had a record number of applicants (including foreigners) for IMP5, which we short-listed to 22. Still, we found the number rather tight for us to handle comfortably, so we have just decided to limit intake to a maximum of 12 for future IMPs.

As the seeds of renunciation are being sown and more facilities are being built for the laity, may SBS be blessed with many more blessings—whether disguised or not. May these blessings help SBS to effectively achieve its primary objectives:

- to provide and operate facilities and resources for the education and training of monastics
- to establish and operate a retreat centre as a means of providing community service to promote spiritual, mental and physical health.

May the Triple Gem continue to bless, guide and protect us. *Have a Great New Year!*

Malaysian Theravada Monks Meet at Temoh

Sunday, 17 July 2005
Temoh, PERAK

Twenty Malaysian Theravada monks met at Vihara Buddha Gotama in what was called *The First Sangha Council of Malaysian Theravada Monks*.

The idea for this meeting arose when a group of 17 Malaysian monks met last year to elect a successor to the late Ven Wong Chandapañño as the abbot of Balik Pulau Buddhist Hermitage. They unanimously agreed to hold an annual meeting to unite English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada monks who are not members of any Theravada Sangha council or association in Malaysia.

It was then proposed by Ven Dhammadinna that it be held in Vihara Gotama Buddha, Temoh. Its abbot, Ven Hye Dhammavuddho, graciously agreed. After consulting Ven Aggacitta Mahathera of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) on the matter some months ago, he sent out announcement letters to call for the meeting. One of the main objectives of the annual meeting is to discuss matters concerning the DhammaVinaya, particularly those related to the Malaysian Theravada Sangha.

The assembly agreed to have the next meeting at SBS, Taiping, Perak, some time before the *vassa* of 2006.

Second Sangha Meeting Planned at SBS

Saturday, 17 December 2005
Taiping, PERAK

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary plans to hold *SanghaSannipāta2006: 2nd Sangha Meeting of English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada Monks* here on 3-4 June 2006. The main theme for the meeting is *Sangha-laity Issues in the Ownership and Management of* Āvāsas *(Monastic Residences) in Malaysia*.

The abbot of SBS points out that many cases of disagreement and disharmony have been cropping up between members of the Sangha and laity regarding the management of avasas. These cases are often related to the issue of ownership. "The main aim of this meeting is to find workable approaches to resolve and avoid such unhealthy conflicts," he says.

He regards this subject of discussion to be both important and timely for Malaysian Buddhists to work on, for the betterment of the Buddha Sasana in Malaysia.

To have a broader perspective on this matter, SBS also plans to conduct a survey among the laity on the matter before the meeting. The results of such a survey are expected to assist the assembly to make the meeting more fruitful.

SanghaSannipāta2006

2nd Sangha Meeting of English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada Monks

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

3 Sat • 4 Sun June 2006

Main Theme:

Sangha-laity Issues in the Ownership and Management of Āvāsas (Monastic Residences) in Malaysia.

On behalf of Ven Aggacitta Mahathera, SBS would like to extend an invitation to all English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada monks to participate in this meeting.

We have already sent Ven Aggacitta's personal invitation to the venerables whose contact addresses are known to us. If you, Bhante, have yet to receive his personal invitation from us, and would like to receive one, please let us know your name, ordination date and correspondence address. If possible please also include your residence, email address and phone number too. Thank you.

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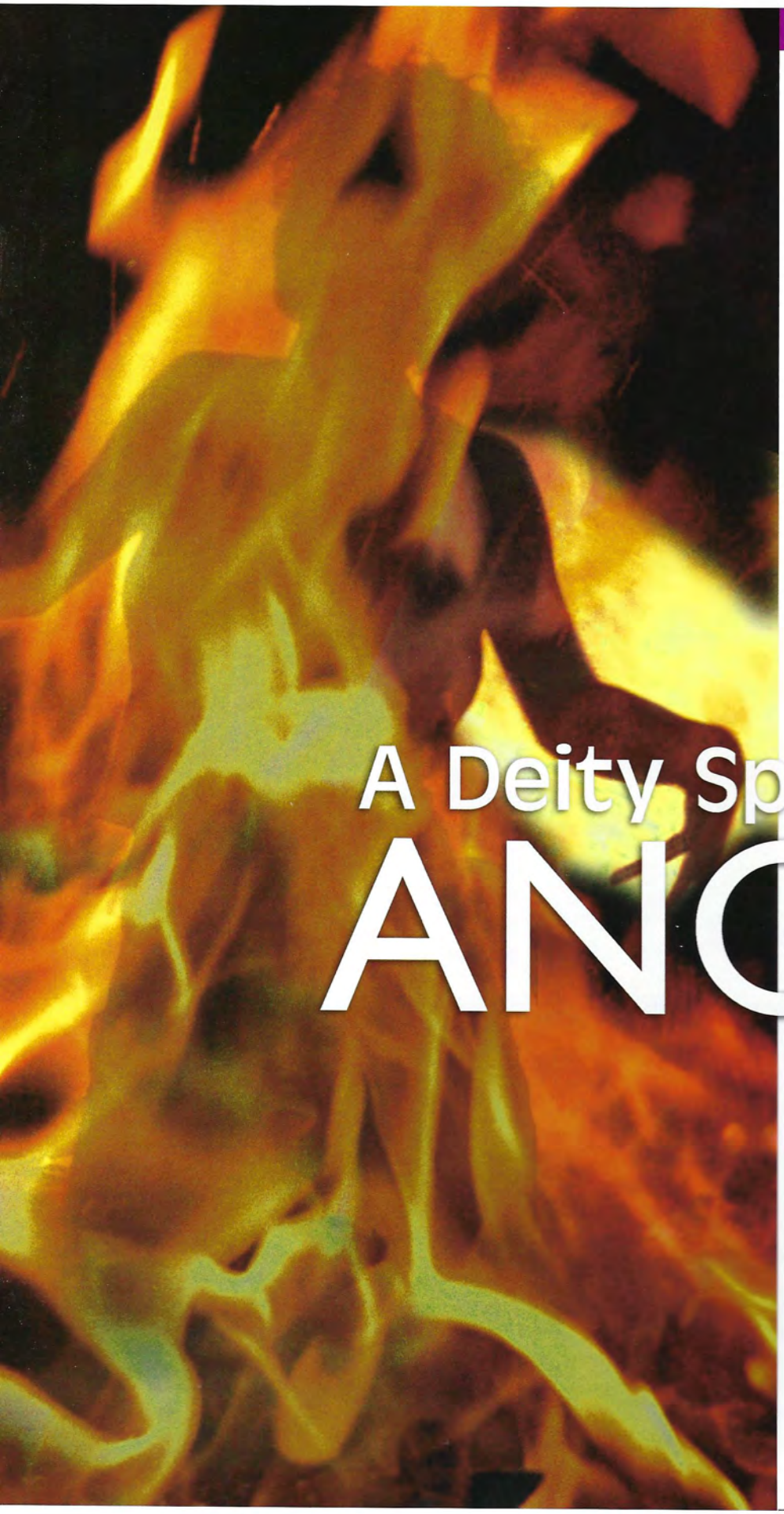
http://sasanarakkha.org/dhamma/

Topic/Speaker/Date	Synopsis
A Deity Speaks on Anger Ven Kumara, 3 Jul	For our own good, emulate Sakka's habit with regards to anger
A Discussion on the First Precept *(refrain from killing)* Ven Kumara, 31 Jul	An open exchange of views on killing and suggestions on how to refrain from it: dissection in biology class; spiders at home; infestation by termites; use of antibiotics, etc.
A Discussion on the Fourth Precept *(refrain from lying)* Ven Kumara, 3 Aug	An open exchange of views on lying and suggestions on how to refrain from it without putting oneself or others in trouble
Unity Among Buddhists Ven Kusala, 7 Aug	Buddhists should live in harmony so that they can pool their strength together to support the Sasana
Rasiya Sutta Ven Balacitta, 14 Aug	Have the wisdom to associate with the wise, do good whenever we can, put the Dhamma into practice and meditate
Sakka Deva Raja vs Asuras Ven Aggacitta, 20 August	Conquering anger with peace and tranquillity
Earning Respect Ven Balacitta, 27 Aug	Respect is spontaneously given to one worthy of it
Independence: a Buddhist Perspective Ven Aggacitta, 31 Aug	True freedom is when one is not enslaved by the five senses
High Class, Low Class Ven Balacitta, 17 Sep	A person's speech with regards to himself and others is one criterion for determining whether he is of high or low class
A Discussion on the Second, Third & Fifth Precept, plus Encouragement Ven Kumara, 24 Sept	An open exchange of views on stealing, sexual misconduct and taking intoxicants, plus suggestions on how to refrain from them. This series of discussions end with encouraging words by the Buddha on abandoning evil and cultivating good
Planes of Existence Ven Balacitta, 1 Oct	Our death thought moments determine our immediate rebirth in one of the planes of existence but our future rebirths are dependent on our present as well as our past *kamma*
Small is Beautiful Ven Kumara, 8 Oct	Malaysians are noted for their generosity in giving to Buddhist or other non-profit organisations. However, such support should be given wisely so that those organisations are not corrupted by too much wealth and power
A Nation's Progress Ven Balacitta, 15 Oct	Qualities of a nation or an organisation that will determine its progress
Sappurisa Dana Ven Kumara, 16 Oct	Five factors that determine the quality of *dāna* that is given
Story from the Dhammapada Ven Balacitta, 22 Oct	The commentarial story of Dhammapada verse 80, about Mahadukhata and how he attained enlightenment in one of his future lives as someone named Tissa
Mangala Sutta Ven Balacitta, 29 Oct	We should associate with the wise, but how to tell who is wise and who is not?
Staying Connected with You Ven Aggacitta, 6 Nov	On Kathina Day, Ven Aggacitta tells devotees how SBS stays connected with its natural environment and the laity
Mangala Sutta (cont.) Ven Balacitta, 19 Nov	The blessings of suitable dwelling, past merits and self-improvement
Spectrum of Merits Ven Aggacitta, 22 Nov	The merits obtained from the following meritorious acts are progressively greater: giving, taking refuge in the Triple Gem, keeping Five Precepts, having *mettā*, and seeing the rising and passing away of phenomena
Mangala Sutta (cont.) Ven Balacitta, 3 & 10 Dec	The blessings of knowledge, skills, discipline, well-spoken speech, supporting one's parents, caring for one's spouse and children, blameless work
What is a friend...? Ven Kumara, 17 Dec	What is a friend in the following situations: on a journey, at home, in times of need, in future lives?
Chanting at dana every morning Ven Aggacitta, 24 Dec	Chanting during daily dana is in Pali. Ven Aggacitta explains the meaning of what is chanted
Mangala Sutta (cont.) Ven Balacitta, 31 Dec	The blessings of giving, practice of what is good, supporting of relatives, blameless actions

Note:
We intend to put all the talks listed above on our website, but some of them may not be there yet by the time you read this. To have them sent to you by email as soon as they are ready, subscribe to SBSmail egroup by sending a blank mail to

sbsmail-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



VEN KUMARA
speaks on anger and its effects on the angered and the object of anger

I am not one afflicted in mind,
Nor easily drawn by anger's whirl.
I never become angry for long,
Nor does anger persist in me.
When I'm angry, I don't speak harshly
And I don't praise my virtues.
I keep myself well restrained
Out of regard for my own good.
(extracted from Samyutta Nikaya 11:22)

A Deity Speaks on ANGER

These words were spoken by Sakka, king of devas. He was probably a *sotapanna* by the time he instructed the Tavatimsa devas with these words. However, not being an *arahant* yet, he was still not free from anger. Yet, although he was sometimes beset with anger, he was able to exercise restraint.

To practise restraint from anger (or any other unwholesome tendencies), it is necessary to have

So, when we are angry, it may be best to keep our mouths shut and patiently watch the anger with detachment until it dies off.

mindfulness *(sati)* and clear comprehension *(sampajañña)*. I suppose Sakka had these qualities, to the point that he was never angry for long.

We too can achieve that if we really try. When anger arises in us, instead of acting upon it with words (or action!), we can choose to mentally step back and watch that anger—as soon as possible. See how it is affecting our mind and body. See how we are torturing ourselves with our own anger. Do that patiently. Are we making ourselves happy or miserable? If we can honestly see our anger as it is, then the anger will naturally ease off. Whoosh! With such persistent and firm wholesome effort, anger simply cannot survive. Cool, huh?

A meditation teacher once gave me this advice: when angry, it is better not to speak. Otherwise, with anger in the mind, our speech tends to be unwise.

I think that makes a lot of sense. We may try to control our speech that is spoken while our heart is still heated with anger; but if we were to be thoroughly honest with ourselves, we can see that the words we use will tend to be improper. Even if the words are not literally harsh, the tone is likely to be spiked with anger. Under the influence of anger, that is to be expected.

So, when we are angry, it may be best to keep our mouths shut and patiently watch the anger with detachment until it dies off. But what if we are in a situation where we find that it is *better* to say something *at that time and place*?

I suppose there are situations when we should speak, despite the lingering anger, such as when a parent needs to admonish a child at a specific juncture. Although admonishing a child, or anyone else, can be and is best done without anger, we may find situations where it is better to speak there and then although the anger is still there. If that is the case, we had better double check first to be sure that it *is* really useful and suitable then—the mind can certainly be quite tricky. In such a situation, be extra careful about our words and tone. Not being eager to speak or act would certainly help. So, besides the anger, the eagerness should be watched too.

If it were not necessary to speak at that time, then it would be better to plainly keep our mouths shut and patiently be with the anger till it dies off. Then, having cooled down, our speech will naturally not be harsh, since anger is no longer there as the motivating force. Sometimes we may even find what we earlier thought was *so very* necessary to say, is better left unsaid after all!

All these may seem somewhat complicated, but if mindfulness and clear comprehension are present, we'll naturally know just the right thing to do at the right time and in the right way. It wouldn't be complicated at all.

Watching anger instead of expressing it may be difficult for people who are prone to anger but I believe that with persistent practice of mindfulness and clear comprehension, it should become easier.

If we choose to assert ourselves instead of applying restraint when angered, we may cause harm to the other party and we will certainly cause harm to ourselves. I know of a man who was highly regarded by many people. However, in a severe display of anger, he managed to destroy much of the respect people had for him. On top of that, he also put himself under a whole lot of unnecessary stress.

In the Culakammavibhanga Sutta (MN135), it is stated that a habit of displaying anger can lead a person to hell. However, if he is lucky enough to be reborn as a human being, he is ugly wherever he is born.

Therefore, while we are still not free from anger, we should emulate Sakka and be mindful of it and exercise proper restraint. This is, after all, for our own good.

NO BOOT CAMP THIS

LIM TEIK LEONG, here to videotape the goings on of Introduction to Monkhood Programme 5 (IMP5), takes his eyes away from the viewfinder now and then to bring to you his personal, insightful views.

Contrary to what we hear Buddhists say, let me assure you, there is no suffering—not where the IMP is concerned anyway. There is suffering only if you have the wrong mindset. Waking up at 5am may sound alien to those who are not used to it. Finishing the day with no dinner or tea may sound like an impossible task reserved only for the monks but those who have experienced meditation retreats can attest to the ease with which you slide into the routine.

IMP is handled with kid gloves by Bhante Aggacitta, though he is firm. From what I see, he is almost motherly; although fatherly would be a more acceptable word. The patience he exhibits in showing how the robes are worn and actually arranging the robes on the participants is an example of this. One would expect them to have learnt how to do this after four days but he was still helping them. In the meditation sessions, when someone once commented that what he said was too soft, in the next session he raised his voice above his normal gentle one to cater to for those at the back.

Evenings are for things like Pali pronunciation so that you can chant better. Listening to the class chanting for the first time is entertaining because of the mistakes.

"Do what I do," is the motto here as the monks lead by example. Every morning they lead the line down the hill for *piṇḍacāra*. Seeing the participants lining up before reaching the Hokkien Cemetery pavilion conjures up pictures of boot camp. The white robed participants line up while the four *bhantes* and the resident dog walk down the line like sergeant majors on inspection day. Is the robe put on right? Is the alms bowl slung over the shoulder correctly? When something is awry, the monks do the necessary adjustments like parents fussing over their own child. Attention to detail shows the respect they all have for the devotees waiting for them with the food.

Last minute instructions are given: "When you are sitting there waiting for your turn to take food, lower your gaze and radiate *mettā* to all the devotees there." The mutual respect and interdependence between the laity and Sangha is very strong.

The walk down the hill each morning is something to look forward to. Boy, the dog which has adopted SBS, is there to lead the troop down everyday. And why not, he gets food there too. As for the rest of the participants, the good food and abundance of fruit is motivating—making the walk down sprightly and light. Once the food is collected and the devotees thanked, the participants look forward to the walk up—as halfway up by the waterfall, breakfast can begin. Only thing missing is a bollywood star singing.

After breakfast, there is only half the hill to walk up. And once up there, it is free time until lectures at 10.30am. They are actually to do cleaning and sweeping but all that have usually been done the evening before and so there remain only a few touch-ups. Those who are tired catch a quick snooze and everyone is fresh for the next slot in the timetable.

Formal meditation is less rigorous than in retreats where yogis have to sit for hours. Here the sessions are only one hour. And Bhante teaches you how to sit, what to do with the wandering mind and what to do when the inevitable pain comes. There are experienced meditators in the group but the introduction to meditation is more than welcome to the new ones. Meditation is not a dreaded word in IMP. It is taught as part of life and not to be confined to formal sitting meditation. Bhante reminds everyone several times daily, "Even when you're off the cushion, be aware of all your daily activities. Be aware how your mind reacts to objects attracting its attention."

At times come the orders, "Everybody out—sit under the trees. Do forest meditation." And so they all troop out to find shady spots under the trees next to the classrooms. You are in the jungle (use your imagination) and yet you are a step away from the conveniences of modern living. Discussions and talks are often held under the trees. Only the opening salvos of threatening rain can get everyone in the hall again.

Evenings are for things like Pali pronunciation so that you can chant better. Listening to the class chanting for the first time is entertaining because of the mistakes. The *devas* will have a hard time understanding what is being chanted in the beginning classes. But it has been all right so far. With the daily chanting of Khanda Sutta, even with the mispronunciation of the beginners, there have been no cases of snake attack. Either they under-

stand or the chanting has made them move out of earshot. This makes daily outdoor cleaning as pleasant as an evening walk in the fresh breeze of the hill.

Night is for chanting and an hour of sitting meditation. Some nights, meditation is around the bodhi tree. Cushions are provided. You sit there in the dark and listen to the soothing instructions given. When you are numb from sitting, open your eyelids slightly and peer out through half-closed eyelids at the looming Buddha-like poses in front of you. Spine-tingling the first time, it is an experience to savour.

So, where is the suffering? There is firmness but not strictness. I would recommend the programme for those who think life here is hard. Things might change if you ordain but IMP is an introduction. The accommodation is good. The facilities are better than spartan. Cooling or chrysanthemum tea is occasionally brewed for general consumption. There are also hot water facilities, ample clean bathrooms, an abundant water supply and caring organisers.

Tourists pay a fortune to experience eco-holidays which may be the luxury version of this. And instead of Belgium chocolates on your pillow, there is an abundance of metta and guidance. You leave with an understanding of the nature of things to help you in life.

On the other hand, maybe you shouldn't come. You won't be able to forge the kind of camaraderie that make fellow sufferers bond—there is no tyrannical sergeant bullying recruits, only a compassionate monk with a sense of humour, very serious about the Sasana.

Tourists pay a fortune to experience eco-holidays which may be the luxury version of this. And instead of Belgium chocolates on your pillow, there is an abundance of *mettā* and guidance. You leave with an understanding of the nature of things to help you in life.

DHAMMA SEEDS

Mindfulness at Sasanarakkha,
Purifying body, speech and mind,
The seeds of Dhamma have thus been sown,
May all beings share in these merits

Bodhi is without name and form
Dhamma is without limits and bounds
Where is the path to Nibbana?
The answer lies in mindfulness.

SACCESI

We are glad we joined IMP5

Compiled by **Ven Kumara Bhikkhu**

In a questionnaire distributed during IMP5, all participants responded that they were glad they joined the programme. Why is that so? Here are some of their answers:

- ☑ I learned about the Buddha's true teachings, and how to distinguish carefully between the *suttas* and the commentaries. This dispels some of the myths and (questionable) practices in current Buddhism. **Bodhipakkha**
- ☑ Kind of finally fulfilled my aspiration to learn from Bhante Aggacitta and be in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) for a period of time. It also fulfilled part of my purpose for joining IMP—to get some indication of what my destiny should be in this life: renunciation or household life. **Mettananda**
- ☑ I've learnt a lot, especially awareness and mindfulness of my life. I've also obtained a very good understanding, through the meditation sessions, of how our mind works. **Ātāpi**
- ☑ I learnt more about being a monk—its advantages and disadvantages. I got to know friends. I learnt yoga and *qigong*. I had more time to meditate. I learnt how to wear a robe. **Pubbāgata**
- ☑ I've acquired a lot of skills and knowledge that I can't learn from any other place. **Vīro**
- ☑ It has given me a good idea of monastic life and new knowledge on various aspects of Buddhism (Theravada). I also learnt from other participants who have more experience in Buddhism. **Pesala**
- ☑ I've improved on my general knowledge of Buddhism. I'm glad about the practical experience on *piṇḍacāra*, the qigong and yoga exercises, and the experience in a quiet and secluded environment. **Samiddhāsa**
- ☑ I got to learn meditation from a most compassionate Bhante, learn qigong, and meet friends with the same interest in the Dhamma. Maha Sadhu! **Saccesī**
- ☑ I improved in meditation and observed Eight Precepts (I somehow feel the benefits after two weeks of it). I've learnt about health matters, made my mind clearer, and become more knowledgeable. **Candimā**
- ☑ It's a very memorable experience, which has helped me especially in identifying my real self with regards to my future dreams and wishes. **Jayanta**
- ☑ I learnt a lot about the monastic community and the role of the laity. It helped me a lot in spiritual development. Personally, I like and really appreciate the interviews with Bhante. **Gambhīradhamma**

VEN NYANASANTI was visiting us when Introduction to Monkhood 5 (IMP5) was on. He now brings to you this "oasis of quiet joy"

I M Peace

CONTINUED FROM FRONT COVER

This group of inward bound adventurers abandoned home and hair and leapt boldly from the layperson's five-precept orbit, towards the novice monk's ten-precept domain... and they landed somewhere in the middle! Donning white robes and eight-precept armour, they seemed unsure where they had abruptly been reborn. (Whoever said there is no place for an intermediate life in Theravada Buddhism?) Sensing their quandary, Bhante Aggacitta soothingly re-assured them that they had arrived at a fortunate destination: the realm of the *anagārikas*—the (honorable) homeless ones.

His introductory briefing was not going to be a sonorous monologue. Bhante Aggacitta first tackled the pernicious misconception that this was to be *just another* novitiate program (with all due respect to the good efforts of others). Without mincing words, he stated: "This Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP) is designed to be a foretaste of monkhood for those considering a long-term commitment to this way of life" (uneasy quivers in the audience). Next, he quizzed them: "What is monkhood?" Greeted by blank stares, he sympathised and offered them a multiple choice answer: (a) Monks are priests (b) Monks are exorcists (c) Monks are skilled meditators (d) Monks are preachers (e) Monks are scholars. "So, what do you think?" prodded Bhante. Thus challenged, invisible group dynamics was evoked among the white-clad brotherhood and an almost equal number of hands were raised for each of the options, thus effectively hedging the embarrassment of a wrong answer. Unfortunately the correct answer turned out to be (the equally invisible) option (f) All of the above! "Monkhood is a spectrum of duties and responsibilities, some of which are compulsory (e.g. following the Vinaya rules) and some optional (e.g. learning Pali)", Bhante explained.

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) is superbly situated, designed, executed and tended to. Although I had seen pictures in the SBS newsletter, when I first arrived I was taken aback by how much prettier it is in actuality. I was told that the size of The Sanctuary is some ten acres; however, the immense views it affords pervaded me with an enormous sense of space. When coupled with the openness, mutual respect, care and sense of purpose, which characterise the SBS Sangha and supporters, I felt transported into an oasis of quiet joy in the midst of a world thirsting for inner peace. The IMP participants seemed as moved as I was, judging from the long periods many of them would sit in silent contemplation, as though soaking in the serene, scenic surroundings.

With interactive lectures, open discussions, self-study, physical exercise, meditation instructions, and an invigorating almsround (attractively labelled as "nature hike" and "riverside breakfast") each day, the IMP was designed to be a crash course in monastic

experience. "Life in SBS is pretty relaxed and informal, so enjoy your time here", Bhante Aggacitta proposed, perhaps to help unwind some of the stress-prone individuals and others intimidated by the schedule. In this IMP they would be learning the refined art of moving away from the usual *busy rush* that crowded their lives, towards the *be, see hush* of enhanced present moment awareness. So this was to be a crash course... in tranquil, slow motion.

Come evening of day one and all were learning the basics of handling their bowls and wearing their robes (in three variations). To add to their considerable confusion, I suggested that each look upon his almsbowl as the Buddha's Head and treat it as such. Some jittery fingers and sweaty palms were so taken aback by this revelation, that a few bowls were suddenly liberated, allowing them to bounce boisterously on the floor. Ears were clasped in agony, so heart rendering was the clatter.

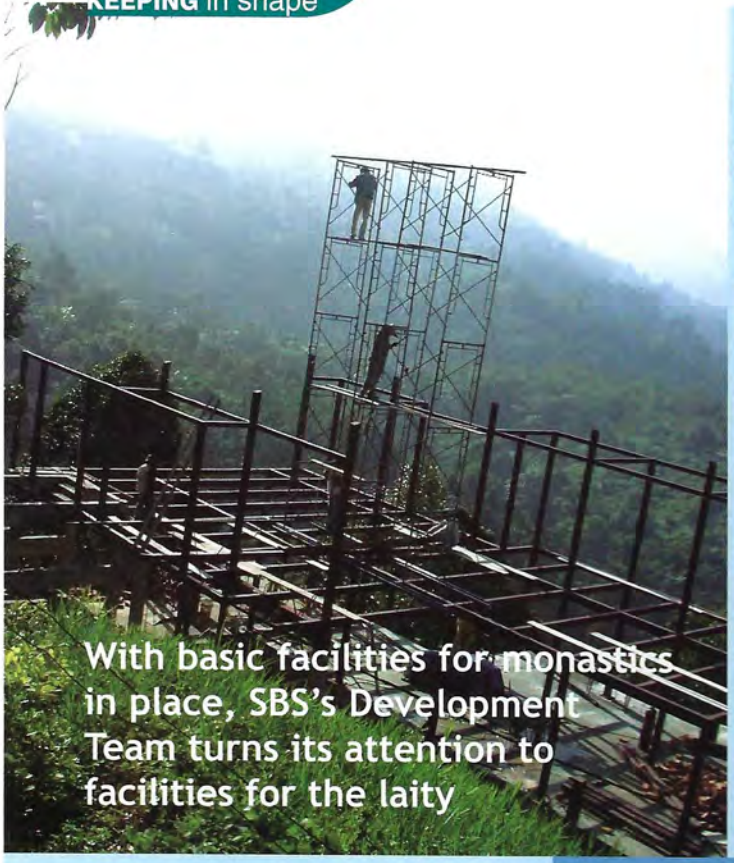
As I write this article, I am reminded of the assignments I had to submit in school and college. There was the inevitable deadline by which we had to turn in our work and I excelled at procrastinating until the very end. The adrenaline would then kick in and whoosh me through my assignments like rocket propulsion. Amazingly, I usually managed to do quite well despite this less-than-exalted study strategy, and soon it was such an ingrained habit that I wondered if I would ever learn to do my work at a more evenly balanced pace. So, as I write this piece—my first 'assignment' with a deadline since I became a monk three years back—I am pleased to discover that I've begun working a full week before my deadline! This feels like a first for me: no adrenaline, no stress, no late nights and caffeine highs... just doing my work in a relaxed, calm way. Why do I bring this subject up? It's because people sometimes ask me (and I sometimes ask myself) what changes I see in myself after these years in the robes? All the detailed rules to follow, the unexciting monastic routine, the duties, the hours of meditation... is it really worth it? Just sitting here doing this assignment way before my deadline... I can't help thinking that my monastic training has had something to do with this tiny (but significant) change I'm witnessing now... my journey from IMPatience to I M Peace!

Come evening of day one and all were learning the basics of handling their bowls and wearing their robes

Just a few days into IMP and it was already time for me to leave for Sri Lanka. Although I was unable to see the programme to its completion, I was nevertheless IMPressed by the sincere interest shown by the participants and their willingness to step out of their comfort zones to experience a wholly different way of life: the Holy Life! May this experience strengthen their commitment to inner transformation. May the manifold merits they acquire benefit, in widening circles, all beings!

I would also like to share some observations from my month-long sojourn in Malaysia: (a) I was moved by the genuine interest in contributing, serving, studying, applying, sharing and open-mindedly investigating the Dhamma among a cross-section of the community. Buddhism here is a healthy faith buzzing with vital energy. It makes me wonder: maybe being a religious minority in a country can be a blessing in disguise if it evokes an interest in understanding, preserving and sustaining wholesome traditions (b) The regular visits and teachings by renowned Buddhist teachers and the local representation of a large number of Buddhist traditions underline the cosmopolitan nature of Buddhism here (c) The local Dhamma centres I visited impressed me with their creative, multi-faceted activities, non-sectarian approach and enthusiastic participation (d) I think that in terms of free distribution of priceless Dhamma literature, perhaps this country is currently a world leader! (e) I even discovered a wonderful Dhamma teaching hidden in Malaysia: "**M**indfully **A**nd **L**ovingly **A**ccept **Y**our **S**ituation's **I**mpermanence **A**lways"!

Before I end, I want to take this opportunity to bow to all my teachers; to express my gratitude to my parents and all who have supported me; and convey my appreciation to all the fine people I've been privileged to have met and learnt from this last month. May we all keep growing in Dhamma! May we all know real happiness; real freedom! ***Sadhu!***



With basic facilities for monastics in place, SBS's Development Team turns its attention to facilities for the laity

Along the long road to development

With Laity in Mind

By Wai Seng Moh

Phases 1, 2 and 3 of building development in SBS concentrated on providing basic facilities for monastic use. However, these facilities have had to be shared with the laity on Saturday nights when TIMS—since it 'went forth into homelessness' in August 2004—holds its meditation sessions for the public. So too on other occasions, such as Dhamma camps and meditation retreats, when the buildings in Sangha Court are used as temporary dormitory, assembly hall and dining area.

More importantly, the successful implementation of our Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP) has sown seeds of renunciation that are expected to gradually increase our monastic population. It is therefore desirable to segregate monastic and lay activities so that both can develop side by side without intruding on one another. With this in mind, Phase 4 development aims to better accommodate the needs of the laity while supplementing monastic training in a healthy way.

As in previous phases of development, construction works on the hilly terrain in SBS encountered challenges like wet weather and unpredictable underground conditions. Fortunately, experience gained from the past has enabled us to handle these challenges effectively and therefore maximise land usage without drastic changes to the natural environment.

We are pleased to inform you that the construction of Main Office (MO) and Farmhouse is making good progress despite some obstacles. By the time this issue of *Sasanarakkha* is published, Farmhouse would have been completed and the MO superstructure erected.

Main Office

The original design had a lower ground floor for male washrooms nestled at one end of the slope. During excavation works for the ground floor foundations, two unforeseen site issues cropped up: an embedded boulder was unearthed and Mackintosh tests for soil stability required the depth of many excavation pits to extend below the lower ground floor level. Consequently, a major portion of the slope had to be excavated. This situation prompted Ven Aggacitta to propose the extension of the lower ground floor to incorporate a hall which could be used for meditation, dining, or as a dormitory for yogis; in addition to a storeroom and space for a proper kitchen.

This extension gives an additional covered floor space of more than 100 sq. m. (1,080 sq. ft.) with independent access. Technically, this makes MO a 3-storey structure—lower ground floor; ground floor as the administrative hub and upper floor as a multi-purpose hall. According to our geotechnical consultant, Ir Dr Soo Kian Sin, this is worthwhile variation works in comparison to the investment, considering the lack of buildable level space among the steep slopes of SBS. Moreover, the excavated soil will be sent to the farmhouse to extend its platform, giving more space

around it, so that even a small storehouse for extra building materials can now be built.

Thus, the honorary Building Development Team got into action again. After more than four months of hard work, the lower ground floor will soon be completed and the steel superstructure erected by the time this issue of *Sasanarakkha* comes out. All this would not have been possible without the constant vigilance of Ven Aggacitta, ably assisted by our volunteer project manager, Lim Tai Eng and field assistant, Chu Chee Kiong. Despite having no previous experience he learned fast and is doing a great job on site. In view of such major variation works, the completion date of MO is now pushed back from mid-October 2005 to February 2006. We expect our administrative hub to be fully operational before Wesak 2006.

Farmhouse

The name given to a structure adjacent to an organic farm (see story on p19) situated next to the open air Buddha Shrine, Farmhouse is multi-functional. While the lower floor serves the needs of the farm, the upper floor can also serve as accommodation for yogis or visitors.

The original design was upgraded in terms of space, function, materials used and finishing requirements. It now looks like a split-level bungalow housing a large (10′ x 30′) guest room; workers' quarters; a storeroom; public washrooms; a kitchenette and a spacious (10′ x 20′) ground floor open on three sides.

In order to keep cost within budget, SBS Management Committee chairman, Ng Kian Chong took the lead to source for sponsors. Several generous people answered the call by sponsoring materials such as cement, sand and aggregates, bricks, timber, aluminium frames, paint, tiles for the roof, walls and floor. Many volunteers also offered their services for skilled work and labour to salvage, transport, sort and arrange construction materials to facilitate the building works.

We expect Farmhouse to be very popular amongst yogis and visitors as the upper floor accommodation commands an extraordinarily panoramic view of the Taiping landscape; it will certainly be an ideal spot in SBS to invigorate one's mental energy during meditation retreats! If things go as planned, it should be ready by year end. The Organic Farm sub-committee has been taking good care of the orchard. We are looking forward to a fruitful season of bumper durian harvest early next year. That would be a good time for you to visit SBS to savour the durians and some of our chemical-free produce which should all be ripe by then!

Dhamma Grove and Burmese Park

In preparation for Kathina 2005, the chairman of the Kathina Ceremony Organising Committee, Ng Kian Chong, anticipated a bigger turnout for the festival and so initiated the opening up of the forested area adjacent to Sangha Court by clearing the undergrowth and reducing the gradient of the slope.

We have had many local volunteers among whom was a group of Burmese workers from Perak Duck Industries, Temerloh, some 20 miles away. They worked tirelessly to clear the site over several weekends in time for Kathina. A brook, Sungai Sangha, divides the clearing into two sections: the portion on the higher slope where Ven Aggacitta delivered his Dhamma talk on Kathina Day was named Dhamma Grove while the other portion on the lower slope, Burmese Park—so named to commemorate the contribution of the Burmese volunteers.

This has been another eventful and satisfying year for the development at SBS as well as for the positive improvement within ourselves as we continue to learn from each other in unity.

Thank you and *sādhu* for your generous support all the way!

19.07.2005

Going GREEN

Cultivating Alobha, Adosa and Amoha

CHIU SHENG BIN

reports on SBS' Organic Farm where volunteers sow seeds to reap gains in personal and spiritual maturity; pull weeds to pluck out greed, anger and delusion

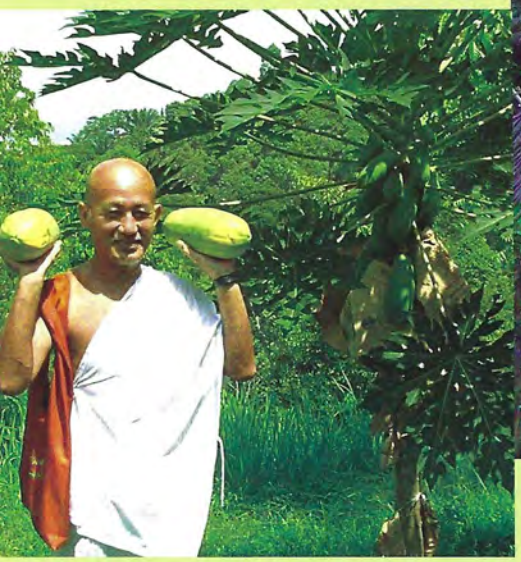
SBS Organic Farm (OF) hides many secrets, notably SBS' own red durians and unique blueberries. Our OF started in March this year, but not with a big bang. Rather, it grew bit by bit, assimilating the 10-year-old durian orchard with a smattering of other fruit trees like *petai*, *rambutan*, *dukong* and *cempedak*. Subsequently more varieties of fruit trees, a herbal garden and a vegetable plot were added.

The OF is naturally a *rojak* mixture, highly dependent on the talents and interests of SBS supporters and the needs of our monastics.

The OF team comprises me, Chen Sew Kian, Mrs Koay, Irene Ng, Looi Sow Fei, Mrs Yeoh and Kueh Kak Seng. We started out with four objectives: to provide healthy greens and fruits for SBS monastics, not to waste any farm produce, to involve as many volunteers as possible and to fill the SBS kitty. I'm delighted to say that the objectives are being well met.

We do not judge the success of OF by looks and income gained alone. Rather, we view it as an opportunity for the personal growth of the many volunteers involved. Each challenge extends the boundary of our emotional limits and uplifts our spiritual maturity. The garden is maturing and improving in tandem with the availability of workers and the experience gained by the farm management.

Beginning last year, the OF team took over the sale of durian fruits rather than contracting out the fruits. It was a tiring but fruitful affair. We managed to raise over RM7,000 from durian fruit sales in the 2004 season, and had a dinner to celebrate our success and hard work. This year, we continue to organise the fruit sales and have collected over RM4,000 from the first season of selling our produce of vegetables, petai, cempedak, papaya, *guava* fruits and of course, durians. Yeo Khee Aik tasted the first batch of *sawi* and was pleasantly surprised by the crunchy texture and sweet flavour of the organically grown sawi.



OF is as much about farming as it is a rallying point for Dhamma friends to come together to share a healthy hobby with harmony and tolerance.

Selling durian fruits was truly exciting and every member of the marketing team faced challenges. First and foremost, everyone was shy to sell things—what more durians! Imagine a mixed bag of an office administrator, teachers, a retired gentleman, an agricultural consultant, a housewife and *kueh kak* seller peddling durians. The only one with real selling experience was Kueh Kak Seng.

The exercise and experience made us all more thick-skinned but more patient. I remember Heng Ghee telling me that he had sleepless nights not knowing where to sell the durians in Penang, until things somehow worked out okay the evening before he headed out to SBS to collect his fruits—the orders seemed to fall out of the sky for the 10 days he was entrusted with the sales. Heng Ghee used his entire network in Penang—family and friends—to sell his fruits. He sold to the staff and contractor of a Japanese plastic factory in Prai through his engineer nephew. His wife sponsored his traveling expenses and his brother kept him company on his trips to SBS. I laugh recalling that his car had to be constantly deodorised with a kati of charcoal.

I'm sure that Chen and David Chang had their challenges too. Only Kueh Kak Seng seemed to go about selling with ease. My fruits usually landed up at Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Mi Tor See and Mahindarama Temple. The kitchen helpers there would ask if the durians were from Mr Saw's orchard. I guess I wasn't their first durian donor.

I don't wish to turn this into a farm report. However, I must mention the enthusiasm of our OF supporters. Chen Sew Kian, Chuah Ah Hwa, Ker Seong Ngo and Looi Sow Fei took the initiative to visit a commercial organic farm, Titi-Eco Farm, near Port Dickson in May. Tan Joo Lan, our OF friend and a director of the Centre for Environment, Technology and Development Malaysia (CETDEM), an NGO that promotes organic farming, arranged for the trip. She also arranged for Tan Siew Luang, the CETDEM expert in organic farming, to give talks and demonstrations on organic farming and preparing compost.

When push comes to shove, the talents and dedication of many

supporters were revealed. Tan Heng Ghee was the key agent for marketing durians in Penang in October and November 2004. Chen and Mrs Yeoh got the vegetable plots going from scratch with the help of many Burmese volunteers from a nearby Temerloh factory. Kueh Kak Seng single-handedly harvested last season's petai fruits week after week. Mrs Koay organised the sale of all farm produce. And there were many more volunteers who have helped in one way or another.

Looi Sow Fei started the herbal garden in front of Dhamma Workers' Quarters (DWQ). With whatever knowledge of herbs she gleaned from family, friends and books, fortified with an interest in the uses of the different herbs, she has tended to the patch with much TLC (tender loving care). I have yet to learn about the uses of the many varieties of herbs she has planted.

All said and done, OF is as much about farming as it is a rallying point for Dhamma friends to come together to share a healthy hobby with harmony and tolerance. It is amazing how a noble activity can very quickly attract willing helpers and contributors as honey attracts bees, or a magnet, iron. Certainly, the OF team shall not lose sight of the heartwood for the leaves and twigs, outer bark, inner bark or sapwood (MN 29); the big picture is still the sustained cultivation of non-greed (*alobha*), non-anger (*adosa*) and non-delusion (*amoha*) in all our activities.

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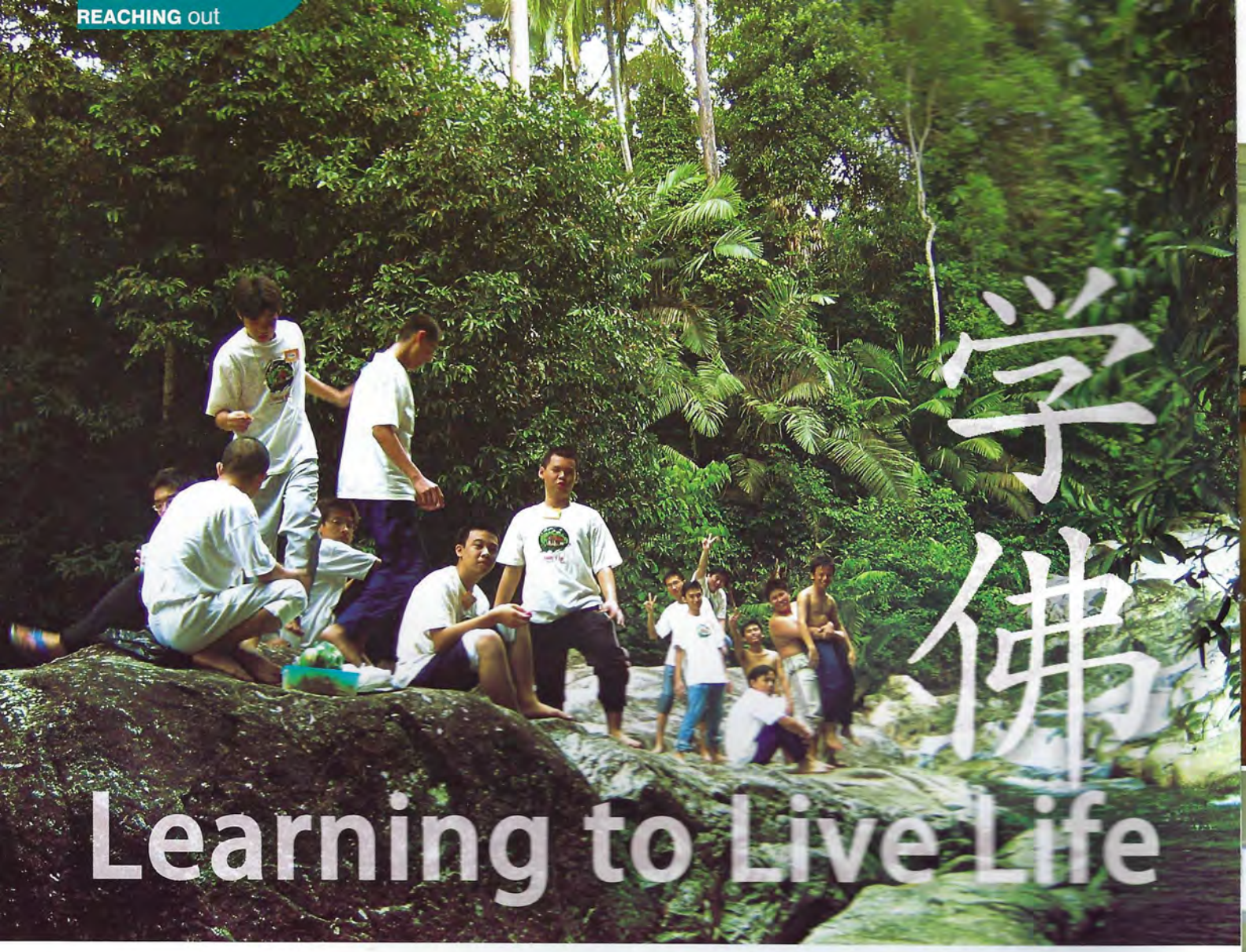


Learning to Live Life

CANDIMA attends a four-day teenagers' camp in SBS conducted in Mandarin by Ven Kusala and finds his life all the better for having attended it.

I really appreciate the chance to participate in the first Chinese Dhamma Camp held in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS). I had been looking forward to meeting, mixing with (kinda) and learning from a monk. I was also hoping to gain more knowledge about the Dhamma and some merits by keeping Eight Precepts. Guess what? I got all of these in this camp!

The *bhantes* taught us a lot of things, such as Eight Precepts and chanting. They also cleared our doubts about certain phenomena like ghosts, hell, heaven and such. These teachings and explanations made us realise that if we want more blessings or merits, all we have to do is just stop doing bad deeds and continually cultivate good deeds such as Five Precepts. The bhantes taught us things that are particularly applicable to us lay people—to respect our parents and elders, not to ask for more than we need, to use our properties righteously and not to waste our parents' hard-earned money on unessential activities.

By practising Eight Precepts, we improved very much on morality. Who would want their children to be cruel, to steal, to tell lies and so on?

It was a very blissful situation. The bhantes were ever compassionate, wise and full of virtue. In other types of camps I have attended, we always had to follow orders, queue up and were often left to our own devices. But in this Buddhist camp,

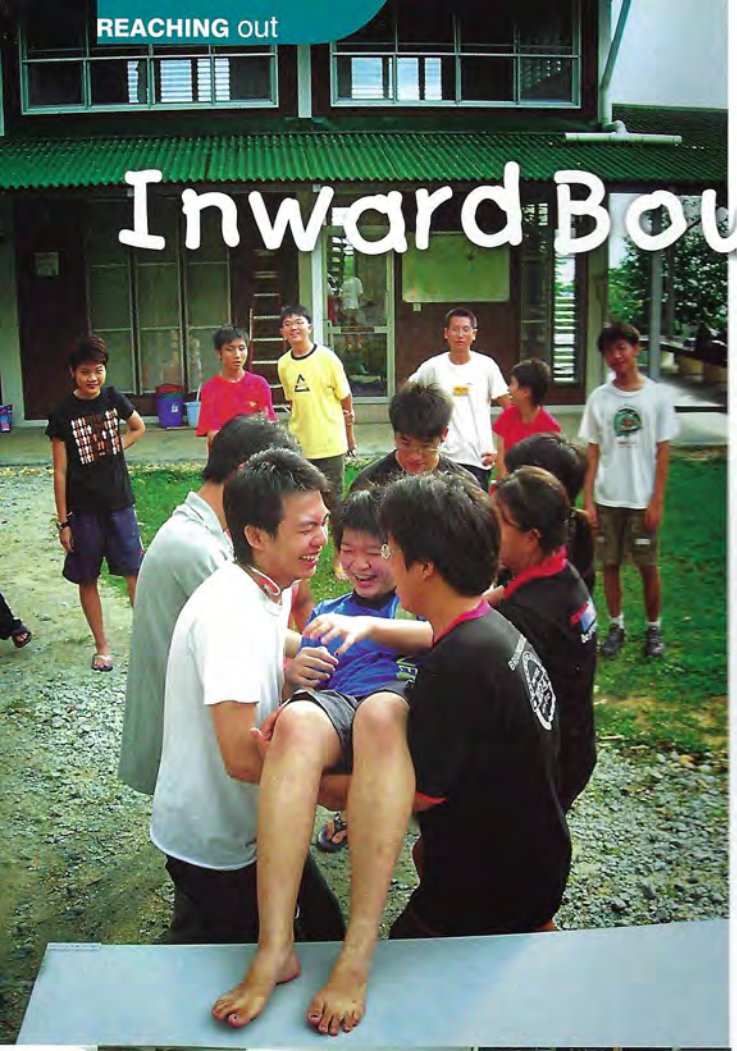
By practising Eight Precepts, we improved very much on morality. Who would want their children to be cruel, to steal, to tell lies and so on?

the bhantes never forced us to do anything, and were neither too enthusiastic nor too cool. It sounds like the participants did not do anything there, but surprisingly all of us kept Eight Precepts quite well and joined in the activities willingly. We participated in the spirit of tolerance; no hard feelings arose.

Now, I would like to thank Bhante Aggacitta, Bhante Kusala, Bhante Kumara, Bhante Balacitta, Dhamma brothers, sisters and fellow participants. My thanks also to those who offered us food. May they be free from enmity and danger. Without them, I would not have come to this monastery and learned so much. I was very fortunate to be given a chance to participate in this camp and hope that others will also be given this chance. I have improved a lot in living life and attaining a little more equanimity

May all beings be free from enmity and danger.

Inward Bound



JEFF OLIVER, who conducted a very successful year-end retreat in SBS in 2003, is back again with bonuses. This time, besides a retreat he also conducted a Teenage Dhamma Camp and a Children's Camp. Here, Jeff tells you how fellowship, meditation and respect for nature were nurtured in the Teenage Camp.

G'day, I'd like to share some of our experiences from the Teenage Camp held in SBS between 26 and 29 December. You know how companies send their employees off for an "Outward Bound Camp"? Well, this was Inward Bound—referring to introspection, knowing oneself. The theme question was, "How do I feel?"

We had a few objectives for the camp. One was to get teenagers in touch with the Dhamma, especially meditation, in a fun and enjoyable atmosphere. Another was to let them appreciate and respect nature. We also wanted to facilitate them to meet other young Buddhists in the local area with the prospect of rekindling the youth group here.

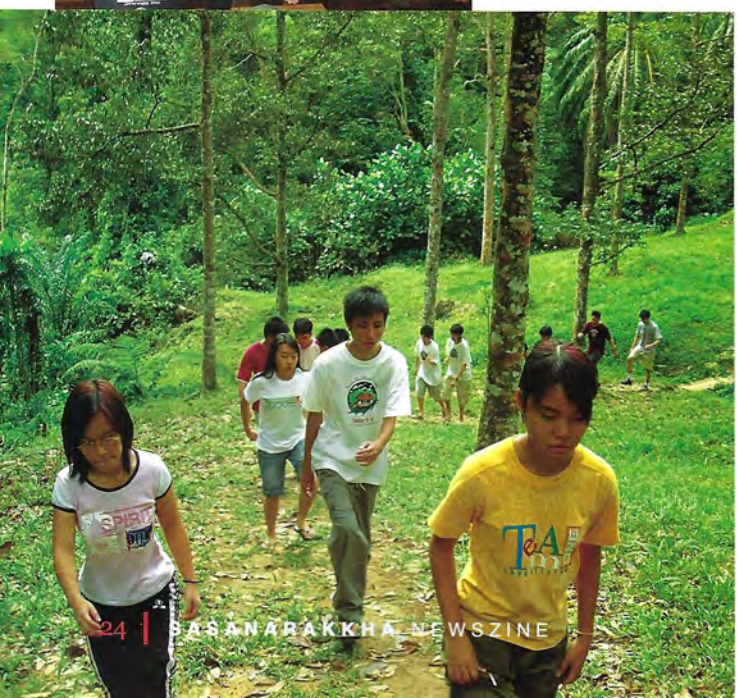
Having just guided the nine-day Vipassana retreat with about 25 adults practising earnestly, it was pretty stimulating to replace that void with the young energy of about 34 teenagers!

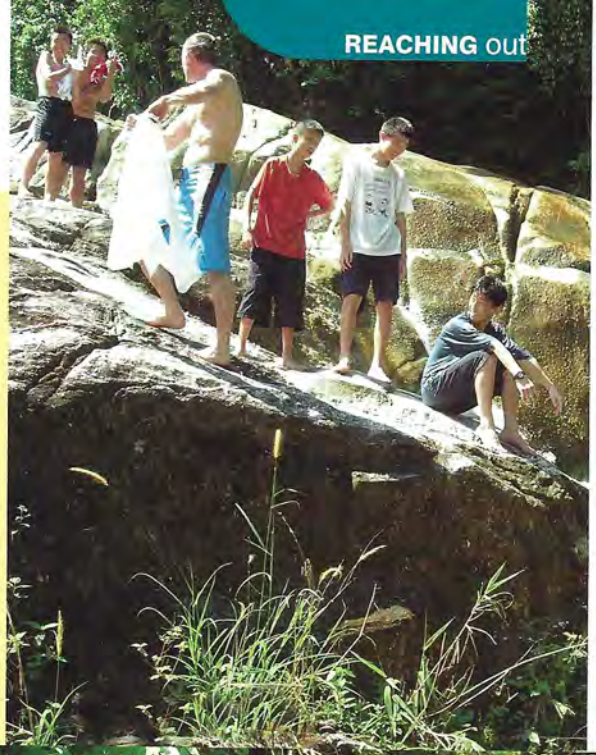
Recently, I was invited to a Dhamma Camp held by the youth group of the Burmese Temple in Penang—Buddhist Generation-X (BGX)—what a cool name! The guys there are cool too! They organised their own camp so well, I invited a few of them to come and join us. Four high-powered dudes came over and got us rocking from the start!

We started off with energetic ice-breaking games which warmed our hearts and we all became good friends real soon. I told my story and introduced meditation. The evening went quite late but that was to be expected for the first night.

We awoke at 6.00am and started the day with some stretching and yoga, followed by meditation and chanting. A yummy breakfast was enjoyed by all before we did one hour's cleaning service in our temporary home. Bhante Balacitta gladly guided us on an expedition to the most beautiful waterfall adjacent to SBS. We all worked together to make a safe passage across the stream and over the rocks. Everyone enjoyed swimming and playing there so much. Some of us meditated too.

Back to camp for a hearty and healthy lunch and then we gathered for lying meditation. Yes, 30-plus teenagers all lying still, quietly and mindfully in the same room at the same time—we have photos to prove it! However, the mindfulness didn't last long as they slowly drifted off to the





land of "Zzzzzz". That was the point; to get them to rest and sleep to be energised for the afternoon programme.

After games and pizza in the afternoon, we headed off to explore SBS on foot with a walk rally, where each group had to visit certain check points described in words and shown on a map. In this exercise they worked in teams and got to know their way around SBS as well as the various buildings and their purposes.

After a well deserved shower, we had "One Jolly Evening". We asked the monk-to-be, Jolly, to talk to us about his life and decision to be a monk in SBS. We went for a silent night walk, and then watched part of a documentary, *What the Bleep do we Know?*, about the reality of life.

Early next morning, Jolly shared some stylish Tai Chi moves with us, after which we did some meditation and chanting before following the monks down the hill for *piṇḍacāra*, ate breakfast by another waterfall and played mindfully in the stream. We had lunch and group lying (sleeping) meditation. The afternoon was taken up by their games and work service. In the evening we ascended to the open deck Buddha Shrine where we were graced by Bhante Aggacitta's presence and Bhante Kumara answered lots of questions in the "Dear Bhante" session. They all benefited a lot from this session with the monks under the stars.

On the last morning, we exercised outside and did longer meditation. We also took time out to reflect and write a small memo of how we felt and what we learnt during our activities.

After breakfast, we cleaned up and had a fun, long and very friendly farewell, expressions of gratitude and asked for forgiveness.

The feedback so far has been very positive and it seems that we now have a new Taiping (SBS) youth group. Congratulations and *sādhu*—to all participants and those who supported us!

May we all live in Peace and Harmony!

Teens also speak for themselves

(uncensored and unedited)

"The camp was awesome. This is the COOLEST camp ever!!!"

"Today, I learnt that diamonds don't last forever."

"The pear and orange eating game and swimming in the waterfall are really fun. But the lime drinking game was really sick."

"Dear Bhante" session. "I like to thank the two bhantes who patiently tried to answer every question fully. Even the crazy ones. Thank you Bhante."

Meditation—"I learnt how to calm down myself. Thanks a lot! I know what to do when I have many problems."

Pindacara: "I don't understand why we were bowing to them, but the way the dog came and sat confirms my suspicion. The dog is a monk too." (see story on p10)

Free Drop: "I learned to trust others and most importantly, I also learned to trust myself."

"If Bro Jeff is leading this camp next year I sure come."

"The waterfall was out of this world."

"The games were merciless in a fun kind of way."

"We also did some cleaning up. It was good that we could give something back to the centre."

"Dinner—"Nay, what the...! It was only leftover fruit and sandwiches. Actually it was only evening snack."

"SBS is so beautiful! Bhante is so handsome! Jeff is so funny! I'm so happy and healthy!"

Moulding Young Minds

By Ooi Cheng Kim

Impressions of meditation, contemplation, and self-reflection filtered into 32 impressionable young minds at the Children's Camp held from 29 – 31 Dec 2005 in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

During the three days that the group of 32 children (aged 7 – 13 years) took part in the first ever Children's Camp in SBS, they participated in a wide range of activities. These include singing, games, morning exercise, chanting and meditation. In most of these, the children were lucky to have Jeff Oliver as their facilitator. He was especially adept at introducing the basic techniques of meditation. These included *mettā* and *vipassanā*. For some of these children, the camp was their first ever exposure to anything Buddhist. The majority also had never experienced any meditation before. It was certainly an eye-opener for them.

The children also had the opportunity to listen to two stories from Jataka Tales told to them in Mandarin by Ven Balacitta. Ven Kumara conducted a very interesting Q&A session in Mandarin with them. Some of the questions asked were unexpectedly refreshing.

On two occasions they were taken for a walk in the dark. The children were requested to walk quietly without talking so that they could feel the serenity of the night. As they walked in almost total darkness, their senses were alert to the sounds of the forest. Brother Jeff also took the opportunity to show them how to reflect on their inner feelings and senses in moments of solitude. The second walk was a fun time for many—a sort of treasure hunt with clues given, which ended with the children doing some meditation in the dark under the stars on the open deck in front of Buddha Shrine.

On the second day, the children were led on a jungle trek down the hill to join the *bhantes* for *piṇḍacāra* at the Hokkien Cemetery pavilion followed by a refreshing breakfast at a waterfall area.

Come morning of the final day, most of the bigger kids gamely took part in clearing up after which the closing ceremony was held. After saying their goodbyes, the children trekked down the hill to Hor Eeah Temple and were safely handed back to their waiting parents.

It is the sincere hope of the organisers that each and every one of the children enjoyed the camp and learnt something about metta, honesty, self-reflection, and contemplation of peace within and without.

VOICES from within

A Time to Learn

General Administrator **LIEW HEE NAM** becomes a jack of all trades and takes everything in his stride

After my retirement from teaching, I idled at home until my wife and children urged me to look for a job. So when Ven Kumara mentioned that there was a vacancy for a general administrator in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS), I applied for it.

I found the job tougher than I expected. The Hokkien people describe it as *pow sua pow hai* which means "to cover the mountain and the sea". The job requires a jack of all trades. Fortunately, I was able to handle most of the tasks and I had a number of willing teachers to coach me. David and Uttara helped with computer skills. Practical skills were picked up as I learnt how to deal with landslides and to negotiate hilly roads in a 4WD. With the help of seasoned SBS drivers like David, Steven and Lim Poh Eng, I was able to negotiate the steep hairpin bends on the hill. As a result, I was able to overcome my shortcomings.

Living close to Nature, I familiarised myself with the names of trees and plants. The ongoing construction of Main Office and Farmhouse was also a learning opportunity to pick up some knowledge of building construction. Walking the hilly slopes of SBS as I went about my duties and breathing in the fresh air keeps me in good health. My gratitude to the *dāna* team for the delicious and wholesome food which also contributed to my good health. I have benefited a lot working for SBS.

On the spiritual front, my knowledge of Dhamma increased through listening to Dhamma talks and reading Dhamma books.

I would like to thank all those who taught me and helped made my job easier—a big "Thank You".

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

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

Introduction to Monkhood Programme

IMP 6 & 7

Programme Components

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

Duration (2 weeks)	Optional 1-week Meditation Retreat	Closing Date for Application
8-21 May 2006	21-28 May 2006	10 Apr 2006
4-17 Dec 2006	17-24 Dec 2006	6 Nov 2006

meditation • discipline • sutta study • Pali pronunciation • chanting • talks & discussions on the DhammaVinaya & relevant issues • qigong • yoga • health talk • alms gathering & other ascetic practices • nature walk • riverside breakfast & other beneficial activities

Requirements:

- Possess general physical and mental health
- 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
- Malaysian (Singaporeans can also be considered)

Fully sponsored by SBS & supporters
Medium of Instruction: English
Maximum Intake: 12 for each IMP
For further details & application form,

- contact SBS Main Office (t.05-8084429 f.05-8084423 e.office@sasanarakkha.org) or
- point your web browser to http://www.sasanarakkha.org/imp/

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

Sīsawāt Kitti Sinā
證法寺

Staying Connected With You

By Jolly Lim

Busloads of devotees from Singapore, Klang Valley and Malacca mingle with local devotees in a united show of support for the Sangha.

Behind the Scenes

The fifth *kaṭhina* celebration at Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS), enjoyed bountiful blessings. More than 100 Burmese workers from Temerloh (Perak) and from Kamunting, volunteered their help in our preparation for the big day, sacrificing many weekends of their off days. They cleaned *kuṭis*, swept roads, cleared undergrowth in Dhamma Grove as well as along the *piṇḍacāra* path and levelled areas for a food court. They were the answer to our manpower problem. A big *sādhu* to them!

Kathina Eve

It was *pasar malam* time for SBS. A few food stalls had been set up at Food Court the night before the big day, and everyone had their fill of good food—food patrons from Kuala Lumpur and even as far off as Singapore, joined the locals!

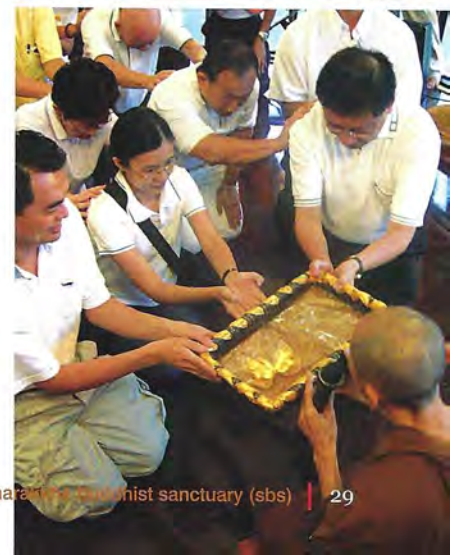
"This is my third time celebrating Kathina at SBS" said Ng Shang Wei, 12, from Singapore, who is here with his family. "The decoration gets better and better each year, especially this year when there are so many lights and colourful flags around! It really brings up the festive spirit of this big day."

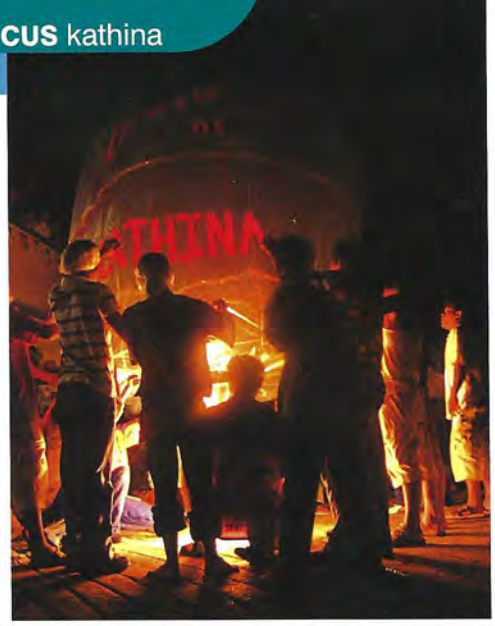
The Big Day

Early birds

Our SBS *dāna* workforce was already up the hill packing rice-packets for pindacara as early as 4.30am—it was indeed a 'hot-sticky-steaming' task for them as they had to pack more than 1000 packets of freshly cooked rice. Our Burmese volunteers were busy cooking their mouth-watering Burmese-style *laksa* at that early hour!

The drivers of the 4WD convoy had their hands full too. This year, with the opening of the pindacara trail, the majority of devotees hiked up part of the way. This really helped to lessen the work load of the convoy.





The moment

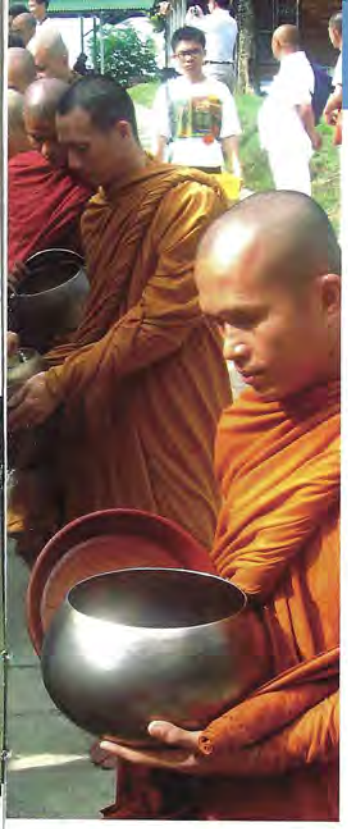
At 7.00am sharp, the Sangha, led by Ven Aggacitta, filed into Sima Hall. This year's Kathina saw nine *bhikkhus* participating in the ceremony. Besides the three resident monks of SBS, we had Ven Ajahn Karuniko from the UK; Phra Ubon from Thailand; Ven Sujivo from Vivekavana, Bukit Berapit, Bukit Mertajam; Ven U Puṭṭananda from Myanmar; Ven Dhammaputta from Penang and Ven Balavuddho from Kelantan.

Devotees took up vantage points around the edge of the *sīmā* pond to witness the ceremony. Led by Lee Lee Kim and Sati Chan, representatives of the Dhamma Family, the sponsors of Kathina 2005 walked solemnly into Sima Hall. The short but meaningful ceremony of presenting the kathina cloth to the Sangha and thereafter to the eligible bhikkhu was conducted in two languages—English and Hokkien. The robe was offered to Abbot Ven Aggacitta.

Buddhist Hymns

While the Sangha began the task of measuring and cutting the cloth in Sima Hall, a choir of 15 trained by a professional gave a presentation that incorporated a monologue and hymns which kept the laity happy. When "The Sunrise Comes" was sung in a capella style it really took everybody's breath away! This song touched me the most, bringing back nostalgic moments. According to Alaric Lee, one of the choir members, the group spent almost two and a half months practising their songs and it was Melvin Ho who put in great effort to do a different musical arrangement for "The Sunrise Comes".

Cindy Yeap's solo performance really brought the presentation to its climax! The professionally trained soprano captivated the audience. We were also very honoured to have Datuk Dr Victor Wee, composer of the SBS theme song as well as its original singer, to sing it for us.



Pindacara

At 10.00am, the Sangha started its 400-metre pindacara from the classroom block, passed the food stalls up to Burmese Park, made a U-turn to Dhamma Grove and proceeded to Sangha Central Facilities before making its way back to Dhamma Grove again. "This is the longest queue of devotees that I have seen offering dana during Kathina and I am really happy to be here to witness all this!" said Ajahn Karuniko.

Staying Connected With You

The theme for this year's Kathina, "Staying Connected with You", was expressed on the souvenir T-shirts and also in Ven Aggacitta's talk that morning.

This year, two Dhamma talks were delivered concurrently after pindacara. One was by Ven Aggacitta at Dhamma Grove for the English and Hokkien devotees; the other by Ven U Puṭṭananda in Sangha Classroom for the Burmese volunteers. During the Dhamma talk, Ven Aggacitta explained to the devotees the significance of the kathina ceremony. He mentioned that this is the day monks should remind themselves to be grateful to the supportive laity for offering them robes. By giving this important requisite, monks can have more time to devote themselves to Dhamma studies, meditation and the perpetuation of the Dhamma.

Bhante also expressed his gratitude to all generous devotees for their support for SBS all this while. He stressed that without their generous acts, it would be difficult for the Sangha and The Sanctuary to continue carrying out their mission to train local monks, to conduct meditation retreats and to provide other community services. He also thanked all the sponsors and the Kathina Ceremony Organising Committee for making the event a successful one.

Bhante said that by opening up SBS to the public in this annual Kathina ceremony, more people would be exposed to the Sangha and eventually 'stay connected' by learning the Dhamma, understanding it and applying it in their daily life, thus helping people live a richer life!

Finale

Though most of the devotees left SBS around 2.00pm, the Sangha continued sewing the robe in Sangha Central Facility sewing room till late that night. After that it was washed, dyed, and dried. "It took me a few hours to prepare the dye needed for dying the robe", said Ven Balacitta, one of the resident monks at SBS. "I used mahogany bark, given by one of the forest monasteries in Sri Lanka while I was there, to make the dye. It seems to be the best dying material I have ever used. The bark produced a rich colour even at the third boiling."

"This is my first time celebrating Kathina at SBS", said Ven Balavuddho, from Kampung Pong, "and knowing that SBS monks still measure, cut, sew, and dye the robe on this very day makes my presence here even more precious! As a matter of fact it is also my first hands-on experience measuring and sewing the robe as a monk".

Approximately at 10.00pm the robe was finally completed. The Sangha and the laity assembled at Sima Hall once more to witness the kathina spreading ceremony. At 10.30pm the kathina was finally spread and everyone went home rejoicing at being able to participate in and witness the whole event on this auspicious day.

By opening up SBS to the public in this annual Kathina ceremony, more people would be exposed to the Sangha and eventually 'stay connected' by learning the Dhamma, understanding it and applying it in their daily life, thus helping people live a richer life!

—Ven Aggacitta

CONTINUED FROM BACK COVER

I also learnt a lot about the Dhamma. Bhante was excellent at teaching Dhamma. Simply excellent. As a Christian, I find the Dhamma to be truly insightful and actually does not go against good but explains the nature of things. With me, if something makes sense, I have to accept it, even if it comes from a five-year old boy with a lollipop in his hand.

There are three bhantes and they all taught me a lot. Bhante Balacitta taught me the Tibetan Five Rites, breathing exercises as well as yoga. His bass voice was very pleasing. Bhante Kumara and I had, at least to me, a relationship of conflict. We would argue and debate on various topics—from politics to food, health, Dhamma and pronunciation. I also posed a lot of hypothetical questions which kind of fired both of us up. I am assuming it fired him up, he being a monk and all. But we always made up. Bhante Balacitta was one of my evening exercise 'gang'. We three would stretch and stretch and talk in between. He is a very, very kind and sweet person and it shines through his eyes, smiles, in his speech and his body language. Heh. He once took me for a walk up along the stream and we sort of jumped from rock to rock; did a bit of wall climbing and it was beautiful. It felt like an adventure—we had our bags and alms bowl slung over our shoulders all cool like and hiked up! And when we returned I took a seat in the classroom. After half an hour, I felt a cold sensation on my legs, and I found three well-fed leeches on me! Whee!

I also joined the IMP, together with 21 others—and boy, was that a whirl of a time! We did so much that there wasn't much time for bathing or washing and it was like Pap! Pap! Pap! And that's the end of the two weeks. We did so much, learnt and experienced so much that it's not gonna get written at all. Join the IMP if you must know.

Then came the retreat with Jeff. He is a great guy. In that week I felt like I learnt really a lot. Things sort of fell into place and I had a better understanding of things. It all got verbalised. I met my demons and subdued some of them, and learned that there are many more battles coming. I learnt not to judge, or plan or retreat but to stay strong and just be there. It was pretty cool.

Being in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) for 40 nights was a blessing. To have chosen 40 nights of SBS over getting blasted in Langkawi with my friends, I would like to think I made the right choice. Before the retreat I was unsure and cracking my head thinking of what to do but after the retreat I knew what I had to do. No, I still don't have the answer as to what I want to do with my life. But I got closer—I know all I have to do now is finish my studies—and I am not going to think of anything else.

I've learnt that Buddhism has been turned into a religion. What actually matters is that this dude, Gotama, learnt something; taught us it; it is good; we copy him and practise. That's all.

There really is nothing else. When you don't cling to anything, this is what you get, a man who taught the world how to end suffering. Pretty cool guy. Of course he also taught the Dhamma for us intellectual folks, but really, you don't even have to study to learn. Just meditate, and you'll see. Have I seen? Yes, I've seen, but I also know that what I've seen and experienced is still shallow, and there are depths I cannot imagine yet.

Leaving after 40 days made me fear things. One is that I cannot go back to the world but have to give up everything and be a monk for that has been shown to be the truth. The other is to go back to the world and enjoy it knowing that the truth is over the other side. Hmm... the plan now is to see how the world is, enjoy it and pursue life, but while doing so, to be conscious that if and when I get tired of it and realise that that is the path I do not want, then maybe being a renunciant would be pretty cool. I could stand on a rock and preach. Hohoho. Also, I find that I can no longer forget about meditation and that it will be a continuous practice for me now.

I have also seen more light. I have always thought Buddhism was just a Chinese thing to do because we were born into it. That is a sad situation. To know the core of and the truth about Buddhism, which is just what the Buddha taught (Dhamma)—a natural law that is actually universal and not confined to Buddhists—is for everyone. Calling it Buddhism restricts it. I wish it could go back to just being this guy taught this guy this and it works. Then take it from there.

To know the core of and the truth about Buddhism, which is just what the Buddha taught (Dhamma)—a natural law that is actually universal and not confined to Buddhists—is for everyone. Calling it Buddhism restricts it.

But who am I? So yeah, my experience in SBS was wholesome and fulfilling (for want of better words). The Bhantes were kind to me; the people were so very nice to me; the place was good to me, and I was at peace with myself for 40 nights at the edge of the forest.

WE'VE GOT MAIL **FROM PAGE 2**

✉ Dear Ven Aggacitta,

On behalf of the "Dhamma Family", we wish to express our gratitude to you for giving us the opportunity to sponsor the Kathina in SBS this year. Under your guidance, the efforts of the Kathina Organising Committee, Dhamma workers and helpers are evident in making it a success. It is heart warming to see everybody working together in the spirit of togetherness in the Dhamma. A big *sādhu* to one and all. With the dedication and selfless efforts by all around, SBS will be a beacon of light for all Dhamma farers seeking the truth.

LEE LEE KIM & SATI CHAN

✉ On behalf of all, thank you so much for arranging our accommodation etc; and congratulations on another successful Kathina. I am always amazed at the oganisational skill and team spirit. Sadhu to all of you in TIMS and SBS. It has been an enjoyable trip and for me, visiting SBS has always been very spiritually fulfilling.

Once again sadhu and by the grace of the merits, may your path to liberation be smooth and joyful.

OOI SIEW SWAN

✉ Would like to thank SBS Organising Committee for a very well organised event. I'm very impressed. All of us had a really great time at SBS. Also, it was good to see Bhante has recovered (he lost a lot of weight though). The park where the monks had their lunch somehow gave me a very good familiar feel, so close to nature, so calm, so carefree.

LEONG POH CHWEE

✉ First of all, sadhu for a well organised and meaningful Kathina at SBS. It was my first visit to SBS and I was deeply impressed. As the name Sasanarakkha (guardian of the Sasana) implies, SBS gives me hope that my grandchildren will have the chance to listen to the Dhamma in Malaysia.

However, I wish to share my personal opinion with the organising committee on areas where I believe there is room for improvement.

For the offering of *piṇḍapāta* , devotees should do it with great respect to the Sangha. I think that cooked rice is not suitable although it is used for symbolic purposes. It is sticky and difficult to drop into the bowl. Many devotees were seen flicking their spoons in order to get the food down, and this act is seen to be disrespectful to the Sangha. In the process of offering, instead of calming and conditioning the mind with wholesome thought, I noticed many devotees getting annoyed and irritated when rice stuck to the spoon. I would suggest considering other food which will serve the same symbolic purpose.

After the offering of rice, robes and articles for daily needs were offered which I find meaningful. The offering of a "money tree" (a tree shape made from real notes), really caught me by surprise though. Did the Buddha teach us to offer cash to the Sangha?

I can't think of any reason why this "money tree" formed part of the *piṇḍacāra*. This can create confusion and misconception for beginners.

I also noted *ang pow* money being collected in a tray to be offered to the Sangha. This is understandable and sometimes unavoidable as it is a deep-rooted Chinese custom to offer them. However, the provision of empty ang pow packets at the counter for devotees to put in their money would seem that ang pow money is encouraged and should be offered. It could further imply that ang pow is requested. I am very concerned that this act may tarnish the image of Buddhism and the Sangha community.

On the same note, I saw people opening the ang pow packets and counting the money before the end of the Kathina at the meeting room with door wide open and visible to all devotees who pass by. We taught our children not to open ang pows in front of the giver, and it is indeed sad to see this happening in SBS.

In short, it is best not to handle ang pows. Any donation could be made officially and with receipt issued (as what is done under the tree near the food stall). Donors can also specify the purpose of the donation eg: building fund, maintenance, or even as an offering to Bhante for his living expenses. This will be seen as more proper.

The above is my sincere opinion, voiced for the benefit of all beings without any ill intention. Having said so much, I think the pros still outweigh the cons, and it is still a job well done by the organising committee. Sadhu again.

LOK NGAI HEY

Editor's note: *Thank you for your constructive feedback, something we always welcome. We are, after all, in the process of evolving a Malaysian Sangha within the boundaries set by the teachings of the Buddha, but which is also sensitive to the needs and aspirations of all Malaysian Buddhists.*

We agree that the offering of rice posed some difficulty to devotees. We shall bear that in mind and will think of ways to overcome the problem.

Actually, the issues of ang pows and money trees arise from the same source—they are cultural practices. The former, as you pointed out, is a Chinese custom; the latter is indigenous to the Burmese, and was offered by our very dedicated pool of Burmese workers (see story on p16). Such offerings enhanced their feeling of joy, as compared to just handing over money to people at donation counters, which were also set up on that day. Both offerings, entrusted to kappiyas, *are for obtaining allowable requisites for the monks.*

The money from the ang pows were counted that very day so that it could be allocated to the kappiyas who accompanied the monks (most of whom went home immediately after the pindacara). However, it is a good suggestion that in future such a practice should be carried out more discreetly, to avoid any misconceptions.

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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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.

1 Jul The SBS staff and Dhamma workers begin to use a punch card machine to clock in on the first working day of July 2005.

David Chang resigns as field assistant and site supervisor for Phase IV project in SBS but stays on temporarily as a volunteer.

2 Jul Before Uttara goes on a one-month leave, Chi Hui Fong, our former administrative assistant (AA), comes to take instructions from her before taking over as temporary AA.

3 Jul After an SBSMC meeting, Ven Kumara goes to PJ to work with Tuck Loon and Ms Looi for a few days on the next Newszine.

6 Jul Ven Kusala comes with the intention of staying on for the coming *vassa* in SBS.

7 Jul Ven Kumara conducts a Dhamma discussion on "Death and After Death" at Setenang@MayangJaya.

8 Jul Ven Sangha Subhadra Thera (Napana Avssawella, Sri Lanka) and Ven Upavana (Nibbana Vihara, Kajang) visit SBS together with two devotees.

Ven Kumara conducts a Dhamma discussion on "Dealing with Difficulties in Observing Five Precepts" at Setenang@MayangJaya.

10 Jul Ven Aggacitta, Ven Kusala and Ven Balacitta attend a pre-vassa robe-offering *dāna* by 100 Burmese working in Perak Duck Food Enterprise in Temerloh, Trong, about 15 miles from Taiping. The factory owner and his family as well as 21 members of TIMS and SBS devotees together with their children also participate in the dana.

12 Jul Allan Soon comes to install Porta Fence at the organic farm to test its effectiveness in keeping wild animals away.

13 Jul Lau Lam Kheng reports for work as a volunteer Dhamma worker.

14 Jul Ven Kusalacitto from Gua Musang, Kelantan, visits SBS with his kappiya.

Chu Chee Kiong reports for work as site supervisor and field assistant.

17 Jul Ven Kumara and Ven Balacitta attend a meeting of Theravada monks in Vihara Buddha Gotama, Temoh, where 22 Malaysian Theravada monks have gathered. They agree to have the next meeting at SBS. (see p6)

21 Jul The monks enter vassa. This is the 26th vassa for Ven Aggacitta, 9th for Ven Kusala, 7th for Ven Kumara, and 2nd for Ven Balacitta.

23 Jul Ven Kusala gives a talk at Simpang Buddhist Society.

25 Jul An Ananda Marga yoga instructor-monk, who had TB before, comes to teach Ven Aggacitta some yoga postures to strengthen his lungs.

28 Jul His Excellency, Chogen Rinpoche of Drukpa Kagyu Lineage, India, accompanied by a Tibetan monk and two local stewards, visits Ven Aggacitta. They have an interesting discussion.

We receive news from the Ministry of Agriculture approving our application for two Burmese workers.

29 Jul Savana Wong (of IMP4) leaves after having stayed as an Eight Precept-holder since 20 April.

30 Jul A chanting group of 16 persons from KL visits SBS. After a Dhamma discussion with Ven Kumara, they chant at the *sīmā* hall.

31 Jul Fourteen Burmese workers from Perak Duck Food Industries are here to help transport stone aggregates and sand, extract nails, categorise wood, clear secondary forest and clean buildings.

Six monks from Bercham Cave, Ipoh, together with 14 devotees, come to pay respects to Ven Aggacitta and tour SBS.

4 Aug SBS resident monks pass a resolution to sponsor building resources worth RM30,000 for a meditation hall to be built in a monk training centre in Galduva, Sri Lanka.

7 Aug An appreciation lunch is held for SBS helpers. Ven Kusala gives a Dhamma talk to the adults while Liew, SBS general administrator, gives a motivation talk to the children.

11 Aug Lim Kooi Fong and Hor Tuck Loon come to discuss a new Buddhist community and resource project linked to the Buddhist Channel.

12 Aug Ven Kumara goes to Wat Bukit Pinang near Alor Setar for a day. He conducts a Dhamma discussion with the devotees there on "Five Precepts".

14 Aug Asalha of IMP4 comes to stay as a postulant, joining Steven Low (Magha of IMP4). There are now two postulants in SBS.

19 Aug Upon the invitation of Hor Eeah shrine committee in conjunction with the Chinese 'month of the spirits', the monastics collect *piṇḍapāta* at Hor Eeah in the morning, and in the evening they chant *parittas* and Tirokutta Sutta at the Japanese War Memorial. Ven Kumara also gives a Dhamma talk relevant to the occasion.

20 Aug Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk at Hokkien Cemetery pavilion after *piṇḍacāra*.

Thirteen students (age 16 to 19) are here to attend a four-day Dhamma Camp conducted in Mandarin led by Ven Kusala. (see story on p22)

21 Aug There is a change in Sunday activities. After pindacara at the market, the monastics have their breakfast at Hor Eeah, instead of TIMS as was the usual practice. At 9.30am, they collect food brought by devotees and return to SBS. The weekly Dhamma talk, previously held in TIMS on Sundays, is now held on Saturdays after pindacara at the Hokkien Cemetery pavilion.

26 Aug Architect Jade Saw and Dr Soo are here to discuss construction details of the basement of the Main Office building. The basement, which will house a proper kitchen and dining hall, is an extension to the building as approved by the management committee. (see story on p16) Later in the evening our consultant structural engineer, Tan Buck Soon, also comes to discuss structural issues with Ven Aggacitta.

27 Aug An anonymous devotee donates a set of amplifier and speakers.

28 Aug Our BM representative, Sim Boon Lee, and his wife bring the Lunas Buddhist Hermitage Tuesday Dana Group leaders to donate RM20,030 for road building.

31 Aug After the monastics have collected pindapata, Ven Aggacitta delivers a Merdeka Day talk.

3 Sep Chow Chee Kin comes to stay in SBS as an Eight Precept holder. He intends to stay for three months.

7 Sep Ven Aggacitta goes for a final consultation at Ipoh Specialist Hospital. The results of the culture test found no traces of TB bacteria.

Ven Kumara leaves for Kuching for Dhamma propagation, to return on 11 September. Two talks are scheduled at Kuching Buddhist Society and another two at Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association.

8 Sep A Dhamma discussion led by Ven Kulasa is held at TIMS.

10 Sep Ooi Tai Lai comes to donate three meditation seats complete with cushion, backrest and mosquito net. He designed and made the set himself, using mostly recycled materials.

15 Sep Having been a chef for many years, Postulant Asalha briefs Ven Aggacitta on the kitchen layout and requirements for the lower ground floor of Main Office.

Venerable U Okkansasiddhi, a Burmese monk, comes for a visit. He says he is impressed with the Sasana work here.

16 Sep Ven Kusala leaves for Bukit Mertajam.

Atapi (Cheng Jin Hui) of Taiping, who was here a couple of years back as a volunteer Dhamma worker and who has just graduated with a degree in nutrition studies, comes up to see Ven Aggacitta and designs a nutrition programme to help speed him along the road to good health.

17 Sep Preparations for Kathina are well underway as Ng Kian Chong, Wai Seng Moh and Yoga hold discussions on a site being cleared of vegetation in preparation for Kathina Day activities. They also discuss a path that will be cleared for use by devotees making the journey up on Kathina Day.

21 Sep Ven Mahapañño comes for a visit.

Chiu Sheng Bin is here to work on Organic Farm (OF) and holds a meeting with the OF committee.

23 Sep Steven Low, who has been here as a postulant since April, ends his stay today.

2 Oct SBS monastics are invited for dana at Taiping Hokkien Association.

A group of Burmese workers are here to clear a patch of jungle near Sangha Court. This clearing will be the focus for dana and pindacara activities on Kathina Day. These volunteer workers continue to provide the much appreciated voluntary labour for many Sundays and other holidays until our Kathina Day.

10 Oct The monastics begin to listen to recordings of Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's Majjhima Nikaya Course. They do this on every eighth day *uposatha* and discuss related issues.

Soon Lee Restaurant donates seven used air-conditioners.

13 Oct The Sangha officially agrees to sponsor relief aid worth RM6,819.25 (being AIA's reimbursement of Ven Aggacitta's medical expenses) for the earthquake victims in Pakistan.

15 Oct Ven Aggacitta takes back his job of teaching the Saturday meditation group from Ven Kumara, the substitute teacher.

16 Oct Ven Aggacitta begins hiking down for pindapata, after having gone down by car for many months.

The monastics receive pindapata at Taiping Buddhist Association.

17 Oct It is Pavarana Day, which is the day monks end their vassa observance. Going by the Vinaya, each of them invites his fellow monks to point out any wrong doing that he may have committed.

18 Oct Chandra Chow Chang Sen (of IMP3) comes to stay for a few days as an Eight Precept-holder and volunteer worker.

19 Oct Jolly Lim Hood Poh from Miri arrives. He has his mind set on becoming a monk in SBS.

Our architect, Jade Saw, calls to say that the SBS building project is one of the only two Malaysian projects that got into the finals of Asia Architect Award.

25 Oct The monastics have a Sutta-Dhamma study and discussion based on Ven Bodhi's course. This session focuses on the bodhisatta's noble search as described in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta (MN 26).

1 Nov Ven Jutipañño comes to visit SBS and Ven Aggacitta.

4 Nov Ajahn Karuniko (22 vassas) from Amaravati, England arrives from Bangkok.

Ven Balavuddho (three vassas), a young Malaysian monk from Kelantan, arrives from Kampung Pong.

Led by Patrick, members of Metta Lodge (Johor) visit SBS.

5 Nov It is Kathina Eve and SBS is abuzz with final preparations for tomorrow.

Led by Dr Ng Yee Kong, three busloads of devotees arrive from Singapore. They have Dhamma discussions with Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara.

Ajahn Ubol (Thai) and Ven Sujivo (Malaysian) check in.

Before he leaves tomorrow, Chow Chee Kin passes up his assignment on comparative study of the popular biography of Siddhattha Gotama against Pali canonical sources.

6 Nov Kathina Day dawns bright and clear. About 1,000 devotees join nine members of the Sangha to celebrate Kathina Day. (see story on p29)

11 Nov SBS monastics go to Penang, driven by Postulant Jolly, to attend a Dhamma workshop there tomorrow morning. While they are there, they go for a dip in the sea to cleanse the body, and to Rayonex Bioresonance & Homeopathy Medical Centre for consultation and treatment.

12 Nov SBS monastics participate in a workshop in Than Hsiang Temple conducted by Ven Sujato to introduce comparative studies of earliest Buddhist scriptures: the Pali Nikayas, and the Sanskrit and Chinese Agamas.

14 Nov Ven Manaramita Mahathero, a German monk who has stayed in Sri Lanka for many years, visits for a day accompanied by four devotees.

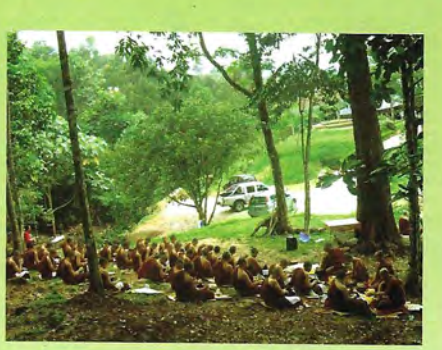
The SBS Sangha formally agrees to sponsor RM2,000 worth of building resources for the development of Santi Forest Monastery, Bundanoon, NWS, Australia.

15 Nov For this uposatha which marks the end of the rainy season, Ven Aggacitta speaks on Pañña Sutta (AN 8:2).

19 Nov Klang and Coast Buddhist Association members come to volunteer their services to clean various buildings in SBS.

22 Nov Two nuns, Sis Sumedha (Sri Lankan) and Sis Anoma (Japanese), and an Eight Precept-holder, Ms Siew Ean (Malaysian), come from Alokarama, Melaka, to visit SBS.

26 Nov A group of more than 50 *sāmaṇeras* and *sikkhavatis* attending the MBMC novitiate programme are here for a field trip. They are accompanied by Sayadaw U Thuzana, Ven Khemananda and Sis Khemanandi. After the monastics have received alms food, Ven Kumara delivers a talk to the novices. Also with the group is Ven Nyanasanti, a young Indian monk who has been invited to share his experiences in the coming IMP5. He will stay on until 5 December.



27 Nov The monastics go for a house dana where they recite parittas to pacify spirits in the house.

29 Nov Led by Ven Aggacitta, the monastics and Chee Kiong construct a rack for alms bowls to be used for the coming IMP5.

2 Dec The two-week Introduction to Monkhood Programme 5 (IMP5) starts today. We have a record number of 22 participants. Lim Teik Leong also comes to videotape the programme.

4 Dec The monastics and IMPians take a group photo at the stream on the way back from alms round. Ven Nyanasanti, an Indian monk born in USA, bred in India, ordained in Thailand and currently practising meditation in Sri Lanka, shares his story on the events that led him to become a Buddhist monk. The IMPians have their evening

meditation with Ven Aggacitta around the Bodhi tree.

5 Dec Lim Soo Jin joins Teik Leong in videotaping the programme. He also edits the recording for the SBS archives.

6 Dec The monastics conduct a bereavement service for the father of a strong SBS supporter. Ven Kumara talks on the subject of death—to the living and perhaps to the departed too. One of the IMP participants begins to act strangely. We learn that he has stopped taking his psychiatric medication since yesterday and refuses to resume taking it.

7 Dec Chu Chee Kiong, our field assistant, accompanies the semi-disoriented participant back to his home.

9 Dec Sayadaw U Nanda (28 vassas) from Sankasia, India pays us a visit.

11 Dec Lay Hoon introduces Joan who volunteers to help out on our website.

We have two video shows for the IMPians: *Doing Time, Doing Vipassana; The Middle Way.*

12 Dec Dr and Mrs Wong Wai Cheong brings Ven Vamsarakkhita (three vassas), a Canadian monk who has been delegated by Chanmyay Sayadaw U Janaka to teach meditation. He is here for a two-day stay. (see story on p4)

Three Sri Lankan monks, led by Ven Seeha, chief resident monk of Samadhi Buddhist Society, Singapore, visit SBS.

13 Dec Sri Lankan monk, Ven Induragare Dhammapala (18 vassas) visits again, and says that he would like to stay for a few months in SBS after Feb 2006 to do his PhD research on the meditation section of "Nama-rupa-pariccheda", a sub-commentary on the Abhidhamma. Some old IMPians come for a reunion near the end of IMP5.

We record Atanatiya Paritta during the evening chanting.

14 Dec We record Maha Paritta Pali (Burmese compilation) during the evening chanting.

15 Dec IMP5 ends today with a closing ceremony at 3pm. Three IMPians stay on for a meditation retreat to be held later. For this uposatha, Ven Aggacitta gives a talk based on AN 10.61 and 10.62.

16 Dec Jeff Oliver arrives to conduct some activities organised by SBS for lay devotees.

Cheong Sin Haur, a local USM student, comes to take instructions from Uttara on Main Office work before she begins her 10-day leave for meditation tomorrow.

17 Dec A 10-day retreat for lay people begins today under the guidance of Jeff Oliver. There are 26 yogis attending.

25 Dec Ven Aggacitta goes to Buddhist Hermitage (Lunas) to take part in the opening ceremony of its Sima Hall. The occasion also marks the 15th anniversary of the founding of the hermitage by Ven Acarasuvanno.

26 Dec Ven Kumara and Ven Balacitta go to Jawi for a house-warming dana, joining Ven Aggacitta who has gone there from Lunas. Ven Kumara gives a talk on housewarming and dedication of merits to departed ones.

From Jawi the monastics proceed to Rayonex Bioresonance and Homeopathy Medical Centre in Penang for consultation and treatment. On the way back to Taiping, they visit Pa Auk Sayadaw at Sitavana, Air Itam.

A Teenager Dhamma Camp conducted by Jeff Oliver begins today and will end on 29 Dec. (see p24)

28 Dec Postulant Asalha finally got a stainless steel plate removed from his wrist at Taiping General Hospital. At last, he is able to move his right thumb again.

In the evening, Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara have a Q&A session with the teens at the open deck.

29 Dec For this uposatha, Ven Aggacitta gives a talk based on Dvedhavitakka Sutta (MN 19). (see p26)

A two-day Children's Dhamma Camp, also conducted by Jeff Oliver, begins today.

31 Dec The monks go to Sitavana, Air Itam, to help make a sima [meaning: (Buddhist monastic) territory] under the direction of Pa Auk Sayadaw.

To receive updates on SBS by email, send a blank mail to sbsmail-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

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.

Anagarika (Pali/Sanskrit) 'Homeless one'. One who enters the homeless life without formally joining the Sangha.

Ayurveda (Sanskrit) ancient Indian medical science of healing and prolonging life

Arahant liberated person who has eradicated all mental defilements

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

Bhikkhu *Theravāda* Buddhist monk

Dāna act of giving, an offering

Deva deity

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

Hokkien a Chinese dialect

Jataka Tales stories or legends about Buddha's previous births

Kamma volition; action

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

Kuali (Malay) wok

Kueh kak a type of Chinese savoury cake

Kuṭi small house or hut

Laksa a noodle soup which is spicy, sour and hot

Makan (Malay) eat

Mettā loving-kindness

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

Paritta protection; protective chant

Pasar malam (Malay) open air night bazaar

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* (essense or energy)

Rojak (Malay) a mixed salad of fruits and vegetables

Sawi a vegetable

Sādhu well done, excellent

Sakka "King of Devas", lord over the celestial beings in *Tavatimsa*

Sāmaṇera novice Buddhist monk preparing to become a bhikkhu

Saṃsāra rounds of birth and death

Sāsana (the Buddha's) teachings or dispensation

Sīmā monastic boundary or territory

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

Sutta discourse

Tavatiṁsa the heaven of the "Thirty-Three" gods

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

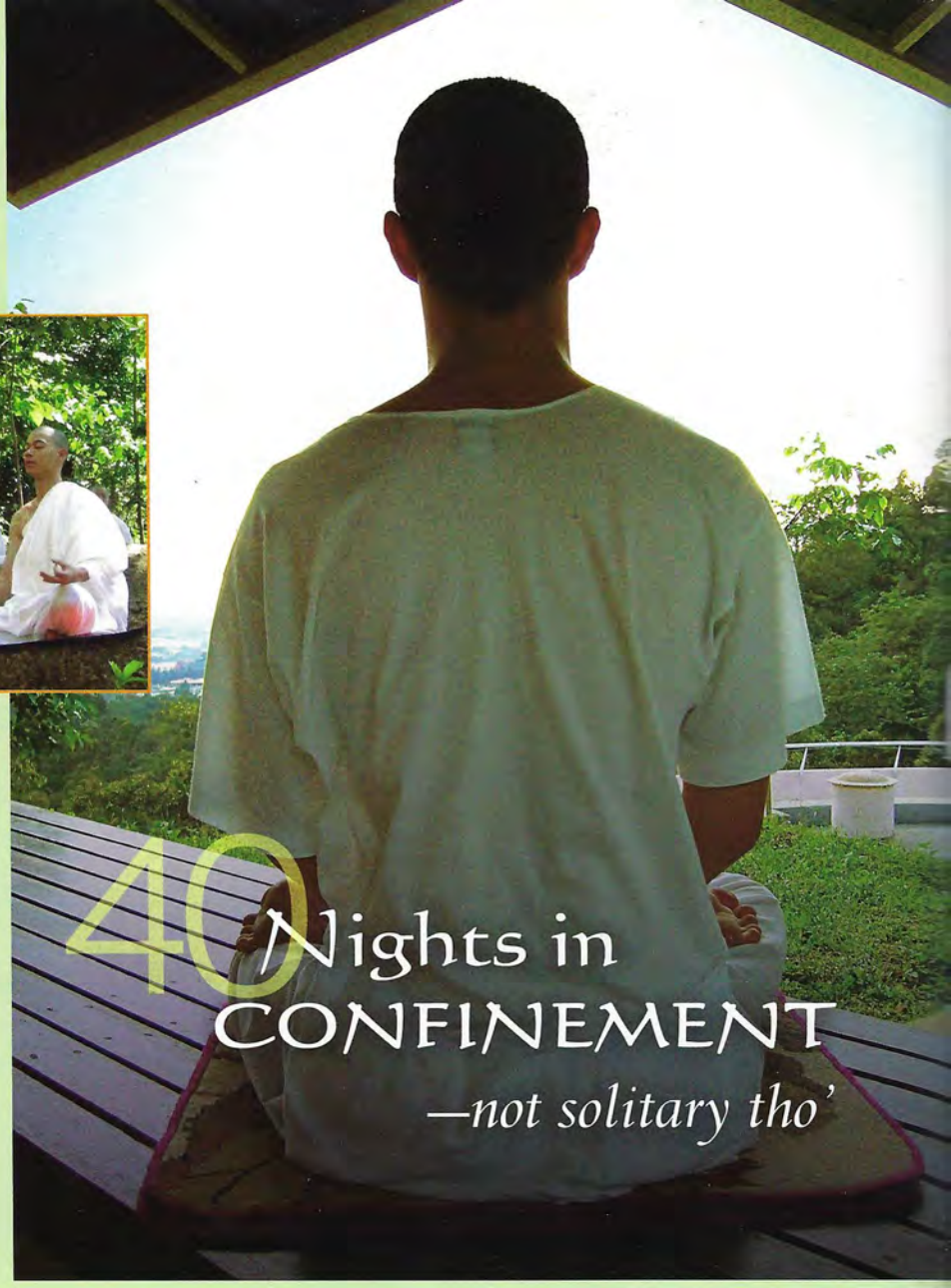
Uposatha Buddhist Sabbath; a day of religious observance and ritual for the laity and the Sangha respectively

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

Vipassanā insight (meditation)

Abbr.	Text	Reference according to
SN	Samyutta Nikaya	Samyutta number:Sutta number
MN	Majjhima Nikaya	Sutta number
AN	Anguttara Nikaya	Book number:(Chapter number.)Sutta number

All references are based on Chattha Sangayana CD-ROM (Version 3.0) published by Vipassana Research Institute, India.



40 Nights in CONFINEMENT —*not solitary tho'*

SIDDHARTHA came to SBS to find himself and leaves with some glimpses of what a Buddhist is.

I was lost and didn't know what to do with my life. It was like I had so many interests without knowing what interests me. All I did was dabble and touch the surface of many things. I got depressed by my uselessness. "If only", I said, "if only I know without a doubt the one thing that I want to do, what I am destined for—my life's calling. Or if there is no such thing as destiny, at least be sure of what I really want." At my dad's suggestion, I went to Bhante Aggacitta. My dad just asked me to see him to say "Hi" or something. Since my mind was still in this state, go I did. I sat in front of Bhante, and he said, "What's up?"

"Can I stay for 40 days here?" Hehehehe... it was to find out what I want to do in life.

So up I went. I felt like I was at a resort, checking in. Later at the *kuṭi* I really felt like I was in a luxurious chalet. Bhante spoke to me that night. "So you are here to find out what you want to do with your life—meditation!" Meditation!—that was the essence of it. Bhante told me that with meditation I will find out what I want to do with my life. I had faith in Bhante. So began my daily sessions of meditation. I was chosen to be the one to wake up at 4.30am to sound the gong at Sima Hall—the call for morning meditation. It was quite ironic for that is usually the time I go to bed.

Meditation. Meditation is about ups and downs, pain and fear, peace and relaxation, sudden insight, sleepiness, anger and everything all jumbled up. Pain and sleepiness seemed to want to be my best friends. At times I would be lazy and not meditate very well, but the daily interview kept me on my toes and pushed me to meditate and find things to tell Bhante.

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