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Sāsanārakkha Newszine

News and views from Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

A forum for interaction within the Malaysian Theravada Sangha—where

SaṅghaSannipāta2006

young monks can learn from veteran monks; where monks discuss issues in Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia; where unity and harmony are forged...

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Being **Present**

Glimpses into... Abhidhamma

What the Buddha **Really Taught**

If the Monkey had Renounced

EDITOR'S THOUGHTS

Truth and Reality

Receiving the many appreciative comments from our readers makes the task of producing each issue of this Newszine much lighter—in the mind. The actual work though, is in reality still a task, with everyone in the team working hard to keep deadlines. Then again, a mind that is light makes the task at hand correspondingly light.

Mind states and the workings of the mind are the themes of some of the articles in this issue—read "Being Present", "Off the Cushion" and "If the Monkey had Renounced".

Still on the subject of appreciative comments, you will find lots of them as you turn the pages. In "Gifts of the Dhamma", Ven Aggacitta gets bouquets of them. "SanghaSannipata", "Our Thoughts on IMP", "What Draws Me to SBS" and "Salt Crystal Sutta Study" also shower SBS with the same.

In case you get the idea that everything is a bed of roses for SBS, you should read "Of Volunteer Workers" and "Fulfilling Plans and Making New Ones." They tell you of the inevitable downs as well as the ups of reality.

What is reality? Ajahn Sujato's "What the Buddha Really Taught" presents us with some questions and answers but still leaves us guessing. Another article along the same theme is "Glimpses" by Rob Moult. Reality is a subject very close to the Abbot's heart. So is truth. He shares with you his thoughts on this in "Coping with Change".

So in this issue there is no lack of articles to set you thinking.

Work the mind if you do not mind the work.

We've got MAIL

✉ Thank you for SBS Newszine #5 and also the Maha Mangala Poster. Sadhu to the SBS News Team.

We rejoice with metta and mudita in the excellent production of this latest issue. Although I have yet to read the whole copy of the newszine and digest the contents, I enjoyed our Most Venerable Abbot's address, "Blessings in Disguise". I rejoiced to read of his improved health condition and the miraculous 99% cure declared by his doctor. Sadhu to all the doctors, all brothers and sisters in Taiping who took care of Abbot and to all the lovely beings who sent him healing energy.

It is truly Abbot's own wisdom that he went for alternative healing therapies. May the blessings of the Triple Gem be with him always.

By the way, the suggestion to convert the exisitng DWQ into a dormitory for lady guests & yogis gets my one vote.

HELEN TOO

I normally forward your mails on SBS news to the rest of my Buddhist friends and I have gained more knowledge and understanding of Buddhism since receiving these mails. Thanks a lot with lots and lots of metta.

LIM GUAT MOOI

✉ Thank you very much for your issues of "Unfoldments". They are fantastic for keeping all Buddhists speedily up to date with the happenings at our only Theravada monks' training centre.

TAN JOO LAN

✉ I recently read two SBS newszines and am deeply impressed with what you are all doing under the guidance of your revered spiritual leader Ven Aggacitta. Your website is terribly interesting and vibrant and I know it is a reflection of SBS. Much thought and thoughtfulness has gone into the setting up and running of SBS. I see the guiding hand of Ven Aggacitta in these endeavours and I am deeply moved. Please let me know how I can subscribe to the Newszine and how to make a donation from Singapore. Please send my respects and warm wishes to Ven Aggacitta, if possible. As a former school friend he is always in my thoughts. I do wish to meet him again one day soon.

KHOR KOK WAH

✉ First of all we wish to thank all the members of SBS for the time and effort in giving us an opportunity to have an insight into the activities of SBS. Malaysians are really fortunate to have a beautiful place like this and I hope in the next few years to come there will be many more devotees coming for long retreats, especially the younger breed of graduates. Thank you for arranging for our upcoming trip on 10 May. I shall keep you informed if there is any change in plans. Meanwhile we look forward to doing what we can to promote awareness of SBS.

KARUNACITTA

Editor's note: *Karunacitta Wong is SBS's representative for the Butterworth area.*

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abbot's address

Coping with Change

In mid-February, I received a request from Ven Santidhamma of Santi Forest Monastery, Bundanoon, Australia, to vet his thought-provoking draft scrutinising vinaya interpretations and practices among contemporary Sangha members who are supposedly conscientious. This became the subject of many evenings of debate and discussion among the Sangha here, thus sharpening our skills in scrutinising available translations and interpretations of the *vinaya* and checking them against the Pali original. As we deepened our comprehension of the spirit and letter of the vinaya rules, we had to change our practice of them in the light of our updated understanding. This may sound like a simple statement in writing, but making a decision to change a well-established tradition that is not in accordance with the Pali Canon involves a whole network of considerations from various perspectives. The process is too technical and legalistic for me to explain in this short address. Nevertheless, we found the exercise extremely challenging and rewarding.

Change or impermanence is a central theme in the Buddha's teachings. All Buddhists would certainly agree when this is applied to conditioned phenomena or formations (*saṅkhārā*); but can it also apply to his teachings as well? Students and scholars of comparative Buddhism will not hesitate to say "Yes". Yet staunch Theravadins or Pure Land Buddhists would insist that their views and interpretations of the Buddha's teachings are complete and correct while others would insist to the contrary, a situation that was already prevalent during the Buddha's time. Teachers and leaders are invested with the power to influence others, but that same power can backfire and scorch them if what they teach is based on wrong information, misinterpretation and egocentric views.

Being a centre dedicated to monk-training, SBS is very wary of this occupational hazard. Therefore engagements to give Dhamma talks and conduct Dhamma discussions force us to seriously research the *suttas* so that we do not end up misleading others by putting words into the Buddha's mouth. In the course of our research, we have made discoveries (and will certainly be making more) that can be rather disconcerting to Theravadin stalwarts. An inkling of this can be inferred from this exaggerated comment by eminent scholar David Kalupahana: "There is not one word in the Pali Nikayas that represents ideas peculiar to the Theravada school." To put it more mildly, current Theravada understanding of the Buddha's teachings, which are largely based on the commentaries and the oral tradition of various lineages of teachers, is not very reliable because it contradicts the Nikayas in many instances. In this issue of Sasanarakkha, I have added a new section, "Closer to Truth", where two respected teachers of the Theravada school contribute their learned and objective views on this matter (see p34 and p40). I hope that these two articles will serve as an eye-opener for Theravadins and a shock-absorber for future revelations.

During IMP6 the participants were introduced to the practice of the four guardian meditations: *Buddhānussati, mettā, asubha* and *maraṇassati*; besides formal and informal *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation. Following IMP6, we had our first IMPians' meditation retreat where the yogis focussed more on satipatthana practice. Throughout my talks on practice I stressed the importance of the gradual training (*anupubbasikkhā*)—a sort of default template used by the Buddha to train his monks in living the holy life (*brahmacariya*)—where Dhamma practice is not confined to just formal sitting meditation but pervades the daily life of a monk in a holistic way. Nonetheless, I also encouraged Ven Thitavijjo, a visiting monk who was trained in the Mahasi technique for several years, to attend a Goenka *vipassanā* retreat in mid-June in Ipoh for a change, knowing very well that the retreat was run in an "intensive" manner quite distinct from the scheme of the gradual training. After the retreat he remarked that he was doing pretty well with *ānāpānassati* for the first few days until he was continually attacked by conceit and indignation when he heard Goenkaji classifying physical sensations as *vedanā* (feelings) and asserting that the technique is the original one that brought the *bodhisatta* to full enlightenment (*sammāsambodhi*). His final word: every knowledgeable monk should attend the retreat to learn how to effectively deal with his conceit (and pet views—I would like to add)!

While I was in Buddhist Wisdom Centre, PJ during the Chinese New Year period, I conducted an impromptu sutta study-cum-discussion session for the laity. Again in mid-June, Ven Kumara and I conducted another session in Mettananda Vihara, Penang. Both sessions

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http://sasanarakkha.org/dhamma/

Dhamma Talks **Jan-June 2006** delivered in and around Taiping, Perak

Topic/Speaker/Date	Synopsis
Merits and Precepts Ven Kumara, 1 Jan	Build up your store of merits to counter your demerits
Sangahavatthu Ven Aggacitta, 7 Jan	Conditions for a person to be truly well-liked and supported by others
Assorted Fruits of *Dāna* Ven Balacitta, 14 Jan	Dana that is given to different beings reaps different merits depending on the virtue of the recipient
Spring-cleaning the Mind Ven Kumara, 21 Jan	Just as we do spring cleaning to prepare for a new year, we need to do regular mental clean-ups
Dog Tales for the Year of the Dog Ven Aggacitta, Ven Kumara, Ven Balacitta, 29 Jan	Tales about dogs from the *suttas* and *jataka*, each with a moral lesson
Mangala Sutta *(Cont.)*Ven Balacitta, 4 Feb	To abstain from evil; to abstain from intoxicants; to be non-negligent in meritorious acts
Is Everything the Result of Past Kamma? Ven Kumara, 11 Feb	Past kamma is not the only cause of our experiences
Honouring the Departed Ven Aggacitta, 18 Feb	Inviting departed relatives for dana and sharing merits with them is the best way of honouring them
If the Monkey had Renounced Ven Thitavijjo, 25 Feb	The practice of renunciation of material wealth, bad habits and mental defilements—*dana*, *sila* and *bhavana*
Even King Sakka Respects the Virtuous Layperson Ven Aggacitta, 4 Mar	A virtuous layperson is respected by all and is ensured of rebirth in higher realms
Letting Go Ven Kumara, 11 Mar	When a loved one dies, we should reflect on the law of impermanence
The Reality of Birth and Death Ven Thitavijjo, 18 Mar	Strip away delusions, superstitions and wrong views of birth and death and what do we see?
What is an *Arahant*? Ven Balacitta, 25 Mar	The qualities of one who has reached the fourth stage of enlightenment
Offerings to the Departed Ven Kumara, 1 Apr	Is it beneficial to make food offerings to the departed?
Ultimate Filial Piety Ven Thitavijjo, 8 Apr	Instilling and nurturing in one's parents the wisdom of *anatta*, *anicca* and *dukkha* is the ultimate in filial piety
Mangala Sutta *(Cont.)*Ven Balacitta, 15 Apr	The blessings of respect, humility, contentment and gratitude. Suitable occasions for listening to the Dhamma
Breakups are Deliberate Sayadaw U Tejinda, 29 Apr	Cultivate virtues that prevent breakups and foster harmony and togetherness even into future lives
Five Benefits of Listening to the Dhamma Ven Kumara, 6 May	Learn new things, clarify knowledge, abolish doubt, correct false views, obtain inner peace
Significance of Wesak Ven Aggacitta & Kumara, 12 May	Remembering the birth, enlightenment and *parinibbāna* of the Buddha
The Happiness Beyond the Senses Ven Thitavijjo, 20 May	True happiness can only be realised when one truly understands the drawbacks of sensual gratification
Mangala Sutta *(Cont.)*Ven Balacitta, 27 May	The blessings of patience, receptivity, meeting renunciants and timely discussions on the Dhamma
Compensating Our Parents Ven Aggacitta, 10 June	How we can repay our debt to our parents
Mangala Sutta *(Cont.)*Ven Balacitta, 24 June	The blessings of self-control, the holy life, seeing the noble truths and realisation of *nibbana*

Read this on p5

Read this on p10

We intend to publish edited transcriptions of some of the talks listed above on our website <http://www.sasanarakkha.org/dhamma> when they are ready. If you wish to receive them by email, subscribe to the SBSmail egroup by sending a blank mail to sbsmail-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Read this on page

If the Monkey had Renounced

VEN THITAVIJJO on his second visit to SBS, spent about five months in SBS and gave a number of Dhamma talks. In this talk he tells how lay people can also 'renounce'

Life is uncertain. My life as a monk is a good example of this. I had intended to be a temporary monk for a period of only three months but now, twenty months later, I tell my parents that I still want to continue being a temporary monk. I do not know when I will disrobe—maybe five years, ten years or fifteen years from now; maybe tomorrow or maybe never. For the moment, I am keeping my options open.

So life is indeed uncertain. Death, however, is certain. I have two friends from my college days in Canada who got married and had a daughter when they returned to Malaysia. We kept in touch. Shortly after I was ordained as a monk, I received news that the husband had died in a car accident somewhere near Taiping. He was only in his early thirties. In mid 2005 another friend of mine, an Indonesian Chinese 35 years of age, died in a plane crash over Medan, Indonesia. He left behind a wife and a few children.

Although death is certain, there are however, a few things about death that are uncertain—how, where and when it will happen. We do not know how, where and when we are going to die. When death comes, it can be so sudden that if we are not prepared, we will get a shock! There is a saying—"Even if a man sees everybody dying one by one around him, he will still not believe that one day he himself will die." I believe that this is true for many of us.

Life is actually very short. A healthy man with proper nutrition and good *kamma* can probably live for only about 80 to 90 years. When the Buddha was instructing the monks on the practice of mindfulness of death, he said that one should treat death as having

occurred 'as long as one breathes in and does not breathe out; as long as one breathes out and does not breathe in.' In another *sutta*, the Buddha told the monks to reflect on the fact that death can come at any time; they could be stung by deadly snakes or scorpions, stumble and fall with fatal consequences, die from severe illness or be poisoned by the food they consume. While reflecting thus, a monk should examine within himself whether he has any unwholesome qualities left in his mind. If he has, he should apply the most earnest effort to rid himself of them—just like a man whose turban and hair are on fire would try as quickly as he can to put it out. The Buddha thus encourages all of us to practise diligently before death strikes. (AN VIII, 73, 74)

THE FIVE CONTEMPLATIONS

Many people are heedless of the reality of death. Therefore their whole life is spent chasing their sense pleasures. On one occasion (AN V, 57), the Buddha encouraged everyone to take up the five types of contemplation:-

- I am sure to become old. I cannot avoid old age.
- I am sure to become ill. I cannot avoid illness.
- I am sure to die. I cannot avoid death.
- I must be separated from all that is dear to me.
- I am the owner of my actions. Whatever actions I do, whether good or bad, of these I shall become the heir.

The first three contemplations are antidotes to the three-fold pride of youth, health and life. They remind us that at every second, we age and move closer towards death. Death is like a slaughterhouse, and we are the sacrificial animals being pulled by the nose ever closer to it. When a person is infatuated by this three-fold pride, he is prone to commit evil acts, be it in thought, speech or action. On the other hand, one who frequently reflects on the first three contemplations will be able to gradually weaken the grip that his pride has on him.

Human beings usually have lustful desires for all that is dear to them. In an effort to cling on to these things, they commit evil in thought, speech and action. However, if one frequently reflects on the fourth contemplation, one will be able to weaken or banish this lust and desire more easily.

Do you know how people catch monkeys using a coconut shell? A slit just wide enough for a monkey's hand to go through is made in a coconut, the juice is emptied and the coconut is refilled with delicious food. The coconut is then tied to a tree. The greedy monkey soon inserts its hand into the coconut to try and grab the food. When it hears the hunter coming, it will frantically try to remove its clenched food-filled fist from the coconut but invariably it will fail and be caught. What ties the monkey down? It is trapped by its attachment to the food. It is only the very rare monkey (one with a monkey's body but not a monkey's mind!) who will be wise enough to let go of the food and make good its escape. If there is such a rare and wise monkey, do you think there is any other monkey (being blessed enough to be able to observe the wise monkey escape from the coconut) who will emulate the wise monkey's behaviour and thus free itself as well? Maybe it will. However it will need to see this happening many times before it can comprehend the cause and effect relationship in such behaviour. Until then, it will proceed to be snared by its own desire.

The fifth contemplation helps us to understand that if we

know we are responsible for our own actions because of the law of kamma, we will be more inclined to act in a responsible manner, to do good and avoid evil.

When one practises and vigilantly reflects on these five types of contemplation, they become powerful tools which we can use to ensure that we walk steadfastly on the noble eightfold path. Do not take these five contemplations lightly. In fact, the Buddha taught that for one who contemplates these five facts regularly, the path arises. He then cultivates and develops the path which ultimately leads to the removal of all defilements, resulting in liberation. If all of us here can reflect on them every morning when we wake and every night before we sleep, it will surely help us in our practice.

My talk so far appears to show Buddhism as a pessimistic, fatalistic and gloomy religion. I will not be doing a good job if I let you leave with such an impression.

Nothing binds the monkey except its own desires. It is important to recognise that the food, however delicious, is inanimate and has no ability to trap the monkey. In our daily life we normally blame others for our own dissatisfaction or unhappiness.

In reality, Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor gloomy. To understand this, let us look at the four noble truths.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

After gaining Enlightenment, the Buddha expounded the four noble truths, initially to the five ascetics. Subsequently many of his discourses over the next 45 years can be traced back to it.

The first noble truth is *dukkha*. (This is probably the first Pali word I came across when I started learning Buddhism about four years ago.) Its common English translation is 'suffering'. In fact dukkha encompasses a deeper meaning of 'stress', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'insubstantiality', and 'changing all the time'.

The Buddha continued to define dukkha by telling the monks, "Birth, old age, illness and death is dukkha". It is significant to understand that even birth is dukkha because when there is birth, there is death as well. There is no escape from this reality. The King of Kosala once asked the Buddha, "Lord Gotama, for one who has taken birth, is there anything to expect besides aging and death?" The Buddha replied, "For one who has taken birth, there is nothing to expect other than aging and death, even amongst the most powerful or rich. Even an *arahant* cannot escape decay and finally the breaking up of the body." (SN 3:3)

The Buddha said that "sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are dukkha. To be together with one whom we dislike is dukkha; to be separated from one dear to us is dukkha; not being able to get what we desire is dukkha. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha." (SN 56:11) Our being can be broken into the five aggregates: form (body), feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. The last four make up the mind. So what we call a human being is essentially: the five aggregates, the body and the mind. The five aggregates are constantly changing and fluctuating. They are all impermanent. What is impermanent is dukkha. Thus the Buddha said that the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha. Owing to limited time in this talk I will not go further to explain the five aggregates in detail but they are crucial for the understanding of the philosophical side of the first noble truth. I strongly suggest you take on the practice of meditation because it will aid your understanding. You will directly experience the meaning of the statement "the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha".

The Buddha then expounded the second noble truth—the origin of dukkha which is craving and attachment to things. Remember the monkey? For example, when there is contact of our eyes (or our other senses) with the object of our desire, greed arises. If you look at something with great intent and wanting, it is not a good feeling—there is tension, unease and a constriction of the heart. Our instinct is to get rid of this feeling of discomfort. From a young age, we have been told that the only one way to remove this feeling of discomfort is to satisfy our desires. So we try to obtain the object, sometimes with ease, sometimes with a lot of money, time and effort. Then the feeling of discomfort is removed momentarily. But at other times when we fail to obtain the object, in other words, when our desires cannot be satisfied, anger and disappointment follow. The unfortunate reality is that, even if our desire is satisfied, the feeling of satisfaction lasts for a short while until our senses meet with another pleasant object and the cycle starts all over again. Our life thus becomes a series of continuous chasing of one desire after another.

The Buddha then taught us the third noble truth—the cessation of dukkha. It is the "remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on

it." (SN 56:11) This is a state of perfect peace, *nibbāna*. It is the cessation of birth, aging, illness and death; of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. With the cessation of dukkha at the culmination of the practice of the path, greed, hatred and delusion will be eliminated and we will be liberated from the beginningless cycles of life and death, *saṁsāra*.

This was followed by the fourth noble truth—the path leading out of this cycle of dukkha. Fortunately for us, the Buddha was an extraordinary human being who arrived in the world 2,500 years ago and taught us the method to escape from dukkha—the noble eightfold path. As a result, many who diligently practised his teachings became enlightened like him. The poor monkey did not have any wise monkey to show him the way. But we human beings who are blessed enough to encounter Buddhism in this life know that the Buddha and his many disciples have successfully escaped dukkha and attained the supreme happiness using the same method. There is no excuse for us. Spiritually, we have the potential to be very rich.

This is the nature of our existence. Some people take the first noble truth in isolation and condemn Buddhism as pessimistic. However, the four noble truths should be looked at, studied and understood in its entirety. Then you will realise that Buddhism is not a pessimistic religion. On the contrary, it is realistic, encouraging and uplifting. Nothing binds the monkey except its own desires. It is important to recognise that the food, however delicious, is inanimate and has no ability to trap the monkey. In our daily life we normally blame others for our own dissatisfaction or unhappiness. If we want to there are actually an infinite number of things that we can blame on others. There is no end to it; we will only reap weariness. However, the Buddha taught us that the problem is internal in us, not external. These are the mental defilements which are deep-seated in us but directly accessible to us—inside our minds. Because of this, it is very promising; this is something we can solve by ourselves if only we are courageous enough to walk the path. We do not have to depend on others.

DĀNA, SĪLA AND BHĀVANĀ

When we walk along the noble eightfold path, we are basically cultivating dana, sila and bhavana.

Dana is the physical act of giving. The more we give, the less greedy we become. The mental factor of generosity and happiness is cultivated in us, making it easier for us to walk the path. The people of Taiping are very generous. I have been here for three weeks and always, the food I have received is very good and nutritious.

Sila is morality. There are different levels of morality. For the lay person, the Buddha prescribed the five precepts. Each of the precepts is introduced from its negative aspect, i.e. one refrains from doing this and that. However, this is actually the first step towards the cultivation of good because we have to remove unwholesomeness before we can start moving towards wholesomeness. We cultivate a mind of loving kindness when we do not kill. We cultivate generosity when we do not steal. These are the positive aspects of the precepts. The five precepts is also a greater level of dana because a person who constantly conducts his life ethically is actually giving all beings in the world no fear as he does not do anything to harm anyone.

To deepen our practice, we need to develop and cultivate our mind—bhavana. Here in Taiping we are fortunate that we have the guidance of Ven Aggacitta. He has many methods to help us in this and therefore, we

should not miss the opportunity to develop ourselves. So do come for the regular Saturday night meditation sessions.

When we practise more and more, our mental defilements are slowly suppressed and eventually eliminated. Then we will become enlightened beings. The cultivation of dana, sila and bhavana are linked by the common theme of renunciation. The training is, in effect, the renunciation of our physical properties, bad habits and mental defilements. Many people are scared when they hear the word 'renounce'. This is actually the key to happiness.

RENOUNCING DESIRES

Many people including my parents have asked me my reason for being a monk. There are many reasons why I became a monk but why I continue to remain a monk is because I can truly see the benefits of renunciation. Let me help you to see the benefits of renunciation. Imagine each of us has a bottle—we will call it the bottle of desire. I am sure each of you here has some sort of goal, wish or desire—be it a promotion, a holiday, a BMW, or a five-bedroom house. When our desire is fulfilled, then the bottle of desire is also full. We always believe that when this bottle is filled up, i.e. when we achieve our goal, we can then be truly happy. But the reality is, whenever the bottle of desire is filled up, the bottle automatically increases in size. It becomes a much bigger bottle. Then we have to strive harder to fill up this bigger bottle, thinking once again that when it is filled up, we can be happy. This cycle continues, with us believing that with the next achievement we will be happy. However, we can never be.

When I was a layman working in London, my life was spent chasing this and that. The desire I had at each stage of my life then was like the bottle. As soon as I achieved the promotion that I worked with great effort for, I wanted a bigger promotion. When I had a good car, I wanted a bigger and faster car. I had to struggle to put in even greater effort to fill up the ever-growing bottle of desire. Desire, by nature is unlimited and never ending. Trying to satisfy our desires is like drinking seawater. The more you drink, the thirstier you get.

Then I had the chance to be ordained and I suddenly realised that there is a way to keep the bottle of desire from growing. As you know, monks need only four things—our robes, food, shelter and the occasional medicine. With the support of these four requisites, we try to practise the Buddha's path. With this, we can manage the bottle of desire. In fact, the bottle of desire is no longer desire as such but just a basic need. Our desires can get out of control but our needs are easily satisfied. When the bottle of desire is kept so small and so easy to fill up, we are complete and we can feel contented once it is filled up. We have peace and happiness. That is why I still want to be a temporary monk. If the monkey knew how to renounce, it would not have been trapped.

The practice of letting go is not easy. If you do not practise mental cultivation, it is almost impossible because we need to be able to watch desire as it arises. Meditation gears up our mental energy to enable us to do this. When you have mastered the first step of 'seeing' or awareness of the desire arising, then you have a choice. The choice is either to satisfy your desire, or to let go of your desire. From a young age, we have been practising the first choice, which does not bring lasting happiness. Now we need to learn to practise the second choice—letting go. It is not in our human nature to let go but it is behaviour that can be learned and mastered. The more you practise, the finer your skill will become. Finally, letting go could become your second nature. Only then, will you have true freedom. The freedom of desire is not freedom at all but the freedom from desire truly is.

One becomes happier. One smiles more. All the monks in SBS smile a lot, as you can see! I hope that everyone can take up the practice which is essential for true happiness. You are blessed to be in Taiping where there are great teachers who can show you the way. The rest is up to each individual to strive on.

Buddhism therefore, is not pessimistic. It is, in fact, very encouraging and optimistic because it gives us the way to live life with true freedom and happiness. Do not forget the five types of contemplation. Whenever you are not mindful, or unsettled or bothered by something, remember that all of us are sure to die one day. With death in sight, whatever that is bothering us will surely not matter so much any more. Just let go and go back to practice. Let the monkey in each of you renounce.

ARE DELIBERATE

SAYADAW U TEJINDA

of Shwe Oo Min Dhammasukha Tawya, Yangon was here for a brief visit in April. He gave this talk in Burmese which was translated on the spot by Ven Aggacitta.

This is a story taken from Pathamasamajivi Sutta (AN 4.55), about a loving couple, Nakulamata and Nakulapita. In Pali the names mean, "Nakula's mother" and "Nakula's father".

Nakulapita once approached the Buddha, saying that he loved his wife very much and did not wish their relationship to break up even in their future lives. This is the wish of every one of us who loves someone dearly, whether a spouse, children, parents, friends or a soul mate.

The Buddha told Nakulapita that this would be possible if both of them had attained the same level of development in the following four qualities:

- *Saddhā* —faith
- *Cāga*—generosity
- *Sīla*—morality
- *Paññā*—wisdom

If so, in this and in future lives, both will be together. Such a family will live in happiness and contentment.

My Malaysian Experience

By Sayadaw U Tejinda

I had a wish to come Malaysia ever since meeting Ven Aggacitta in Myanmar in 2004. I felt respect for and an affinity with him, and wished to meet him again in SBS. Since Malaysia is a Muslim country, I did not expect to see much Buddhist activities: just as when one is in a desert, one does not expect to come across a lake. However, I have found such a lake here—many people practising the Dhamma.

There is a Burmese saying: "If you know to eat, you will be full." This does not mean you will become fat like me! What it means is: if you know how to choose and eat suitable, nutritious food, you will become full in a healthful way. It is obvious to me that you know to choose your food wisely. Why do I say this? It is not just because you have offered delicious food. It is because you have offered wholesome and nutritious food with the utmost respect to the monastics. How do you know to do this? It is because the monks in SBS have imparted the Dhamma to you which you are now practising—a very praiseworthy situation indeed.

All of you know how to choose your food wisely—and you have obtained good nutrition. So when monks offer you the nutritious food of Dhamma, take it and digest it.

To conclude, I would like to share with you verse #204 from the Dhammapada:

Good health is the highest gain

With the food of the Dhamma, I hope you will grow strong and healthy.

Contentment is the greatest wealth

Be content with what you have and you will be happy. Where there is greed, replace it with generosity; hatred with *mettā*; ignorance of the Dhamma with wisdom. Practising thus, you will eradicate greed, anger and delusion.

Trustworthy ones are the best kinsmen

Value intimate relationship with the wise, whether friends or family. They can teach us the Dhamma; to cultivate *dāna*, sila and *bhāvanā*.

***Nibbana* is the highest blessing**

All of us here, including me, are not enlightened, so it is difficult to understand nibbana. However, if we find ourselves experiencing mental discomfort possibly from the boredom of listening to a long talk, or physical discomfort from sitting too long, we should realise that it is just mind and matter. Nibbana is transcending such mind and matter issues, leading to the end of suffering. I hope all of you can achieve this supreme blessing.

In this world, in our interaction with others, there is bound to be dissent and conflict, especially if our mind is not refined but clouded and convoluted. This will occur not only among acquaintances but even among members of a family, such as between husband and wife, parents and children, kith and kin. However, if we really love our family and wish to be with them always, all the members must cultivate these four qualities. Even if the others do not strive to maintain them, on our part we should start the ball rolling to serve as an example in the hope that they will see and follow suit. Wise people do not compare themselves with those who are lower in sila but rather with those of higher morality because by doing so, they will keep on improving.

Even among members of the Buddhist community, there exist individual quirks and foibles. As such, it is necessary to learn to compromise, forgive and forget. We must understand we have our own way of thinking. Mindfulness should be ever present to enable us to watch our state of mind and alert us when conflict arises. In so doing, the Buddhist community will remain united. This is emotional and mental **caga**. It is also beneficial for us to practise right speech when conversing with another—for words once uttered, can never be retracted. This is **sila** of speech.

In the event of conflict, there is inequality in the four qualities of the parties involved. It is very common and convenient to blame the other party but it is far better to look within oneself for the reason. If one is mindful, then one will see the fault in oneself. Then, as we improve on our insufficiencies, conflicts will no longer arise in the future. Just imagine, if all of us practise this, there will be no more conflict! This is a subtle worldly result of meditative **paññā**. A contemplative person will apply this technique of constant awareness in his daily activities.

So, we can see that if one does not endeavour to develop the four qualities conducive to togetherness, then that is tantamount to deliberately causing a breakup.

What Draws Me to SBS

VEN U DHAMMANANDA makes his second visit to SBS and looks forward to his third. What is the pull here for this westerner monk?

In February 2003, at the age of 45 I discovered the Buddha *sāsana* in Thailand by sheer luck, not in books but within a meditation setting. The first 24 days of intensive *vipassanā* retreat, in Wat Chom Thong (70 km West of Chiang Mai) with Edward from Canada as my 'firm but gently smiling and always encouraging' meditation instructor, was an encounter that changed my paradigm of meditation.

At that time I didn't know anything about the Buddha's teachings of two realities, five *khandhas*, progress of insight, *kusala* & *akusala*, *indriyas*, *nīvaraṇas*, *samatha* & *vipassanā*, *jhānas*, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, etc.; and *nibbāna* was nothing more than a myth from ancient times. The experiences I had, without doubt opened to me a solid ground of teachings that is clear, practical, deep, direct and complete—something I have not found in any spiritual path I have been involved in around the world for the last 30 years.

Traditionally we always read and study, then intentionally apply and practise. But with the practice of vipassana, I was studying it, not second-hand through concepts and words, but through first hand observation, investigation and knowing that comes from practice and experience. Instead of studying big fat books, manuals, written instructions and then applying the acquired knowledge in the practice, the process of the practice was the study. That was most important for me—it is still mind-blowing even now after three years of attending many intensive retreats.

REVIEWING MY FIRST VISIT

At the end of 2004, after numerous intensive retreats, I felt I needed to temporarily test-experience for three months, the life of a Theravāda Buddhist monk. After my ordination in SJBA in KL with Sayādaw U Indaka from the Mahāsī-Chanmyay Sayādaw lineage, under the name of U Dhammananda, I was directed by Sayādaw U Thuzana of MBMC to go and take *nissāya* (teaching dependency) with Bhante Aggacitta at SBS.

What luck again! It spared me years of searching, to look for and live with a monk who is influencing the creation of a Sangha-laity climate that blends friendship, enthusiasm, quiet and warm empathy. All this is achieved with a smile, availability and concern. Combining this with deep and thorough practical and scriptural knowledge and and—Bhante, with a gentle but firm hand guides the young monks for their benefit and growth in the study of DhammaVinaya, such as the gradual training, *pātimokkha* study, recitations and meditation. He is proficient in Pali and Burmese, and has some knowledge of Thai, all acquired during his training as a Theravada

Every day for about one and a half hours, we six monks gathered to discuss issues brought up in the draft copy and thoroughly look at the vinaya as it is observed now through the eyes of monks not born in countries with a traditional Buddhist culture.

monk through 25 years of practice in South East Asia. (Read the article "Was it a month... a year... or years?" in the July 2005 issue.)

HOMECOMING

In August 2005, I was ordained under Chanmyay Sayādaw in Burma to become a monk permanently. After five months of intensive meditation split between Chanmyay Yeiktha and Paṇḍitārāma forest meditation centre, I came to spend about two weeks in SBS. It felt like a homecoming, being with the Bhante, the Abbot, the rest of the resident Sangha and the visiting Bhante Varadhammo and Bhante Thitavijjo, evoking warm memories of last year's stay.

Critical Study

Bhante invited me to participate in the study and discussion of a draft copy of a critique on the current practices of vinaya entitled "Seeking the Roots". It was written by an Australian monk who sent it to him for review and suggestions. Every day for about one and a half hours, we six monks gathered to discuss issues brought up in the draft copy and thoroughly look at the vinaya as it is observed now through the eyes of monks not born in countries with a traditional Buddhist culture. Can we practise the vinaya according to the early Buddhist teachings as found in the Pali Canon without the cultural overlays of Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka?

Personal Investigation

In my meditative experience I never found any culture—rather, freedom from it. Vipassana meditation is about intent, careful observation of any mental and physical phenomena with their specific and common characteristics as they occur in the present moment and seeing their transient, unstable, oppressive and impersonal nature. That experience eradicates specific unwholesome elements that are now part of our human makeup and living experience. Buddha points out that these elements are the cause of human suffering. Their eradication is freedom from suffering—nibbana. The Buddha said...

> *Aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppādavayadhammino;*
> *uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho*
> Transient are all conditioned things. To rise, to fall, their nature is.
> Having become, they pass away. Their cessation is bliss.

Is that all verifiable or is it a sweet promise found only in the books? How glad I am to discover a teaching that encourages personal investigation and does not blindly exhort its followers to comply with the authority of the spiritual leaders or tradition.

But do I investigate myself (the five khandhas) in meditation or through study or both? Can purification of mind, temporary or permanent, take place through the study of books or listening to Dhamma talks?

This is the spirit in which Bhante lives and which he encourages in monks and devotees. I had such experiencing and observing with him—to come, study, work, investigate, discuss, discover, experience, meditate and see for oneself.

Foundational Training

Every one of us is an owner in this life of one thing only—one's own *kamma*, the accumulated result and residue of activities acquired through living in this and countless previous lives. For myself, I see that six to seven months of intensive vipassana meditation in Burma, followed by five to six months of integrated spiritual living and DhammaVinaya study as Bhante is teaching it, is the complete foundational training for a young monk like myself.

LOOKING FORWARD TO MY NEXT VISIT

A few days after I left SBS, I met Chanmyay Sayādaw in Bangkok for three weeks of meditation. When I requested to go, after the retreat, to SBS in Malaysia for three to four months of study with Bhante Aggacitta, he leaned towards me and with deep concern in his voice asked me, "How is his health? I've heard he had problems with it?"

I exclaimed, "Sayādaw phayar, he has miraculously recovered and he is healthier, stronger and more energetic than ever!"

"Good!!" Sayādaw sighed with relief. "Yes, it will be all right for you to go there for three to four months and then come back to Yangon for the *vassa*."

THE SBS SPIRIT

Bhante is well known and esteemed—and with good reason. He is very honest and earnest; stricter with himself than with others and never stops learning. You could say he walks his talk. That is integrity for me. He provides psychological space for monks and laity to find out for themselves while gently, softly guiding them to discover for themselves the relevant understanding of their present concerns. And I can see that spirit in the rest of the members of the SBS Sangha. If he discovers he has been in error of some minor rules, he corrects himself and adopts the new understanding and living after thorough cross-reference research in the scriptures. For example, the issue of monks going on vehicles was mentioned by Buddha as a wrongdoing. When Bhante discovered that, he stopped the monks' use of vehicles on SBS grounds, although it causes them inconvenience.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

The interaction within the Sangha is always meaningful, honest, joyful and supportive, creating closeness in an atmosphere of a small Sangha family. With his proficiency in Pāli recitations as well as his knowledge of the DhammaVinaya, Bhante Kumara helped us with pati-mokkha, *sutta* study and recitations. But his openness in continuous learning in a large spectrum of interests is like Bhante Aggacitta's—simply remarkable for me. He and Bhante Balacitta are wonderful at making visitors and devotees feel comfortable as good Dhamma friends, with whom one can have productive time. In the SBS Sangha there is a safe, friendly and respectful environment within which to share, and explore one's views and ways of thinking; reflect on daily activities through the "eyes of sīla"; receive from and give feedback to other monks. Bhante Aggacitta's magnetism is felt within the Sangha and laity.

EXPERIENCE, LEARN, GROW

There are so many things I have discovered in SBS that are truly beneficial for me but this article does not provide enough space. Even temporary visits are truly of great value for my practice. I am glad Bhante does not mind my coming and staying in order to synchronise, so to say, my understanding and practice. I hope many Malaysian as well

as foreign monks can come to SBS to stay, experience, learn and grow.

Lastly, I would like to encourage everyone who is visiting SBS to go to the sima pond, and lying face down on the bridge towards the hill, dip deep one's empty right hand into the water. The golden fishes in the pond do not have any teeth (so you will be safe); let them touch or kiss your hand in gratitude and communicate their affection to you. You will experience that part of Bhante's family too. After a few minutes you can feed them by offering food into their mouths, holding it between your thumb and index finger while with your middle and ring fingers you can pet them beneath their throats one fish at a time. They are like pets. Enjoy the interaction! The fishes are sentient beings that have feelings, some degree of individuality and, I was surprised to find out, lots of affection and joy too. These feelings arise not only because of the food but from the sympathetic attention they receive from interaction through our hands. Test it for yourself! This is a very unique experience I have never had.

Thank you, SBS, Bhante Aggacitta, Bhantes Kumara, Balacitta, Varadhammo, Thitavijjo, and everyone I met and interacted with, for your support that made my stay a wonderful and beneficial experience.

May Sangha and laity be always well, peaceful, harmonious, happy. May they be lights to themselves and each other!!!

Till next time, with gratitude and *mettā*,
U Dhammananda

SASANARAKKHA BUDDHIST SANCTUARY

KATHINA

sunday 22 oct 2006

Experience 2500 years of Theravada Buddhist tradition at the edge of the forest.
Let us come together once again in a united show of support for our Sangha.

AM	7.00	Offering *kathina* cloth to Sangha
	7.10	Speech by kathina sponsor
	7.20	Awarding kathina cloth to qualified *bhikkhu*
	7.30	Speech by Guest of Honour
	7.40	Sewing kathina robe (monks only) Breakfast for devotees
	8.30	Baba Nyonya Live Comedy cum Chanting by Seck Kia Eenh
	9.30	Offering kathina accessories
	9.45	Collecting *piṇḍapāta*
	11.00	Dhamma talk
	11.45	Lunch
PM	1.00	Break
	2.00	Continue sewing kathina robe (monks only)
	4.00	Refreshment break
	4.30	Continue sewing kathina robe (monks only)
	7.00	Spreading kathina

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

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

The Kathina Ceremony Organising Committee will be most happy to:

- provide you lunch on this day
- facilitate your hotel booking if you so require (please confirm by 31 Aug 2006)

Schedule for 4WD transport:
4.30am-9.30am & 1.00pm-3.30pm

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

Organised by SBS Management Committee and sponsored by Taiping Dana Group

Being PRESENT

The past is dead and gone; tomorrow may never come; *the* present is our reality. VEN AGGACITTA tells us how to live in this reality.

The Buddha taught *satipaṭṭhāna* to human beings for the ultimate aim of purification, as the way to overcome physical pain and mental defilements. 'Satipatthana' refers to the four establishments (*patthāna*) of mindfulness (*sati*): remembering to continually observe the body, mind, feelings, as well as perceptible natural phenomena and how they work (*dhammas*). This practice also brings its attendant benefit of being focussed on activities of the present moment.

In several *suttas* the Buddha defines 'sati' as remembering. What is he telling us to remember? He is telling us to remember to observe the body as the body, the mind as the mind, feelings as feelings, dhammas as dhammas—in other words, watch the body, etc. in order to realise that it is just body, etc.: not 'I', 'mine' or 'my self'. The body is composed of sensations that we can directly feel. Be aware of the bodily sensations which are present all the time. Thus the Buddha repeatedly advises, "in bending or stretching the arm, etc. one does so with full awareness (*sampajānakārī*)." 'Sati' therefore is not awareness, but rather a reminder to be aware.

The five senses can take in only present objects. On the other hand the mind can take in past, present and future objects as well as time-freed objects such as ideas, abstractions and fantasies. Most times when we are engaged in our daily activities—moving around, writing at the desk, washing dishes, etc.—it is difficult to remember to be aware and to go back to the body. But it is a good tool to use mindfulness of the body as an anchor; to ground one in the present moment. The moment you are aware that you are thinking, note the thought, let it go and bring the mind back to the body.

UNCOVERING LAYERS OF PAST CONDITIONING

It is good to ask yourself, every now and then, "Where is my mind?" If it is not with the five senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching—then it is thinking. Check how it moves and behaves. As the Buddha said (in SN 47.35), "one exercises full awareness by being aware of feelings, thoughts and perceptions as they arise, persist and disappear." If you are skilful in watching the mind, then you will not get caught up in thoughts and emotions. When you do this, you become more focussed on what you are presently doing, and you can be aware of the many layers of conditioning that cause thoughts and emotions to arise.

During a recent Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP) conducted in SBS, one of the participants put into practice what I had taught about mindfulness of ongoing activities. He petted one of the cats we have there, trying to be mindful, then went to wash his hands. At that moment, it struck him that the cause for his habitual act of washing his hands after touching a cat—he was not deliberately thinking about the cause, but at that instant he saw that it was because his mother had inculcated this in him when he was a child. He had an insight into the conditioning that brought about the automatic response of washing his hands after touching a cat.

Most, if not all, of our behaviour patterns are the products of past conditioning. Like robots we automatically react to situations according to such conditioned ways. Sometimes such conditioning can be the root of certain bad habits. If we can see such conditioning, then we have a chance to undo it. We can see the root causes of problems such as inexplicable inhibitions, phobias and grudges. We can be our own psychotherapist—watch our mind, see the conditioning that brings about such negativity and we can overcome them.

Our behaviour patterns are the products of past conditioning. Like robots we automatically react to situations according to such conditioned ways.

TRACK THE MIND AND EXPERIENCE NOT-SELF (*ANATTÀ*)

The mind is a busybody. If you watch it, you can see how it moves from the eye, to the ear, etc. to thoughts commenting on almost every little thing that you can perceive through the senses. It seems to be engaged in multitasking, but it is not. The mind is just moving very fast from object to object. See how it moves and behaves and how thoughts arise. This is how we can learn to be focussed on what we are doing in the present.

It is good practice to see how the mind works. While walking to your workplace or the washroom ask yourself as you walk, "Where is my mind?" If it is not with the five senses, particularly being aware of the movements of your limbs, it must be lost in thought. Then bring your mind back to the five senses—be aware of what you hear, see, smell as well as tactile sensations that can be felt while walking. If you want to be in the present moment, come back to the five senses.

Being a busybody, the mind will be pulled to whichever sense object that is dominant. Each sense is constantly trying to overpower the others to get the attention of the mind. If you just let it go, the mind will be taken over by the senses and it will respond with attachment, greed, lust, dislike, disappointment, etc. The moment you are aware of this, bring the mind back to the body.

However, there is a note of caution here. When we are aware of unwholesome thoughts we tend to either indulge in them or feel guilty about them. It is important to bear in mind that the practice of mindfulness involves disengaging oneself from those thoughts and observing them objectively. Any reaction to those thoughts are also mental states that should be noted. In order to prevent further reactions to all those thoughts, you must immediately bring the mind back to the body.

As you continually try to watch your thoughts and emotions, one of the first insights that will dawn upon you is how fleeting and unruly the mind is. It really makes you wonder, "Who am I?" If you can clearly see how thoughts and emotions arise due to various specific conditions you will begin to have a greater understanding of what the Buddha meant by "not-self" (anattā). You experience them as a flux of transient phenomena which are discrete yet causally related. Now the seeming solidity of your self-image (ego) begins to melt. You can watch them as an external observer, without identifying with them. Then even the "observer" can be seen as discrete moments of awareness that arise and disappear due to specific conditioning. This can be very liberating, as we normally identify our thoughts, emotions and awareness with our "self".

BE PRESENT

In your daily life it is hardly possible to do *vipassanā* as practised during an intensive meditation retreat. You must learn to apply what you have learnt in an intensive meditation retreat to life in the outside world. A retreat is a simulated environment, where you are spoon-fed. Less than 1% of your lifetime is spent in retreats—the rest of the time you are in the "real" world. In real life, do not expect spectacular insights like what you can experience in a retreat.

Do not think that the practice of satipatthana is confined only to retreats and that when you are in the outside world, you cannot be mindful; on the contrary, I would like to stress that the four satipatthanas are very, very important whenever you remember to practise them. They help you to be in the present moment, to be fully aware of your daily activities, no matter how mundane they may be. It is especially useful to watch your mind states as they respond to stimuli at the sense doors. Then you can clearly see how your thoughts and emotions are conditioned into existence, thus loosening your "subconscious" attachment to the illusory ego. And the less attached you are to the ego, the greater will be your clarity of mind in responding to whatever is required of you at that moment.

In 2004 we had a camp in SBS for some university students and a former biology lecturer said that more than 80% of the energy we use up is mental energy. Thinking causes tremendous mental energy to be burnt up. Manual workers, after a hard day's work under the scorching sun may not feel as burnt out as a white collar worker who has spent his day working his brain power at his desk in an air-conditioned room. But a good practitioner of satipatthana, by significantly reducing discursive or verbal thinking, can actually conserve mental energy and therefore feel more energised.

So be present, be clear, be energised!

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

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

Introduction to Monkhood Programme

IMP7

Date (2 weeks)	Optional 1-week Meditation Retreat	Closing Date for Application
4-17 Dec 2006	17-24 Dec 2006	6 Nov 2006

Programme Components

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

meditation • discipline • sutta study • Pali pronunciation • chanting • talks & discussions on the DhammaVinaya & relevant issues • qigong • yoga • alms gathering • nature walk

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

Details and application forms can be obtained from:

- SBS Main Office (c/o 15, Lrg Tasik Permai 6, Tmn Tasik Permai, 34000 Taiping, Perak
- 05-8084429; f.05-8084423; e.office@sasanarakkha.org) or
- 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

Note: IMP is not a novitiate programme. SBS does not offer short-term monkhood

News on SaṅghaSannipāta2006

SBS hosted the second gathering of Theravada monks in June. The two-day event was attended by 17 monks from all over the country. From the comments from some of them, it has been a fruitful one.

Compiled and edited by Ven Kumāra Bhikkhu

SaṅghaSannipāta2006: 2nd Saṅgha Meeting of English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada Monks was successfully held here in SBS on 3 & 4 June 2006. Seventeen monks, their seniority ranging from 26 to 2 *vassas*, participated in this assembly which discussed various issues related to ownership and management of *āvāsas* in Malaysia. The collective mind managed to provide many useful suggestions to resolve current issues and forestall future ones. Workable solutions were also found for other issues brought up, mostly regarding monastic conduct.

The meeting was also a wonderful opportunity for the monks, who are to a large extent geographically dispersed, to get to know each other, thus contributing to unity and harmony among us. Certainly, the objectives of the meeting were achieved to a great degree.

We asked some of the participants to write about the meeting and here are extracts of their feedback.

VARADHAMMO BHIKKHU

English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada Saṅgha has come a long way. Twenty years ago, there were only about 10 such monks. But now the number has grown to at least 70.This SaṅghaSannipāta2006 was chaired by Ven Aggacitta. Ven Dhammavuddho, Ven Mahāñāṇo and he shared their experiences in managing a monastery and the issues they face with the laity in its management.Ven Dhammavuddho, who had encountered a few problems in the past, summed up his experiences with this: "On a hill, there mustn't be two tigers." Ven Aggacitta shared his experience of how he conducted a thorough study on ownership and management of monasteries in Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Australia after which he had things laid down in black and white in a constitution to prevent conflicts in the future. Ven Mahāñāṇo has yet to settle management issues in his monastery. Many other monks also reported their experience of such issues.The meeting of 17 monks in Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary brought out a sense of brotherhood and provided a chance for us to learn more about the DhammaVinaya from experienced

Only when harmony and smooth operation in the Saṅgha is ensured can both the monks and lay people dedicate their time to practising the Buddha's teaching, instead of trying to resolve issues.

Ṭhitavijjo Bhikkhu

monks, like Ven Aggacitta and Ven Dhammavuddho. We hope SaṅghaSannipāta2007 will attract more monks, for the future well-being of the Saṅgha.

KOVIDA BHIKKHU

It's fortunate that this time the* Saṅgha *meeting is held at Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary. This 2-day Saṅgha meeting signifies the unity of Saṅgha members. It is rather important for the prolongation of the Buddha's teachings. Besides speaking on the management of monastic residences, Bhante Aggacitta brought up the question of what should be done if a non-Thai Malaysian monk commits a heavy offence. As a Saṅgha council for such monks has yet to be established, there is temporarily no conclusive answer to this.

Anyhow, I hope this annual meeting will be held regularly.

ṬHITAVIJJO BHIKKHU

Before the SaṅghaSannipāta2006, I was a bit cynical. "What is the use of such a gathering? Can it help my practice to reduce my mental defilements at all? What has my practice got to do with others? It's all inside my mind anyway..." I was sure the meeting would not change anything, both inside me and the environment around me.

Throughout my (temporary) monkhood of only two vassas, I spent most of my time outside Malaysia. My stay in SBS has just come to four months; and the connection one can get with the outside world from SBS is minimal. Therefore I was not too familiar with the Theravada Saṅgha, its laity and its challenges in Malaysia. I attended the meeting with the attitude of a learner and an observer, and to get acquainted with other Malaysian monks and the Malaysian system.

Bhante Aggacitta's opening speech made reference to Mahāparinibbāna Sutta in which the Buddha mentioned regular assemblies of the *bhikkhus* as one of the seven conditions that conduced to the non-decline of the Saṅgha This temporarily cleared my cynicism and suspicion, although not completely. The Buddha *sāsana* now is different from that two and a half millennium ago where enlightened beings abounded; so there was no reason for me to believe that any effort to make it last will not be futile.

After the case studies session, in which Bhante (Hye) Dhammavuddho, Bhante Mahāñāṇo and Bhante Aggacitta shared their wisdom gained from some rather unpleasant

> One of the things that was impressed upon me was that accepting real estate on behalf of the Saṅgha is a *very* tricky thing that can get one into extremely sticky situations. Without foresight, an act of generosity can end up being a disaster.
>
> **Kumāra Bhikkhu**

past experiences, I realised that unless one is a *dhutaṅga* monk, one can never totally shield oneself from challenging difficulties that can arise from interaction with lay supporters. To an outsider, this meeting could be wrongly perceived as a group of monks gathering in the forest to discuss ways or weapons to "deal" with lay people; however, its objective must be viewed from this wider perspective: to promote the healthy growth of young Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia.

It would be naive to think that the Saṅgha should not have any problems. The Buddha's teaching is perfect; but the religion is not. The members, while walking on the path, are not perfect. Any organisation, religious or secular, is a living system with human beings of minds with different defilements. So regular meetings to discuss existing or newly arisen issues, just like those held regularly in any secular organisation, is an effort to resolve issues, to share wisdom and experiences, and find solutions which we can use to avoid similar problems or pitfalls in the future.

For example, if everyone in the Saṅgha, monks and lay people alike, has a good understanding of the true meaning, the difference and the implication of 'Saṅgha' and 'individual' property, many past incidents of disharmony would not have arisen. Only when harmony and smooth operation in the Saṅgha is ensured can both the monks and lay people dedicate their time to practising the Buddha's teaching, instead of trying to resolve issues.

In trying to address the problems brought out on the first day, the subsequent session attempted to seek answers from the Pali scriptures. During the Buddha's time, when his teaching spread and more people joined in the Saṅgha, problems and difficulties grew. What was the Buddha's advice to the monks then? With Bhante Aggacitta who is conversant in Pali and knowledgeable in the vinaya leading the discussion, we realised that there are many valuable solutions offered to us from the omniscient Buddha. If only we are willing to consider and adopt his advice, while adapting to our local cultural environment, many of the common problems resulting from a clash of minds can be avoided. I am sure it was an interesting discovery for many others in the meeting.

I emerged from the meeting feeling glad. Would it help my practice on the path as a monk in any way? Certainly, because if I do remain within the monkhood long enough to face issues of a similar nature, I know where to first turn to for advice: the vinaya scriptures. More importantly, Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia is young but there are experienced elders whose wisdom we young monks can tap from. When a monk renounces, he leaves his home by

himself, but he may not realise that he is in fact joining a big family, with many fathers and brothers, where mutual support abounds when needed. This feeling of brotherhood peaked in me when we parted from each other with encouragement, respect and gratitude.

KUMĀRA BHIKKHU

None of us is better than of all of us. That's an impression that I got in SaṅghaSannipāta2006. No matter how much anyone knows, there are always new things to learn, especially from a gathering such as this.

I've certainly managed to glean much knowledge and experience from others, some of whom had to learn the hard way. It's a bit like getting to eat *durians* without even having to risk being pricked! One of the things that was impressed upon me was that accepting real estate on behalf of the Saṅgha is a *very* tricky thing that can get one into extremely sticky situations. Without foresight, an act of generosity can end up being a disaster. I'm certainly glad I get to learn this before I'm anywhere near such a potential hot soup.

Many participants had a wonderful opportunity to consult more experienced and knowledgeable monks on various matters. I think this alone makes the meeting worthwhile. Furthermore, as these monks are likely to be looked up to and consulted on various Buddhist matters in the local Buddhists communities, the true magnitude of benefit extends far beyond.

As in the last meeting, some monks proposed the setting up of an administrative body, which they believe would bring unity to the monks such as those in the meeting. However, I see that the expected outcome of unity is more imaginary than real. Besides, a periodical gathering such as this one is already doing the job of bring us together. As for those who chose not to attend the meeting, I do not see how having a registered body, which they have not agreed to, is going to help. Besides, no one was interested to do the administrative work.

So, again the proposal did not obtain enough support, which I think is a good thing. While a Saṅgha council *may* bring about some benefit in the beginning, in the long run, it's bound to becomes a political field of power-crazy monks, and thereby contribute greatly to the destruction of the Buddha sāsana.

The Buddha, with his foresight, has laid down general instructions, as enshrined in the Vinaya Pitaka, to deal with various monastic issues. I think it would be better to go by that, rather then to create something that I believe will likely, in the long run, cause more problems than solve.

At the end of the meeting, some of us voiced our wish that more English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada Monks would participate in such meetings. Others agreed. Bhante Aggacitta suggested that each participant promote future meetings by bringing in 5 other monks, to which others agreed to try. I rejoice.

"Bhikkhus, the growth of the bhikkhus is to be expected, not their decline, so long as they

- *assemble frequently and in large numbers;*
- *meet and disperse peacefully and attend to the affairs of the Saṅgha in concord;*
- *appoint no new rules, and do not abolish the existing ones, but proceed in accordance with the code of training (vinaya) laid down;*
- *show respect, honour, esteem, and veneration towards the elder bhikkhus, those of long standing, long gone forth, the fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha, and think it worthwhile to listen to them;*
- *do not come under the power of the craving that leads to fresh becoming;*
- *cherish the forest depths for their dwellings;*
- *establish themselves in mindfulness, so that virtuous brethren of the Order who have not come yet might do so, and those already come might live in peace.*

So long, bhikkhus, as these seven conditions leading to welfare endure among the bhikkhus and the bhikkhus are known for them, their growth is to be expected, not their decline."

Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DN16.6)

As part of the effort to encourage English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada Monk to attend the next SaṅghaSannipāta, a DVD video of this meeting shall be produced to be distributed among them. Lim Soo Jin who has so kindly videoed the 2-day event, with the help of Lim Teik Leong, told us that it can be ready in July 2006.

As certain matters discussed can be taken in the wrong light by certain people, the participants agreed that it shall be made available to suitable Malaysian Theravada monks *only*. If you are an English/Chinese-speaking Malaysian Theravada Monk wishing to obtain a copy of the DVD, please give us your name, contact number and correspondence address.

Next SaṅghaSannipāta: 2-3 June 2007; Aloka Meditation Center (Melaka) or Balik Pulau Buddhist Hermitage (Penang).

OFF THE CUSHION

LAURA ZAN, an advocate of mindfulness in daily life, shares with us her thoughts on 'squeezing out minutes of meditation' from our daily routine.

Returning from a 10-day meditation retreat, I felt the energy of the metropolis close by. The dense cover of evergreen trees on either side of the highway gradually gave way to a concrete jungle. As the bus turned into the depot, we were welcomed by a barrage of flashing ads and scantily clad models on billboards. After a five-hour ride, the transition seemed complete, at least physically. I wondered how much longer the euphoria would continue.

When I started practising *vipassanā* a couple of years ago, I returned from retreats with a belief that the continuous mindfulness would carry on. Sadly, the awareness and diligence built up over days and months wilted in the blink of an eye against a waiting army of defilements. With the game all figured out, the *kilesas* were now on their home turf. The city provided a perfect breeding ground and cover with all its sense candy. Ten days of intense retreat in a year were not enough training time to purge Mara's hardened soldiers who had all the other days to plan and proliferate.

Having experienced this first hand, meditation teachers caution yogis on the dangers of defilements outside. At the Shwe Oo Min monastery in Myanmar, Sayadaw U Tejaniya warned a yogi at the end of his retreat, "Beware of defilements; they are very clever. They can wait three or four months while you practise intensely. They will temporarily go on leave. But when you go back outside and you don't continue with a watchful mind, they will return with full force."

ALLURE OF RETREATS

In any book on meditation we can find ancient stories of yogis and monks on decade-long retreats in the Himalayas and Tibetan caves. Today, the East is no longer the only place for solitary withdrawals from daily life. For years now, the West has boasted meditation retreats as well as an assortment of imported techniques. Miles from city hubs, in *kuṭis* or Dhamma halls, they are places to recharge, find tranquility, and develop insight into the nature of mind and body.

Without the blitz of flashing ads, the allure of shop windows, smell of burgers and fries, and without the strain of family obligations, it is a time to directly face a friend and enemy we know so little of: our minds. When finally stripped of all distractions, and in the silence of the Dhamma hall, we discover a subtle but incessant procession of activities, feelings and volitions previously concealed under the surface of thoughts, speech and actions. Within a supportive environment, gross emotions give way to

delicate balancing acts. And this newly acquired sensitivity opens new doors to experiences and insights with the power to transform.

From a few days to a couple of months, protected by noble silence or surrounded by muted chatter, retreats helped me understand the world better, to let go and become more tolerant. The schedules were intense yet the settings were some of the most tranquil and serene in the world. There was a new level of discovery waiting at every turn.

OUT OF THE DHAMMA HALL

Returning to lay life, I found myself once again getting caught up in the routines of lay life. The urgency of practising meditation was all but gone after a few months; the summer retreat was a distant memory. I was only jolted out of my reverie one morning on my way to work. The emotional turmoil of an argument with another passenger on the B8 bus immediately brought awareness back to the fore. Finding the nearest seat, I became aware that my mind simmered with thoughts and 'what ifs'; the gleeful feelings from retorting back to that passenger. It took the rest of the bus ride for me to "watch" (focus on) the mind and sensations but when I got off at my destination, I felt grateful for the reminder. I walked the rest of the way to work in peace.

When we become accustomed to the serenity of a meditation centre, the return to lay life can be jarring. How do we make the transition from a full schedule of sitting and walking meditation to a full schedule of work, chores and responsibilities? Back in the lay world, hectic work, school, family and social schedules seem to take priority. There are never enough hours in the day to finish what we want.

Despite the fast pace, there is something infinitely more exhausting than the daily 'to do's': the web of emotions woven by the mind. They are the complex stories we comfort or terrify ourselves with—the what-if and when, to imaginary future situations. They are solutions to unsalvageable past situations. They are figments of the imagination so real that we are in conflict with ourselves.

It is in tough moments that our daily meditation practice can come to the rescue. They are like damage control squads; all we have to do is watch... and learn. How we react to real situations are indicators of how far we have really grown in life.

FINDING THE TIME AND PLACE

There are plenty of ways to squeeze out minutes of meditation in daily life.

Train rides are immensely more pleasant when accompanied by the friend, Awareness. The impatience of waiting for a tardy friend naturally melts away under a vigilant mind. Otherwise explosive situations can be treasure-troves of lessons on cause and effect. Slowly we become less enslaved by the machinations of the mind and the fluctuations of life.

I usually observe my feelings and thoughts as I walk to the bus stop in the mornings. On the bus, I observe my breathing during the half-an hour ride. At times the mind is agitated, flitting from idea to idea, thought to thought. At other times, there is a peace that is a total contrast to the blaring horns and traffic jams outside.

On campus, the library is my favourite place for sitting meditation during an hour's break. A quiet corner on the third floor is an ideal place to recharge and reestablish continuity of practice after a few hours of class time.

Stolen minutes can eventually transform into chunks of continuous awareness. If we ever give ourselves a few minutes of not doing anything, but watching thoughts, we can feel the movement of the mind. Memories foam up from the depths cued by a little corner of the previous page. The next thought takes a little concept of the previous thought and weaves another tale. We can watch the rising heat, stoked by a phanthom enemy. There may be a storyline, maybe not. Hours or days later, the same demons haunt our minds. Even from memory, we recoil at an insult or must have the final word. Do we always have to follow the master storyteller?

EIGHT MINUTES A DAY

There is a story of a layman in Myanmar who started meditating by practising eight minutes a day at work. Every hour on the hour, he would sit quietly at his desk and practise mindfulness of breathing for one minute. Then he would continue whatever he was doing. On average, he would get eight minutes of *anapansati* a day.

After some time, this man started to see a change in his life. The occupational stress and agitation abated; peace and calm took their place. He continued in this way for some time and slowly, eight minutes stretched out. He started to meditate in earnest.

One yogi. Eight minutes a day. Immense benefits. It is about the amount of time we spend waiting for the train in rush hour. It is eight more minutes of sleep after hitting the snooze button. It is eight minutes to stand in line to pick out and pay for the order at lunchtime. It is a miniscule portion of an average work day. Yet one life changed forever with eight minutes a day.

WHY SEEK OUT THE POT OF GOLD?

At the end of our lives, will we measure our net worth in the number of zeros on the final line in the bank statement? Or the alphabet soup of letters that follow our last names? Is it the respect that people pay on our deathbeds? Walking even a few steps on the eightfold noble path holds immense benefits. It is a way out of mental poverty; it is the promise of ultimate freedom from fear, worry, animosity, lust and delusion. Few in this world will come even close to the Buddha Dhamma. Even fewer will take the first steps.

Sasanarakkha Management Committee 4 (SBSMC 4) has taken over the reins and shoulders the task of guiding the development of SBS through the next two years. All volunteers, they are equipped to sail 'SS SBS', and are prepared to shoot some rapids along the way.

Of Volunteer Workers and the SBSMC... a personal perspective

By Akincana

SBS is now six years old. Volunteer workers for The Sanctuary, in particular those on the management committee, have changed repeatedly during these past few years. By and large, there are many who readily volunteer their services when approached. But what is it that makes some leave and others march on?

It is indeed rare to find a truly dedicated volunteer who soldiers on regardless of obstacles along the route. In the last 6 years I have made my own observations of this breed of people. I see individuals with their own characteristics and ways which, when harnessed positively, will make them good team workers. But regardless of how they perform, I wish to say *'sādhu'* to all of them. They have volunteered and tried their very best, I'm sure.

Having been part of the management committee in its first four years, I know the difficulties volunteers encounter. Now back in its fold after a two-year absence, I see it as a blessing in disguise.

During that time I did a lot of soul searching and decided to take a closer look as to why I left in the first place when I had already made a personal pledge to myself to serve the *sāsana* the day I was introduced to the Dhamma way back in 1989. Was it anger, conflict of interest, stubbornness, personal commitments or what? I believe it was a little of each and more. I came to the conclusion that I was 'burnt out' and really needed a rest.

Those two years have allowed me to see things in a different perspective. What I eventually realised was something that made me feel humbled and forgiving: it is not only others who always do the wrong things. I myself

I see individuals with their own characteristics and ways which, when harnessed positively, will make them good team workers.

have a part in it and I should not be so judgmental or feel that I'm always right and others are wrong.

When one stays too long in any society, one tends to take things for granted. People tend to feel that it is their right to do things their way and ignore others' suggestions and recommendations. Then one starts to argue when one's views are rejected. The big 'I' then comes into play. 'I' am right and you are wrong. One starts to feel that when 'I' am not there the whole society will crumble. No one can take 'I's place. 'I' am the indispensable one. Upon deeper scrutiny, I felt that one is but a tiny insignificant individual who is there only to help build a society and not to control it.

Humility and a caring attitude are qualities needed most when we volunteer our services. The big 'I' should be discarded into the bin. This, I believe, is a very clear and unbiased view of volunteering of services. Just be there to help and allow the committee as a whole to make the necessary decisions. After all, many heads are better than one, right? All this analysing eventually made me want to serve again. What better place to offer my services than to the management committee of SBS where I will have a better chance to deepen my grasp of the Dhamma, walk the path, and learn to be a better person? Hopefully I can be less judgmental and serve the sasana better now than before.

Some long-serving volunteers have also given me their views on why they are staying on to serve in the management committee. A big sadhu to all of them.

"My decision to stay on was inspired by the last kathina theme, 'stay connected'. I have learnt very much more about the Dhamma and the Sangha after serving in the previous committee. In actual fact I wasn't too happy about my contributions as Finance Manager 2 in the last committee and wanted to call it quits. But Bhante invited me to serve again this year. I was surprised and happy that my services were still needed and that Bhante still wanted to 'stay connected' with me. This made me reverse my earlier decision to quit and I feel very privileged to serve again," Yeo Khee Aik, now Vice Chairperson 3 who served as Finance Manager 2 in the last committee, couldn't have said it better. Very commendable of him, I must say. A good choice for his given post.

Wai Seng Moh, Development Manager 2, who served as Vice Chairperson 1 in the last committee has always felt joyful when doing *dhammaduta* work. He said, "I feel that serving in the management committee of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary is an honour. But I will still offer my services whether or not I get to be in the management committee. I just want to be a part of the Guardian of the Sasana". Another keen and happy volunteer.

Someone who has served on the committee right from day one is the current Development Manager 3 who also served in the same capacity in the previous committee. Lim Lay Hoon's thoughts? "Having supported the establishment of SBS it is only natural that I continue to support its growth and development. Dhamma work has been my hobby since I was introduced to the Dhamma many years ago and SBS has given me the opportunity to pursue that hobby". Interesting concept isn't it? Anyone out there who wants to make a hobby of dhammaduta activities? SBS welcomes you as volunteers.

Administrative Manager 2, Yoga Tang, who was co-opted into the last committee as Administrative Manager

Humility and a caring attitude are qualities needed most when we volunteer our services. The big 'I' should be discarded into the bin.

1 after the incumbent resigned, feels that, "with retirement on the horizon it is payback time. As age catches up, I naturally head towards the spiritual path. After joining the Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP) I had a clear idea of where I was headed. In SBS I get to kill two birds with one stone. I get to learn the Dhamma and also increase my circle of friends". He adds, "serving SBS has also given me a sense of fulfillment. I get to work in an environment that has plenty of good qi, clean air and water. Of paramount importance is the chance to be part of a team that is propagating the Dhamma". Sadhu to you my friend, on your wisdom in planning to spend your golden years fruitfully.

"A ship of such magnitude as SBS surely needs many crew members to help it keep to its course and to weather strong waves." Being on its management team has enabled Doreen Lim to do just that. Having served as Development Manager in previous committees, she's now Finance Manager 1. Her duties have given her a certain degree of spiritual fulfillment and confidence in the Dhamma. "I believe that in order to help ourselves, we need to help other, too," she said.

"I didn't know I was voted back for a second term... I certainly didn't volunteer—not that I'm complaining!" quips Jettha Dato' Peter Khoo, Vice Chairperson 1.

"In fact, I think it's an honour and a privilege to serve the Sangha at any time and in any way, the Sangha of SBS in particular. I strongly believe and support their primary objective of seeking and training local (Malaysian Chinese-English speaking) monks. I think this is very important as there are not many and certainly not enough Theravada monks in Malaysia who can teach and elucidate the Dhamma in fluent English.

"SBS is still young, a new kid on the block and thus I believe it needs all the support from the laity like ourselves to firmly establish its roots, particularly so at the present as physical development is still in progress. Whether one is working within the MC is not important. Everyone's contribution is invaluable so long as one is able to assist, in whatever way."

Our Spiritual Director, Aggacitta Bhikkhu, sums it all up when he said:

It is my wish that by contributing your time, energy and expertise to serve the sasana here at SBS you will be able to reap not only manifold material benefits as some of you may testify, but also profound spiritual returns in the form of personality development and greater happiness resulting from insights into the true nature of mind and matter.

SBS Management Committee 2006/2008

SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR
Venerable Aggacitta Maha Thera

PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR
Venerable Kumara Bhikkhu

CHAIRMAN
Ng Kian Chong

VICE CHAIRMAN 1
Dato' Jettha Peter Khoo Peng Lai

DEVELOPMENT MANAGER 3
Lim Lay Hoon

PUBLIC RELATIONS
Lim Lay Hoon

PROGRAMMES
1. Ang Poh Heang
2. Atapi Cheng Jin Hooi

WEBSITE
John Lee

PUBLICATIONS
Doreen Lim

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Looi Sow Fei

DEVELOPMENT MANAGER 2
Wai Seng Moh

HUMAN RESOURCES (SANGHA & LAITY)
Wai Seng Moh

DEVELOPMENT MANAGER 1
Lau Chee Chang

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Lim Tai Eng

VICE CHAIRMAN 2
Lee Lee Kim

FINANCE MANAGER
1. Doreen Lim
2. Ooi Cheng Suan

FUND RAISING
1. Lee Lee Kim
2. Lim Hee Chay
3. James Khoo
4. Dr Ng Yee-Kong

VICE CHAIRMAN 3
Yeo Khee Aik

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER 2
Yoga Tang Kow Chye

BUILDING & INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE
Ooi Eng Huat

FIELD ADMINISTRATOR
Chu Chee Kiong

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR
Uttara Ong

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER 1
Goh Keat Soon

MINUTES SECRETARY
Yap Keow Kean

DANA
Ooi Teow Keat

HEALTH
Tong Kok Chan

TRANSPORT
1. Lim Poh Eng
2. Yeoh Sia Teoh

HOUSEKEEPING
Yee Ah Huah

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER 3
Chiu Sheng Bin

ORCHARD & FARM
Chiu Sheng Bin

LANDSCAPE
Chen Sew Kian

SBS REPRESENTATIVES

Perlis Lim Tai Eng
Kedah Ch'ng Kok Eng
Penang (Island) Ooi Sung Yong
Penang (Butterworth) Karunacitta Wong
Penang (Bt. Mertajam) Sim Boon Lee
Perak (Upper) Judy Chua
Perak (Lower) Chew Cheow Beng
Selangor (Klang) Helen Too
Selangor (Petaling Jaya) How Eng Keong
Selangor (Subang) Leslie Guoh
Selangor (Shah Alam) Josephine Lew
Selangor (Kajang) Stanley Chen
Federal Territory (KL) Wong Mun Yee
Melaka Kenny Chan
Negeri Sembilan (Nilai) Yeoh Kar Kheng
Negeri Sembilan (Seremban) Ong Guan Leong
Kelantan (Kota Bahru) Loke Chee Kong
Terengganu How Chee Seng
Pahang Leong Weng Choy
Johor Ang Teck Hock
Sabah Soh Poh Soon
Sarawak Teo Chin Chiang
Youth Representative Mabel Liew
Singapore Dr Ng Yee-Kong
Singapore Kweh Soon Han
Myanmar Daw Khin Saw Ma
Australia Lim Su See
South Africa Lionel John Theron

In the previous issue of Sasanarakkha, we brought you to the as yet uncompleted Farmhouse. With this issue, we take you once again to Farmhouse which is proudly hosting numerous activities. Main Office construction is still ongoing, with all involved exercising their patience. Meanwhile, more plans are coming up and gathering momentum.

Fulfilling Plans, Making New Ones

By Wai Seng Moh

Serving in the SBSMC (Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary Management Committee) for two consecutive terms has been a beneficial experience for me in terms of interaction, learning and sharing. During these two terms it was my responsibility to oversee the building development in SBS. Throughout the duration of these tenures, I have had the support of a very able team of consultants, field and administrative staff as well as the SBSMC. With them behind me I have been able to guide Phase 3 of development through to its completion and bring Phase 4 up to its present stage of progress. I have enjoyed working with them—thank you all.

PHASE 4

Main Office (MO)

We had targeted MO to be completed before Wesak 2006, but due to the unexpectedly high rainfall over the last two to three months and also to external factors which we struggled to bring under our control, progress has been at a toiling pace. So far, the construction of MO has posed the biggest challenge to the building development team and the SBSMC. Looked at positively, it has given us the opportunity to develop endurance and patience for many of us.

Very soon when this flagship building is completed, we will all be relieved to see it standing tall, like a guardian overlooking the main gateway and most parts of The Sanctuary. Then, we expect lay activities such as meditation retreats and Dhamma camps to be high on the SBSMC's agenda. Bravo to all!

Farmhouse (FH)

There were some delays to the finishing of the building because of some problems with the sponsorship of aluminium doors and window frames. Eventually, the sponsor overcame the problems and we got them fixed in March. The building is now being well utilised as living quarters for our two Burmese general workers. Once I asked them how they found their quarters and they confirmed they are happy and said that the wind at night makes it very cool there. Our volunteer worker, Uncle Quah, is also housed here. Administrative Manager 1 (AM1) Goh Keat Soon, once remarked that he was eyeing the guest room with the panoramic view of Taiping for his part-time stay while overseeing the daily administration of SBS, but he has yet to ground himself there. Other visitors, however, have not had second thoughts about staying there. Very soon many visitors who wish to stay overnight will have to make advance bookings!

Very soon many visitors who wish to stay overnight will have to make advance bookings!

Situated adjacent to the organic farm vegetable plots, FH also services the activities of the orchard and farm committee.

PHASE 5

Proposed construction of Female Guest Lodge (FGL) and Monastic Guest Lodge (MGL)

The Dhamma Workers' Quarters does not only house our temporary office; it has recently been converted to Female Workers' Quarters. Recently our office administrator, Uttara, moved in and became its first occupant. When it comes to retreats and other activities, this building will be too small to accommodate female guests. With this in mind, plans are afoot to construct a Female Guest Lodge (FGL) under Phase 5 (see p33).

Also in the pipeline under Phase 5 is a guest lodge for monastics (MGL), so that visiting monastics, including past participants of Introduction to Monkhood Programmes (IMPians) on private retreat will have their very own quarters. An inspection for the proposed sites for FGL and MGL was carried out on 28 May to ascertain the ground orientation and certain pertinent measurements to enable the architect to come out with accurate building plans. We hope to begin construction this year. *[**Editor's note**: after this article was written, another site inspection was carried out and the site earmarked for MGL was found to be not suitable after all. So there is a possibility that MGL will be put on hold while FGL takes off.]*

Last but not least, to all of you who have helped in one way or another towards the development and upkeep of SBS up to this stage, we wish to say *'sādhu'* and 'thanks'. Remember, your continuous support is still very important for SBS to carry out its primary objective as a Theravada monk training centre and also to function as a retreat centre for the laity.

New Team at the Helm

Since I have been given a different appointment in SBSMC4, I shall no longer oversee physical development matters. Lau Chee Chang, as Development Manager 1 in SBSMC4, has taken over the building and development mantle, assisted by a very capable team. He will see Phase 4 to its completion and launch Phase 5. However, since I am a Taiping resident my services to 'see head, see tail' are always available.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY TILL JUNE 2006

Receipts		Receipts RM	Payments RM
1)	General Fund	122,573.32	134,566.97[1]
2)	Building & Maintenance Fund	146,230.66	267,237.50[2]
3)	Food & Dana Fund	18,901.15	10,035.00
4)	Publication Fund	10,648.00	9,843.00
5)	Organic Farm (net sales)	6,307.05	
	Total	**304,660.18**	**421,682.47**
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE PERIOD		**(117,022.29)**	

Note #1	**General fund (Payments)**	**Amounts**
1.1	Salary, EPF & Socso	35,207.85
1.2	Upkeep of Motor Vehicle	14,477.03
1.3	Motor Vehicle - Totoya Hilux (AFS 7206)	65,423.55
1.4	Others	19,458.54
	Total	**134,566.97**

Note #2	**Building & Maintenance Fund (Payments)**	**Amounts**
2.1	Farm House Construction	12,489.99
2.2	Main Office Construction	203,278.05
2.3	Road Construction	15,302.15
2.4	Upkeep of Land & Building	35,047.31
2.5	Others	1,120.00
	Total	**267,237.50**

✉ I have always wanted clarification on "lying" which sometimes is a grey area and will appreciate very much if Bhante will spare the time to answer my question out of compassion for me:

A person is in a situation where he sees an animal running into a hut to hide from two hunters who are armed with guns, and he asks, "Did you see an animal?"

Out of compassion for the animal one would say, "Yes, the animal ran down the hill."

He told a lie with the wholesome intention in order to save the life of an innocent animal. It is different from telling a lie in court to save a killer.

FAM KEAT HONG

Ven Kumara replies: The intention to save the life is wholesome, but the intention to lie is not. Actually, if he is wise enough, he sees more than just the two options of:

A. to lie

B. to tell the truth.

Rather than worrying about whether to lie, he can be more creative and choose option C, or D, or E—whichever works best in that situation.

C. ignore him

D. offer him a cup of tea or some durian

E. run!!

F. fill in the blank yourself

But if he is too scared to think of other options and decides to lie instead, the kamma of lying is still there, though it may not be the kind that leads one to an unhappy destination. Life is full of possibilities, even in a crisis. Don't limit yourself unnecessarily.

✉ Are there any benefits gained from a one-day meditation retreat, taking eight precepts? I tried to encourage a friend to join such a retreat but he declined to do so, saying that such practice for a day does not bring any benefits.

PADMINI LIM SEW LIAN

Ven Kumara replies: *In the days of the Buddha, lay people who undertake the eight precepts normally do so on Uposatha days, which occurs only once every seven days or so. Yet, in Visakhuposatha Sutta (AN VIII.43), the Buddha says:*

Visakha, when the Uposatha undertaken with its eight component practices, is entered on, it is of great fruit, of great advantage, of great splendor, of great range. And how, Visakha, is the Uposatha undertaken with its eight component practices, entered on, is of great fruit, great advantage, great splendor and great range?

Here, Visakha, a noble disciple considers thus:

'For all their lives the arahants dwell having abandoned killing living beings, refrain from killing living beings, they have laid down their staffs, laid down their weapons, they are conscientious, sympathetic, compassionate for the good of all living beings; so ***today*** *I dwell,* ***for this night and day****, having abandoned killing living beings, refraining from killing living beings, I am one who has laid down my staff, laid down my weapon, I am conscientious, sympathetic, compassionate for the good of all living beings. By this practice, following after the arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.'*

It is undertaken by this first practice.

[Then the Buddha repeats this for the seven other uposatha practices.]

[Extracted: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/anguttara/an08-043.html]

Hope the above answer is satisfactory to you.

Do keep your mails coming in. We enjoy reading them. Even if it is a mail not meant for the editor, we can help you 'post' it to the right person in SBS.

• Email: office@sasanarakkha.org • Fax: 05-8084423
• Mailing Address: **Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary**
c/o 28 & 30, First Floor, Jalan Medan Taiping 4, Medan Taiping, 34000 Taiping, Perak, Malaysia

FGL

AN INVITATION

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary Management Committee invites sponsorship for its

FEMALE GUEST LODGE (FGL)

The womenfolk attending retreats or doing voluntary service have always had to make do with makeshift accommodation. FGL will make this a thing of the past.

FACTS AND FIGURES:

Cost: RM400,000 inclusive of fittings
Structure: a building comprising a dormitory, 8 smaller rooms (6 of which can be opened up to make a hall 6.0m x 6.6m in area), a tea room and toilet and bathing facilities.
Construction to start once funds are available

SPONSORSHIP PLANS

Dormitory: there is already one interested party.
Small rooms: Sponsorship is invited for the smaller rooms.
Name plaques will acknowledge sponsors' contributions
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what the buddha really taught

The Pali Nikāyas and Chinese Āgamas[1]

By Ven Bhikkhu Sujato

[1] This essay is in part adapted from my forthcoming book, *A History of Mindfulness*

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When I go into a Buddhist bookshop or library, I am often struck by the number of books there—shelves crammed full of people's opinions about 'what the Buddha taught'. However, try to find something that actually contains the Buddha's teaching and you're in for a much harder time. It seems to be fine to be a Buddhist, attend talks, read books, meditate, chant, and go on retreat, without ever bothering to ask oneself the question: what did the Buddha *really* teach?

For the rare and brave seekers who dare to inquire beyond what their teachers tell them, it will not take long before they hear of the Pali Nikāyas. Here, we are told, is the original unadulterated Teaching, the Buddha's words in their pristine purity. We are in the enviable position of having many excellent translations of these texts available in English, both in books and on the web. Anyone with sufficient time and interest can, with a little perseverance, gain a reasonable understanding of these teachings. The Pali Nikāyas have been one of my formative influences, right from my first days as a Buddhist. The Dhamma they embody is clear, rational, balanced, gentle, and profound—everything one could hope for.

However, it is easy to fall into a kind of 'Pali fundamentalism'. The texts and language are so pure and precise that many of us who fall in love with the Nikāyas end up believing that they constitute the be-all and end-all of Buddhism. We religiously adhere to the finest distinction, the subtlest interpretation, based on a single word or phrase. We take for granted that here we have the original teachings, without considering the process by which these teachings have passed down to us. In our fervour, we neglect to wonder whether there might be another perspective on these Dhammas.

Perhaps most important of all, we forget—if we ever knew—the reasons why we are justified in considering the Nikāyas authentic in the first place. While it is good enough for most faith-based Buddhists to believe that their own scriptures are the only real ones, this will not suffice for an objective seeker. Any religious tradition will try to validate itself by such claims, and they cannot all be right. These conflicting claims led the early researchers in the modern era to examine the evidence more objectively.

When the modern historical study of Buddhism began in the mid-19th century there was considerable confusion. In a burst of rationalist enthusiasm, scholars were prepared to question whether the myth of the Buddha had any factual basis at all. Was there any historical connection between the different religions practised in far-separated places like Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Japan? Did the Buddha really exist? Was he just a sun god? Was he an Ethiopian prophet? What did he teach? Can we know? Which traditions are most reliable (or least unreliable)? Since the traditions had been largely separated due to the forces of history—especially the destruction of Buddhism in India—they had little information about each other, and each asserted its own primacy. Each school preserved its traditions in vast collections of abstruse volumes of hard-to-read manuscripts in wildly different languages (Chinese, Tibetan, Pali, and other Indian languages such as Sanskrit).

Then gradually the evidence was assembled. The traditions were compared and archaeological findings confirmed key facts. Some 1500 year-old Sri Lankan chronicles mention the names of the monks, Kassapa, Majjhima, and Durabhisara, sent in the Asokan period as missionaries from Vidisa to the Himalayan region; an excavated stupa in Vidisa has the names of these monks inscribed on it in letters dating to the Asokan era. By the beginning of the 20th century, accurate outlines were drawn in works by such scholars as T.W. Rhys Davies, whose writings retain their value today. There was still controversy in the early half of the 20th century though, as evidence was still being accumulated, new texts were edited, and new studies done.

However, as early as 1882 a scholar called Samuel Beal published a series of lectures under the title of *Buddhist Literature in China*. This included information on the process of translating into Chinese, as well as sample translations from some of the main strata of Buddhist literature—the early Suttas, the Jātakas, and a Mahāyāna text. He stated the following:

> *The Parinibbāna, the Brahmajāla, the Sigalovāda, the Dhammacakka, the Kasi Bhāradvadja, the Mahāmaṅgala; all these I have found and compared with translations from the Pali, and find that in the main they are identical. I do not say literally the same; they differ in minor points, but are identical in plot and all important details. And when the Vinaya and Āgama collections are thoroughly examined, I can have little doubt we shall find most if not all the Pali suttas in a Chinese form.*

Over a century later, a thorough study such as that urged by Beal has yet to be done. However, some progress has been made. In 1908 the Japanese scholar M. Anesaki's *The Four Buddhist Āgamas in Chinese: A concordance of their parts and of the corresponding counterparts in the Pali Nikāyas* was published. This was followed in 1929 by Chizen Akanuma's *The Comparative Catalogue of Chinese Āgamas and Pali Nikāyas*, a comprehensive catalogue of all known existing early discourses in Pali and Chinese, as well as the few early texts available in Tibetan and Sanskrit. These findings were incorporated in full-scale historical studies such as Etienne Lamotte's *History of Indian Buddhism* and AK Warder's *Indian Buddhism*.

These studies have largely confirmed Beal's initial hypothesis—the Chinese Āgamas and the Pali Nikāyas are virtually identical in doctrine. They are two varying recensions of the same set of texts. These texts—popularly referred to simply as 'the Suttas' were assembled by the first generations of the Buddha's followers, before the period of sectarian divisions. They are pre-sectarian Buddhism.

Although these texts are popularly thought of as 'Theravāda' teachings, this is not so. Eminent scholar David Kalupahana went so far as to declare that there is not one word in the Pali Nikāyas that represents ideas peculiar to the Theravāda school—although I think this is a slight exaggeration. Lamotte comments:

> *However, with the exception of the Mahāyānist interpolations in the Ekottara, which are easily discernible, the variations in question [between the Nikāyas and Āgamas] affect hardly anything save the method of expression or the arrangement of the subjects. The doctrinal basis common to the Nikāyas and Āgamas is remarkably uniform. Preserved and transmitted by the schools, the sutras do not, however, constitute scholastic documents, but are the common heritage of all the sects.*

The contributions of the schools are mostly limited to fixing the final arrangement of the texts and standardising the dialect. Interpolations of sectarian ideas are few and usually readily recognisable. To pick one random example of an apparent sectarian statement, let's consider what the Saṁyutta of the Theravādins and the Saṁyukta of the Sarvāstivādins tell us about how the four noble truths are realised in time. The Theravāda says that one who sees any one of the four noble truths also sees the others (SN 56.30). This sutta, which has no counterpart in the Sarvāstivāda, implies that the four truths are realised all at once. In contrast, a number of Sarvāstivāda suttas, which have no Theravāda counterparts, say that one will come to know each of the four

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noble truths in sequence, one after the other (SA 435-437). This relates to the disputed question of sudden (*ekābhisamaya*) versus gradual (*anupubbābhisamaya*) attainment. Appropriately, the Theravāda was a classic *ekābhisamaya* school, and in their Abhidhamma they developed the theory that all the four noble truths were realised in one mind moment. The Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma argued the contrary position, that the truths were realised gradually. This dispute became one of the major sectarian battlegrounds in later Chinese Buddhism, but its roots appear already in the Saṁyuttas. Notice that, while the two schools do differ on this point, the very fact that they share the doctrine of the four noble truths is what makes this dialogue meaningful. If they didn't share the basic teachings in common, they couldn't argue about the details of interpretation.

We must, however, remain cautious when drawing conclusions from apparent differences. Even the best scholars can make mistakes, especially as new material is constantly coming to light. For example, Thich Minh Chau, one of the great pioneers of Āgama-Nikāya studies, noticed that the Jīvaka Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya (MN 55) was absent from the corresponding Sarvāstivādin Madhyama Āgama, and indeed was not found anywhere in the Chinese Āgamas. This sutta deals with the question of meat eating. As is well known, Theravāda monastics usually allow meat eating, while Mahāyānists generally do not. The Theravāda sutta, consistent with the practice in Theravāda cultures, permits meat eating. Thich Minh Chau suggested that its absence from the Sarvāstivāda indicated that, even from such an early time, the practice of vegetarianism was favoured by the Sarvāstivāda. This conclusion was a reasonable one at the time. But since then, the Sarvāstivāda Dīrgha Āgama has been discovered and partly explored. That collection has a version of the Jīvaka Sutta (along with several other important Majjhima suttas missing from the Sarvāstivāda Madhyama Āgama). So its absence from the Madhyama is not because of a sectarian difference, but simply because the Theravādins chose to place it in their Majjhima, while the Sarvāstivādins chose to place it in their Dīrgha.

It is easy to forget, in our times, that the reason why the Nikāyas carry such prestige is largely due to the discovery that they are very similar to corresponding collections of sutras found in Chinese translation. The logic is powerful: the Southern (Theravāda) school and the Northern (Chinese) schools were separated by vast distances, with only occasional contacts for the better part of the past 2000 years. Even before that, within India herself, the schools had separated and passed down distinct versions of their canonical scriptures. Yet despite this separation, their root canonical scriptures are doctrinally almost identical.

These conclusions were arrived at by the early generations of cross-cultural Buddhist scholars, both Western and Eastern. Their findings gave strong impetus to the authority of the Pali Nikāyas and Chinese Āgamas and the importance of studying these collections on a comparative basis. These findings have been taken to heart in modern Buddhist studies especially in Taiwan and Japan. However in the English-speaking world, the Chinese Āgamas have been comparatively neglected. This seems to be due to a number of factors, not least the practical difficulty of learning to read Chinese.

There is also the assumption that the Chinese translations are more 'fuzzy' and hence less reliable than the Indic texts. In many psychological and philosophical contexts, the precision of the Pali is obscured in Chinese translation; and sometimes the vagueness of Chinese grammar makes the problem worse. While this is true in certain cases, it really depends on what one is looking for. Often we can tell with a fair degree of certainty what Indic term the Chinese translator had before him. And the 'fuzziness' of translation is only relevant at close focus, when considering the meaning of a particular word. At a greater distance for example, when considering the meaning of a whole sentence, there is often little difference. Furthermore when we look at larger textual blocks, such as a whole paragraph, the difference disappears altogether.

As an example of this, consider the term 覺 (jue2). This can carry a variety of meanings, usually connected with *bodhi*, awakening or enlightenment. But what are we to make of this term when it appears in the formula for the first *jhāna*: 有覺有觀 with 覺, with investigation'? Here 覺 cannot stand for bodhi or anything similar. Now, the jhāna formula is very common and standard throughout the Nikāyas and Āgamas. We can be fairly certain that 覺 must stand for the corresponding Pali term *vitakka* ('thought', or 'initial application of mind'). This is confirmed when we see that in Sanskrit texts that closely relate to the originals from which the Chinese was translated, the term used is indeed *vitarka*. Having established this, whenever we see the term appearing in the jhāna formula, we know that it means vitakka, and we know this with as much certainty as if we had read the Indic original. So in such cases, the Chinese translations are just as accurate and authoritative as the Pali, and sometimes may even be more reliable.

Another possible reason for the relative neglect of the Āgamas in the English-speaking world is the perception that they are later than the Nikāyas. This impression has been reinforced by no less an eminence than Etienne Lamotte, whose opinion has been often repeated. But his main reason for this conclusion was that the Chinese Saṁyukta agama included a long passage from a late 'Life of King Asoka'. However, Japanese and Taiwanese scholars have long recognised that this is an alien interpolation into the Saṁyukta, probably nothing more than a filing error by a careless librarian sometime in China. A closer examination of the content of the Āgamas suggests that they are, generally speaking, neither earlier nor later than the Nikāyas, but rather both sets collected materials over roughly the same period of time.

It is beyond the scope of this little essay to examine the various collections in detail, but we can review the basics. Here is a table of the main existing collections. The 'T' numbers refer to the sutra numbers in the standard Taisho edition of the Chinese canon.

Theravāda Nikāyas	Sarvāstivāda Āgamas	Other Āgamas (in Chinese)
Dīgha (Pali)	Dīrgha (Sanskrit)	T1 Dīrgha (Dharmaguptaka, trans. Buddhayaśas)
Majjhima (Pali)	T26 Madhyama (Chinese trans. Gotama Saṅghadeva)	
Saṁyutta (Pali)	T99 Saṁyukta (Chinese trans. Guṇabhadra)	Two 'other' Saṁyuktas (T100, T101, unknown schools)
Aṅguttara (Pali)		T125 Ekottara (Mahā saṅghika?, trans. Gotama Saṅghadeva)

The Sarvāstivāda Dīrgha is an exciting find: an ancient Sanskrit manuscript, two-thirds of which have mysteriously appeared from Afghanistan in recent years. It has not yet been edited and published. When available, it will be seen that we have a nearly complete collection of sutras from the Sarvāstivāda school. In addition there is the Dīrgha from the Dharmaguptaka school. The school of the Ekottara is really unknown, though some scholars tentatively assign it to the Mahāsaṅghikas. These are all early schools of Buddhism that thrived in ancient India. The fifth Pali Nikāya, the Khuddaka, is a miscellaneous collection, containing a mix of early and late material. While there is occasional reference in the Chinese and Tibetan canons to a Kudraka Āgama there is no existing counterpart of the collection as a whole. Nevertheless, there are many existing counterparts to sections of the Khuddaka, including the Dhammapada, Jātakas, Aṭṭmmhakavagga, and so on.

The Tibetan canon does not contain any major Āgamas of early sutras. This seems to be because by the time Buddhism went to Tibet, from around 700CE, there was not

They are the answers given by teachers of old to the question: 'What does Buddhism mean for us?' Each succeeding generation must undertake the delicate task of hermeneutics, the re-acculturation of the Dhamma in time and place. And in our times, so different from those of any Buddhist era or culture of the past, we must find our own answers.

much interest in studying the Āgamas sutras. Nevertheless, there is a fair number of early sutras scattered through the vast Tibetan collection, individually or in small groups. In addition, there is a fair number of quotes and references to Āgamas sutras found embedded in later treatises. So although the Āgamas themselves are sadly absent in Tibetan, they are acknowledged and accepted as canonical.

By examining the collections of texts side by side, we can determine to what extent the schools may have introduced their own ideas into the canons. This process, happily enough, reveals that sectarian ideas are almost completely absent. Only here and there, searching with a critical eye, can one tentatively discern minor sectarian influences. The most reasonable explanation for this situation is that these texts were already accepted across the Buddhist community as canonical well before the period of schisms.

This does not mean that everything found in these texts is literally the 'Word of the Buddha'. The first schism was over 100 years after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, which allows plenty of time for editorial manipulations. The texts themselves remind us that what is essential are 'those suttas spoken by the Tathagata'. Much of the material in the early Nikāyas/Āgamas is not 'spoken by the Tathagata', for example, background stories and narrative. This should not be regarded as authoritative in the deep sense. And indeed, comparison between corresponding sutras in the Nikāyas and Āgamas frequently reveals that, while the doctrinal matter is very similar, the setting and other incidental details may be different. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, but shows a tendency in the compilation of the canon to regard doctrinal matter as the heart, and treat incidental matter rather freely. There are even instructions in two Vinayas on what to do if one forgets the setting of a sutra. These more or less instruct the monks to just say it was at Sāvatthī!

Perhaps another reason for the relative neglect of the Āgamas is their very closeness to the Nikāyas. We have to go to a lot of effort to discover what we think we know already: the core Buddhist teachings really are the four noble truths, the noble eightfold path, dependent origination, and so on. Although there are occasional instructive variations, the main benefit of this study is not in the content of the teaching, but in the method. Rather than assuming that the scriptures of just one school are the first and last word on what the Buddha taught, we are investigating into the root teachings shared in common between the schools. Such an approach will not only help us to get 'back to the Buddha', but it will provide the best platform for an improved understanding between the Buddhist schools we find alive today.

I started out this essay by criticising 'Pali fundamentalism'; but we must also beware of becoming 'pre-sectarian' fundamentalists! The teachings of the various schools are not just a sheer mass of error and meaningless corruption, any more than they are ironclad formulations of 'ultimate truth'. They are the answers given by teachers of old to the question: 'What does Buddhism mean for us?' Each succeeding generation must undertake the delicate task of hermeneutics, the re-acculturation of the Dhamma in time and place. And in our times, so different from those of any Buddhist era or culture of the past, we must find our own answers. Looked at from this perspective, the teachings of the schools offer us invaluable lessons, a wealth of precedent bequeathed us by our ancestors in faith. Just as the great Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa employed an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Nikāyas, many of the greatest 'Mahāyāna' scholars, such as Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and AsaṅEga, based themselves securely on the Āgamas. By following their example and making the effort to thoroughly learn these Teachings we can understand, practise, and propagate the living Dhamma for the sake of all sentient beings.

Glimpses into the Origin and Development of the ABHIDHAMMA

By Robert Carleton Moult

Some time ago, I was shocked when I heard a meditation teacher wrongly refer to the seventeen thought moments of the sense-door process as the word of the Buddha. For many people, the Abhidhamma is what is included in the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha. This is because the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha is the basis of popular Abhidhamma texts such as "A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma" (with Bhikkhu Bodhi as General Editor) and "Buddha Abhidhamma Ultimate Science" by Dr Mehm Tin Mon. The Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha was written about 1500 years after the Buddha's *parinibbāna* and includes many concepts introduced after the compilation of the seven books of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. This article discusses the origin of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the later additions (the seventeen thought moments are one of these "later additions").

EXTANT THERAVADA ABHIDHAMMA

The Theravada Abhidhamma Piṭaka consists of seven books, each with a very different style of presentation:

- **Dhammasaṅgaṇī** (Buddhist Psychological Ethics): A detailed listing of all phenomena with an analysis of consciousness (*citta*), accompanying mental factors (*cetasikas*) and matter (*rūpa*)
- **Vibhaṅga** (Book of Analysis): Eighteen essays analysing topics such as aggregates (*khandha*), bases (*āyatana*), elements (*dhātu*), truths (*sacca*), faculties (*indriya*) and dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)

Above image showing the Buddha teaching Abhidhamma in Tāvatiṃsa Heaven to his mother and other Devas

Seven years later, during the three months of the rainy season retreat, the Buddha went to Tāvatiṃsa heaven to teach the Abhidhamma to his former mother and many other *devas*.

§ **Dhātukathā** (Discourse on Elements): Listing of sub-groupings of the five aggregates (*khandha*), twelve bases (*āyatana*) and eighteen elements (*dhātu*)

§ **Puggalapaññatti** (Designation of Human Types): Different types of individuals are classified in a form following the Aṅguttara Nikāya.

§ **Kathāvatthu** (Points of Controversy): Written by Moggaliputta Tissa during the Third Council to list and refute doctrinal points of other schools

§ **Yamaka** (Book of Pairs): This text has not been translated. It records pairs of questions with their opposites.

§ **Paṭṭhāna** (Conditional Relations): This massive text has only been partially translated. It details the 24 ways in which the phenomena described in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī interrelate with each other.

TRADITIONAL ORIGIN OF THE ABHIDHAMMA

The traditional origin of the Abhidhamma is detailed in the Introductory Discourse of Buddhaghosa's Atthasālinī[1], his commentary to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī (the first book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka):

During the fourth week [after His enlightenment] He sat in a jewel house in the north-west direction. The jewel house here does not mean a house made of the seven jewels but the place where he contemplated the seven books [of the Abhidhamma]. And while He contemplated the contents of the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, His body did not emit rays; and similarly with the contemplation of the next five books. But when, coming to the Great Book [the Paṭṭhāna], He began to contemplate the twenty-four causal relations of condition, of presentation, and so on, His omniscience certainly found its opportunity therein... Rays of six colours – indigo, golden, red, white, tawny, and dazzling [note: the origin of the colours of the Buddhist flag] – issued from the Teacher's body, as He was contemplating the subtle and abstruse Law by His omniscience which had found such opportunity.

Seven years later, during the three months of the rainy season retreat, the Buddha went to Tāvatiṃsa heaven to teach the Abhidhamma to his former mother and many other *devas*. It is said that only by listening to the entire Abhidhamma discourse in **one** session can the Dhamma be realised. As only *devas* could do that, He taught the Abhidhamma in heaven and not to humans in this world. Although he took three months of human time to accomplish the task, the whole discourse lasted only 3.6 minutes according to Tāvatiṃsa time. Nevertheless, as the Buddha was a human, He had to attend to his mundane bodily needs. Each day, when it was time for Him to descend from Tāvatiṃsa heaven for His alms-round, He created an image of Himself and willed that the created Buddha taught the Dhamma so much during His absence. After His daily alms-round, the Buddha met Sāriputta and told him that so much had been taught during the interval. Thus, there are three versions of Abhidhamma:

§ Taught by the Buddha in Tāvatiṃsa Heaven (long version)

§ Taught by the Buddha to Sāriputta (short version)

§ Taught by Sāriputta to 500 monks (medium length version; this is the version of the Abhidhamma passed to us)

Buddhaghosa's Atthasālinī continues, "The textual order of the Abhidhamma originated with Sāriputta; the numerical series in the Great Book [the Paṭṭhāna] was also determined by him. In this way the Elder, without spoiling the unique doctrine, laid down the numerical series in order

[1]Pali Text Society Translation

to make it easy to learn, remember, study and teach the Law."

Buddhaghosa explains that the table of contents of the fifth book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the Kathāvatthu, was initially laid out by the Buddha but later expanded upon by Moggaliputta Tissa at the time of the Third Council, as foreseen by the Buddha. Buddhaghosa thereby justifies the inclusion of the Kathāvatthu as one of the seven books of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

MY PERSONAL VIEW ON THE ORIGIN OF THE ABHIDHAMMA

The Pāsādika Sutta (DN 29) recounts the dissension among the followers of the Jain founder, Niganṭha Nātaputta, immediately following his death. The Buddha then instructs that shortly after His death, the Sangha should, "... come together and recite [the 37 *bodhipakkhiya-dhammas*, the requisites of enlightenment], setting meaning beside meaning and expression beside expression, without dissension, in order that this holy life may continue and be established for a long time...".

The Sangīti Sutta (DN 33) takes place soon after the events of the Pāsādika Sutta. In the Sangīti Sutta, Sāriputta leads a group of monks in chanting an extended list of 230 items. In his translation of the Digha Nikāya, Maurice Walshe comments that the listing has been compared by different writers to the *mātikā* of the Abhidhamma. The *mātikā* is an extensive "table of contents" which appears at the beginning of the Dhammasaṅgaṇī; it lists 122 modes of classification found in the Abhidhamma texts.

My personal view is that at the time of the First Council, held soon after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, the texts of the Abhidhamma Pitaka may not have existed in their present form (as claimed by Buddhaghosa), but that there were certainly a lot of lists in existence with accompanying material. It is quite possible that the *mātikā* of the Abhidhamma was already in place by this time.

The first schism occurred at the Second Council, held about a century after the Buddha's parinibbāna. At this time, the Mahāsanghika monks (the forerunners of the Mahayanists) split from the more traditional Sthaviravāda monks (the forerunners of the Theravadins) over doctrinal points. In his historical book, "Indian Buddhism", A K Warder states, "already within the first two centuries after the *parinibbāna*, and in a great part before the First Schism, a substantial development [of the Abhidhamma] had taken place."

Personally, I tend to agree with Warder's conclusion. Nevertheless, I accept the Abhidhamma Piṭaka as canonical because, as explained in the Pāsādika Sutta and the Sangīti Sutta, the Buddha endorsed the approach of teaching lists of dhammas, "setting meaning beside meaning and expression beside expression". I believe that the framework for the Abhidhamma Piṭaka was largely in place during the lifetime of the Buddha.

I am not aware of any contradictions between the Suttas and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and I do not believe that the conservative Sthaviravāda monks would have been willing to introduce significant new material into the teachings, especially within such a short time of the Buddha's *parinibbāna*.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ABHIDHAMMA

About two thousand years ago, the three Piṭakas (Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma) were written down in Pāli. A large number of commentaries, some reputedly dating back to the time of the Buddha, were also written at this time. Most of the original commentaries were written in Sinhalese. These original texts were the source material for Buddhaghosa's commentaries written in Pāli about fifteen hundred years ago.

Buddhaghosa saw himself as a translator and compiler of existing materials. He made an effort not to insert his own opinion into the commentaries. In those few cases where he does express an opinion, it is clearly identified. Because much of the source material was believed to date back to the time of the Buddha, the Theravada tradition accepts Buddhaghosa's works as supplements to the Pāli canon.

Buddhaghosa's source materials have all been lost with the exception of the Milinda Pañhā (Debates of King Milinda) and Upatissa's Vimuttimagga (Path of Freedom). The Vimuttimagga has a similar structure to Buddhaghosa's encyclopedic Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification). The main contribution of the Vimuttimagga to the Abhidhamma is the laying out of the names and order of the thought moments in the sense door process. The Visuddhimagga expands on this structure by providing quantities (such as seven *javana* thought moments), crafting a mind door process and the processes for events such as rebirth and attainments.

At the same time that Buddhaghosa was expanding on the Tipiṭaka with his commentaries, Buddhadatta was developing a condensed version of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka to be used as a study guide. His text, Abhidhammāvatāra, is only 138 pages long and is written completely in verse to make it easy to memorise. Buddhadatta provided a simple

	Abhidhamma Piṭaka	Later Additions
Structure	Seven texts, each with its own distinct structure	Highly structured (Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha is a "study guide")
Cetasikas	Open-ended, overlapping lists of *"dhammas"*	Fixed list of 52 *cetasikas* (the term *"cetasika"* used in this context is a later addition)
Citta Process	Not mentioned	Details provided of the sense door, mind-door, attainment and rebirth processes
Rūpa	Fixed list of 27 *rūpas*	Added heart-base to list; added groupings of *rūpas* (*kalāpas*)
Meditation	Very similar to Suttas	Considerable details added including *carita* (character), *nimitta* (mental image); four levels of *jhāna* expanded to five
Kamma	Very similar to Suttas with addition of "reserve kamma"	Many more types of kamma defined (productive, supportive, obstructive, destructive, weighty, death-proximate, habitual, inoperative, etc.)

yet comprehensive structure to condense the massive collection of details found in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

For example, the opening section of the Dhammasaṅgaṇī lists wholesome *"dhammas"* using multiple overlapping groupings (absorption factors, faculties, path factors, powers, wholesome roots, etc.) largely taken from the Suttas. Buddhadatta eliminates the overlap ("wisdom" is part of seven different groupings in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī). Using this approach of eliminating overlap, Buddhadatta comes up with a condensed list of 52 mental factors (*cetasikas*) and this structure was also used by Anuruddha in his Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha.

The Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha serves the same purpose as the Abhidhammāvatāra—to provide a concise overview of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and related materials. The Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha owes much of its framework to the Abhidhammāvatāra. For example, it was Buddhadatta who introduced consciousness, 52 mental factors, 28 types of matter and Nibbāna as "realities" as distinct from "concepts".

The table above summarises some of the later additions to the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

MY ADVICE

One should view the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha as it was intended – as a starting point in the study of the Abhidhamma. Having grasped an overview of the subject from the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha, one should then proceed to study the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and it will then be clear what materials in the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha were "later additions". These later additions are not necessarily wrong or embellishments, but they can be viewed as non-core teachings. Though non-core teachings may be interesting to discuss, they should not distract us from the important themes contained in the Tipiṭaka.

The Abhidhamma should not be viewed as an "intellectual exercise". The Abhidhamma provides a framework for the understanding of our everyday experience and this understanding will act as a condition for the arising of insight. For example, in the Anupada Sutta (MN 111), the Buddha praised Sāriputta for being able to detect some twenty dhammas occurring together with the *jhānas* (including the *jhāna* factors) as they arise, persist and disappear.

The time-line below shows important dates in the development of the Abhidhamma. These dates are only approximate and may vary by as much as two hundred years.

Reaching Out With Gifts of Dhamma

In 2005, Buddhist devotees in different parts of the country sent metta to Ven Aggacitta and did distant healing for him when he suffered a bout of ill health. In his own words, all this activity "produced miraculous results." To show his gratitude, Bhante went on a Thanksgiving Dhammadana tour in February, March and April 2006, bearing gifts to Buddhist devotees in the Klang Valley, Penang, Sarawak, Singapore and Johor Bahru.

His bountiful gifts of talks, discussions, workshops and Q & A sessions are in the tables below.

Date	Talk/Discussion	Venue/Time
In the Klang Valley, 3 – 6 February		
3 Feb	"Wheels of Fortune" based on Cakka Sutta (AN 4.31)	Tan Buck Soon's residence after lunch *dāna*
	Meditation: Different Objects, Different Methods—Finding the Best for Yourself	Bandar Utama Buddhist Society evening
4 Feb	"Rare Occasions" based on Pubbanhasutta (AN 3.150) & Patubhavasutta (AN 6.96)	Ng Beng Lean's residence after lunch dana
	Q & A: How to improve/deepen one's meditation practice	Buddhist Wisdom Centre evening
5 Feb	"Canine Lessons for the Year of the Dog" based on Kummopama Sutta (SN 35:240)	Buddhist Wisdom Centre after lunch dana
	Sutta Discussion: Contemporary understanding of *jhāna* against that described in the suttas (MN 111, 118, 119)	Buddhist Wisdom Centre afternoon
	"The Responsibilities of a Human Being and How to be Focussed on On-doing Activities"	BMSM, Kajang evening
6 Feb	"Praised by the Wise" based on Panditasutta (AN 3.45)	David Chang's residence after lunch dana
In Penang, Sarawak, Singapore and Johor Bahru, 29 March – 8 April		
28 Mar	Discussion: *Kammic* Debts & Healing	Mettananda Vihara, Penang evening
29 Mar	"Don't be Complacent with Just Sanghadana" based on Piti Sutta (AN 5.176)	Mettananda Vihara, Penang after lunch dana
	Discussion on miscellaneous topics	Inner Peace Club, Miri evening
30 Mar	"Giving Wisely" based on Sappurisadana Suttas (AN 5.147 & 148)	Inner Peace Club, Miri after lunch dana
	"Mutual Care, Sure Security" based on Sedaka Sutta (SN 47.19)	Inner Peace Club, Miri evening
31 Mar	Sharing Merits with Departed Ones	Kuching Buddhist Society (KBS) after lunch dana
	"Mutual Care, Sure Security" based on Sedaka Sutta (SN 47.19)	Kuching Buddhist Society evening
1 Apr	Difference between Sharing and Transfering Merits	Kuching Bhagawan Buddhist Society (KBBS) after breakfast dana
	Low and High End Sharing of Merits	Kuching Bhagawan Buddhist Soc. after lunch dana
	Workshop on How to Counter Christian Evangelism	Kuching Bhagawan Buddhist Society afternoon
	Honouring the Departed	Kuching Bhagawan Buddhist Society evening
2 Apr	"From Darkness to Darkness" based on Tamotama Sutta (AN 4.85)	Kuching Buddhist Society after lunch dana
	Interview (edited version below)	Kuching Buddhist Society afternoon
	Sangha Practice in the 21st Century	Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association, Kuching evening
4 Apr	"Destinies of the Stingy and the Generous" based on Macchari Sutta (SN 1.49)	Lim Poh Cheng's residence, Singapore after lunch dana
	Meditation Workshop	Palelai Buddhist Temple, Singapore evening
5 Apr	"What is Good" based on Sadhu Sutta (SN 1.33)	Colin Chan's residence, Singapore after lunch dana
	Mindfulness and Its Benefits	Buddhist Fellowship, Singapore evening
6 Apr	"Rebirth on Account of Giving" based on Danupapatti Sutta (AN 8.35)	Buddhist Fellowship, Singapore after lunch dana
	Workshop on Bereavement and Memorial services	Buddhist Fellowship, Singapore afternoon
	Right Intention and Right Effort	Buddhist Fellowship, Singapore evening
7 Apr	Discussion on various topics	Leong Liew Geok's residence, Singapore after breakfast dana
	"Ways of Making Merits & Their Results" based on Punnakiriyavatthu Sutta (AN 8.36)	Ng Yee Kong's residence, Singapore after lunch dana
	Satipatthana Vipassana / Honouring the Departed	Metta Lodge, Johor Bahru evening
8 Apr	"Praised by the Wise" based on Pandita Sutta (AN 3.45)	Metta Lodge, Johor Bahru after lunch dana
	Discussion: What Happens After Death	Metta Lodge, Johor Bahru afternoon

Read on for the accolades and encore calls from the places Bhante visited.

NG BENG LEAN, *Klang Valley:*

My son's birthday wish was duly fulfilled on 4 February when we had a lunch dana for Bhante Aggacitta at my house. It was the first time for most of my neighbours to attend a dana. I can still remember vividly when, after the Dhamma talk, there was moment when I paused to feel the energy in our house and the feeling was one of refinement, lightness and calm. There was a light breeze drifting gently through the house. At that point, I felt so connected to all the beings present in our house. I could feel their joy. That certainly was the result of a virtuous monk gracing our home.

A particularly memorable session was the sutta discussion held in Buddhist Wisdom Centre after lunch dana on 5 February Bhante led a sutta discussion questioning the contemporary understanding of jhana against that described in the suttas. At the end of the discussion, an attempt was made to get Bhante to agree to give regular sessions on the suttas. But, mindful of Bhante's very busy schedule, the members will have to be satisfied with whatever we can glean.

All co-organisers unanimously expressed the hope that Bhante will plan his visits to the Klang Valley in conjunction with the Chinese New Year as an annual affair.

ANTHONY YEO, *Miri:*

It had been months since we had the last Dhamma talk. We were pondering over our next Dhamma talk when Tan Guan Soon alerted us about Bhante Aggacitta's Dhamma tour of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore, with an extended East Malaysia leg up to Kuching. Of course, we grabbed the opportunity. In fact, we hope that the momentum of many such visits to Kuching will spill over to Miri!

Our Myanmar brothers and sisters in Miri were pleasantly surprised by Bhante's fluency in the Burmese language. We were told by one of them that Bhante speaks Burmese like a Burmese! Despite the relatively short time, Bhante's visit to Miri has had a most profound effect in encouraging us to practise the Dhamma. Maha *sādhu* to Bhante!!

TAN HUNG LANG, *Kuching:*

We are very happy to have Bhante and really grateful to him for sharing the Dhamma with us. What we really want is to see him more often. This is what we have to say: "Bhante, you should pity us. You have compassion for us and want us to meditate, but there's no one to teach us." We also appreciate the Dhamma talks. Bhante is really very good—very authoritative on the scriptures, and his talks are very clear cut. Whatever he says is backed up by reference to the suttas.

ANG TECK HOCK, *Johor Bharu:*

It is a pity that Bhante does not come to Johor Bahru more frequently. If only he can come once a year. He is knowledgeable in the suttas and various meditation techniques. He is well respected by all Theravadans in this region and in Singapore, being a shining example of how a monk should conduct himself.

JIMMY VOON, *Singapore:*

Bhante's talks were always interesting and very Asian. I could easily relate to and understand them although some were quite profound. Lots have been said about him being a "Stern N Strict" monk, but after serving him during his stay in Singapore for two consecutive years, I can assure you that he is one of the most down to earth and approachable Sangha members I have ever met. I asked a lot of silly questions but with his patience and wisdom, he answered all of them to my satisfaction.

Bhante preferred to join the resident monk for morning *piṇḍacāra* in a nearby hawker centre instead of just accepting breakfast dana from us. If every Theravada monk in

Singapore practised this way I feel that we will put an end to the activities of "bogus monks" who give amulets from their alms bowls in exchange for money. This will help to clear misconceptions about monks' livelihood and clean up our tarnished Buddhist image.

We are very grateful to Bhante for kindly sacrificing his rest time to conduct an impromptu workshop on "Bereavement and Memorial Services" for the Ehipassiko Chanting Group (ECG) members. We have indeed learnt a lot from him. With his kind advice and learned suggestions, we will be changing the format of our chanting service to further provide proper and more meaningful Buddhist funeral services in the near future.

* * *

In Kuching, Bhante fielded questions from some members of Kuching Buddhist Society in an interview. This session is reproduced for us by WANG WEE CHOO.

Venerable, what is the objective of your Dhamma Tour?

It is a "Thanksgiving Dhammadana Tour" to thank the Buddhists who sent me metta while I was ill.

How did you know that Buddhists had been holding *puja* and sending metta to you?

While I was in the hospital I felt energised and alert despite the drugs.

At the time when you were undergoing treatment, what thoughts went thorough your mind?

I didn't think of the future or what I would do after that. I was just resting and meditating. The thought of death never crossed my mind.

Actually, the blood I coughed out last year was only one-quarter of what I coughed out when I was in Burma in 1993. I was gasping for breath and everyone then thought I was dying. A few years ago, while we SBS monastics were doing distant healing for a former course-mate of mine who had terminal cancer, I felt very weak. I coughed out blood-stained sputum and so I stopped the healing, rested for a few days and recovered.

Last year Chief Reverend Dr K Sri Dhammananda and Sayadaw U Silananda were gravely ill and we again did distant healing for them too. However, I think I didn't do it right and so my energy was sapped.

Your Dhamma talk last night was "Mutual Care Sure Security". Was it inspired by your illness and the concern that the Buddhist friends had for you ?

Not really. In fact this is the fourth time I have given this talk. I was trying to get it made into a CD but the recording was bad then. I did a variation of the talk in Miri two nights ago.

As for the healing, I think it was more of the *kammic* cause and effect. I did healing for people and in return other people did healing for me.

Christian missionaries have been very successful in converting many Chinese, especially the young people, to Christianity. What is your view on this?

Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the East, while in the West and in Australia Buddhism is gaining a foothold. Maybe it is due to disillusionment with the state of the prevalent religion.

For example, the Sangha in Asia has reached a state of moral decadence. It has set in because of too many gains and respect from lay supporters, particularly led by the older generation. If the senior monks give priority to gains and fame, the young monks will follow and therefore neglect their fundamental duty of study and practice of the DhammaVinaya, including meditation. Monkhood in Asia has degenerated to priesthood, which is primarily concerned with pastoral service. The younger generation, being exposed to critical Western thinking, is neither as docile nor as pious as their elders. They do not hesitate to scrutinise the opulent and decadent Sangha. It is no wonder that they become disillusioned and turn to more attractive religions like Christianity. It all boils down to the Sangha members not doing their fundamental duty because they are being pampered by the laity.

Different religions have different objectives. Buddhists, especially the Theravadins, are not so concerned about converting other people. We are more concerned about purifying ourselves first.

Theravada Buddhism stresses self-reliance, which is a difficult feature to "sell". Many people turn to religion

when they are in trouble and that is the time when they prefer to take refuge in a savior. In this respect, Theravada is different from Mahayana Buddhism in that they have the image of Kuan Yin to pray to.

Nonetheless, individual inclination and interest play a large part in one's choice of religion. Some people may like to practise meditation; some prefer social work or dana. We should tap all the potential like what is being done in KBS. Gather together all the Theravadins of different talents and then there will be more resources to operate with. However, because of the element of affinity, people tend to conglomerate according to their interest.

You must operate based on the objectives of your society, which can have different wings to cater for members with different interests.

Lay people seem to place excessive emphasis on doing dana as opposed to meditation. Is this because of the general belief that dana begets merits that can take them that much closer to liberation? If so, is there a flaw in the teachings — this over-emphasis on dana for merits?

The Buddha gave different teachings for lay people and for monks. For monks he talked about the triple training (*sila, samadhi, paññā*) leading to liberation (arahantship). For lay people he knew that this was quite impossible with all the responsibilities of lay life, so he talked mostly about dana and sila and the benefits that can be accrued such as long life, good rebirth, wealth and beauty, and only sometimes about bhavana.

People today seem to think that they can have the best of both worlds: periods of intensive retreats to gain *samādhi* and insight but still clinging on to the enjoyment of lay life. If you want liberation (arahantship), you have to renounce the worldly life—there are no two ways about it. But even such serious lay yogis are very few compared with the masses who are ever ready to give dana.

When most lay people do dana, I do not think they are thinking of liberation. It could be that for poor people, they realise that in the past they had neglected to do dana, so they hope to make up for it in order not to be poor next time. For the richer ones, maybe they want a guarantee of future wealth.

This emphasis on dana is already ingrained in the Nikayas. Again and again the Buddha talked about the benefits of dana, particularly to the Sangha as "the incomparable field of merit in the world". He gave several talks on the spectrum of kammic returns: for example, giving to a human being brings more merits than giving to an animal; to an *anagami* brings better returns than giving to a *sotapanna*; giving to the Sangha brings immeasurable returns, and so on. For the Chinese mentality—that is already notoriously calculating and materialistic—this is not very healthy at all.

People today seem to think that they can have the best of both worlds: periods of intensive retreats to gain samadhi and insight but still clinging on to the enjoyment of lay life. If you want liberation (arahantship), you have to renounce the worldly life—there are no two ways about it.

I personally feel that the concept of *paramis* was introduced in the later scriptures to counteract this over-emphasis on dana. This concept did not appear in the early scriptures. To gain paramis, one has to give with no thought of worldly gain, only with thought of liberation or just the intention to give what is needed and suitable at the right time. This applies to all the paramis.

Actually, I've been trying to diffuse this obsession with kammic returns, but this has resulted in my getting poison-pen letters. They accuse me of not following the teachings, and even quote from the suttas to say that the Buddha praised making offerings to monks even if they don't need them. Someone even said that although the monks do not need the offered items, the people need the merits of such dana. Thus we are obliged to accept out of compassion for them, even if it is burdensome to us.

Should counseling play a bigger role in the training of the Sangha, especially for those who are interested in missionary work?

The objective of SBS is to provide a basic course that includes the study and practice of the Dhamma Vinaya and

the daily application of mindfulness and full awareness. In addition we also try to cater for the different inclinations, talents and abilities of the monastic trainee.

One can major in meditation, vinaya, do research into the Pali scriptures, Dhamma propagation or counseling. Whatever one's interest is, one must do it within the boundaries of the vinaya. Resident monks are encouraged to practise meditation and to be grounded in restraining their senses before going out to preach to other people.

Buddhists tend to lose out to the Christian missionaries who are trained in public speaking and counseling. What do you think of this?

At SBS these are in the curriculum but there are not enough trainees to conduct a regular, structured course. Christian missionaries may have been trained as counselors and in public speaking but they are not trained on how to watch their mind and to restrain themselves. This perhaps explains the cause of scandals, such as embezzlement of church funds and molestation of young people by pastors, which have resulted in widespread disillusionment among more critical Christians.

In our English Section we hardly have any young members. How can Buddhism be made more appealing to the young people?

Revamp the approach in Sunday schools. Adopt a more interactive method instead of using the old system which is based on telling of Jakata Tales or poster drawing. For example Patricia Sherwood, a Buddhist psychologist in Australia, gives drama classes and to her, that is the best way to communicate with young children. Get in touch with modern educationists. Make use of video games because children are fascinated by video games. Introduce them to Buddhist hymns and songs. At Brickfields, the youth group there is doing very well, making use of high-tech, modern approaches.

With the great advancement in science and technology, what role do you think Buddhism plays in the modern world compared to the time of the Buddha?

Externally, the world seems to have changed a lot but the perennial issues of birth, sickness, aging and death are the same. The meditative aspect of Buddhism is spreading throughout the whole world as an effective therapy for physical and mental stress. The Buddhist concept of peace, harmony, loving-kindness is greatly appreciated by Westerners. It does not believe in a Creator but instead postulates the principle of causality—that everything is related to everything else—which is what scientists are verifying. This is most relevant in present times.

The change is in the approach to propagating Buddhism. Buddhism has been preserved by the Sangha who live in isolation. Therefore, their approach to propagating Buddhism is very ancient. When Buddha used similes in his talks, it was appropriate at that time. However, nowadays such similes are not relevant.

If forest monks read too much of the mass media, they might be adversely affected by sensually stimulating advertisements and news items. On the other hand, if they don't read, they might be unable to connect with lay people using modern idiom. For example, Ajahn Brahm reads a lot of newspapers and so can relate very well to the people. He is in touch with the world.

ABBOT'S ADDRESS **FROM PAGE 3**

dealt with different topics but the response from participants was very positive. (See p44 and p49) I think that having such sessions is a very effective way to expose Buddhists to an appreciation of what the Buddha actually taught—at least one that is based on more accurate translations of the Pali originals—thereby helping them to unlearn Theravadin ideas that contradict the Buddha's words and to cope better with the change of perspective. At SBS we try to have such sessions fortnightly on 8th day Uposathas.

SBS embarked on Dhamma propagation in Kamunting Detention Camp when Ven Balacitta and I went there for the first time on Wednesday 21 June. We expected to meet intellectual political detainees, but were rather surprised that none of the inmates who attended the session fitted our expectations. In the end, it was Ven Balacitta's day; he conducted an impromptu but animated talk in Cantonese—a welcome change for me but a sudden one for him that he coped with well.

Another change is just round the corner. This *vassa* period (10 July – 6 October) will mark the gradual implementation in SBS of a practice of the Thai forest tradition that is worthy of emulation. Monastic-lay activities during this period will be restricted so that we can have more private time for our own personal development. This means that, apart from commitments previously agreed upon, SBS monks will not

- attend house danas (except bereavement service for close supporters)
- give Dhamma talks on Saturday mornings after pindacara
- give Dhamma talks to visitors.

However, the Saturday night meditation sessions for the public will continue as usual; so too the planned mid-year meditation retreat from 19-27 August that we hope will inaugurate our new multi-purpose hall (which should be ready for use by then).

Change is inherent in everything. Remember to be aware of that and we shall be able to cope better with it.

Salt Crystal Sutta Study

Discussion at Mettananda Vihara

by Ven Kumāra Bhikkhu

Sutta study is important to know the teachings of the Buddha unadulterated with cultural interpretations. The SBS Sangha encourages us to do just this, and conducts sutta studies when they find the opportunity. This is one such occasion.

On 16 June 2006, we had an interesting discussion on Lonaphala (Salt Crystal) Sutta at Mettananda Vihara, Penang. It was well received by the participants. Even "seasoned" Buddhists seemed to have learned quite a few new things about the workings of *kamma*, rectifying some preconceived notions.

Bhante Aggacitta spent much time preparing the discussion, but unfortunately lost much of his voice just before we left for Penang. As he was not vocally fit enough to conduct the discussion the next day, I was asked to substitute for him—on that day itself! The day before I also had to substitute for him at the last minute for a Dhamma talk at Than Hsiang Temple. So, I had to quickly read up his notes (after having prepared and given an *anumodanā* talk for lunch *dāna*). Fortunately, he was also there to tell me how he planned to go about the discussion. Furthermore, during the discussion session itself, he was also there to guide and interject whenever necessary.

As I was preparing for the talk that afternoon, I thought, "Hmm... so this is why I am in Penang." You see, earlier there was no plan for me to follow Bhante Aggacitta there. He alone was supposed to go for the talk and discussion. "Luckily you're here," said Bhante. But at that time I did not think it was that lucky for me!

The next day, Bhante Aggacitta suggested that I conduct the same in the Klang Valley. I thought it would be great, as it would not be too difficult for me, having been guided through the well-prepared discussion.

Then it occurred to me, "Hmm... Is that why he suddenly 'decided' to lose his voice?" Perhaps it's true what they say: There are no coincidences.

REFLECTIONS

YEW LYE HIN

From the discussion, I have learnt the following:

- My interpretation of what the (translated) sutta meant was not "spot on".
- Sometimes the translation (of a Pali sutta) is not quite correct due to no fault of the translator, as the "original" material he worked with was not correct in the first place.
- Sometimes the translator translated wrongly and this could come about just from using the wrong preposition (as "by" instead of "of"). This reinforces the fact that it is best to be able to read the suttas in Pali. I used to shy away from Dhamma discussions as I had found they were just a platform for someone or some persons to voice their views. This discussion had a big difference in that it was guided by **knowledgeable *bhikkhus***—this is surely another expedient means of imparting the Dhamma. May I have the good *kamma* to attend more of such discussions!

HOR KWEI LOON

It was my first experience with SBS's style of conducting sutta study. It has a number of unique and salient approaches. One was the reviewing of the translation from the primary canonical Pali text and that too was cross-referenced from a number of sources. Liberal and measured references were also quoted from the commentaries. Secondly, the main source of translation was also compared to a number of other translations. This provided the participants with different angles and insight into the subject. Thirdly, there was a good balance between open-mindedness and critical examination of the various translations, sources and interpretation of the subject matter. Above all, the audience was invited to participate freely in the intellectual and insightful exchange. If SBS's intention is to create a Malaysian Buddhist identity, this is one such instance of it—the fine and exemplary display of a truth-seeking spirit, balanced approach, respect for freedom of choice, and trust in the individual to decide for himself. To nurture these qualities, which the Buddha advocated 2500 years ago, will pose a true challenge for SBS.

CONTINUED FROM BACK COVER

It was a joke among us that if one was not mindful during pindacara, coming back uphill would be *dukkha* because the bowl would be heavier. Just one extra mango and it would be dukkha all the way.

FIRST THING TO LET GO

The first thing I had to 'let go of' was the hair. Although there is very little of it left, it still had to go. Vain thoughts crowded my mind. The attachment was so strong that I postponed shaving until the very last moment. My usual barber had already closed shop for the day—it was almost 7pm—so my wife volunteered to do the job, one that she had been waiting to do for sometime!

It is a new experience; the head feels light and cool. The next morning, sitting quietly, contemplating the baldness, I felt a strange prickly sensation on the scalp as if the strands of hair were pushing their way out of their follicles. You have to experience it to know it. Why not give it a try?

When Sheng Bin arrived to pick me up, I was relieved to see Bhante Balacitta sitting in the front seat. I did not have to wear a cap after all. Bhante is bald; I am bald; and Sheng Bin is almost bald.

IMP6 TAKES OFF

On Saturday afternoon of 13 May, IMP6 was officially launched in the *sīmā* hall where Bhante Aggacitta welcomed us. We took the eight precepts and then adjourned to the classroom.

Most of our activities were in the classroom. Bhante Kumara gave a short briefing on the programme schedule. We were then taught how to fix our alms bowl bag, and how to wear the robes and *aṁsa*

There are three ways of wearing the robes: style 1 for casual wear is the easiest, style 2 is more formal while style 3 is for when we go out. Every morning for *piṇḍacāra* we had to wear style 3 which was the hardest. All the resident monastics helped to ensure that we got it right before we ventured out. At the cemetery, before reaching the pindacara hall, Bhante Aggacitta always did a final inspection to ensure that our robes were in order. Most of us still found difficulty wearing it even at the end of the two weeks.

Bhante Aggacitta gave us basic instructions for four guardian meditations and *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. However he emphasised mindfulness at all times, not just during formal meditation. Walking down the hill for pindacara is easy when one is mindful. I tried going barefoot one day and the experience? Unforgettable.

UNFORGETTABLE BAREFOOT EXPERIENCE

The first part of the track was soft and nice to walk on. The feel of moist grass and the soft earth, sandy in some places, slippery in others had to be experienced mindfully as I made one step after another downhill. During the course of the programme, a few of us slipped along this path, luckily without any serious injury. However, Uttamasevaka slipped, aggravating an old injury and had to withdraw from the programme.

Along this 'nice' stretch, one had to be extra mindful to watch out for leeches, attracted by the vibrations of our footsteps—waiting, standing on their hinds, waving their suckers, begging for donations. A momentary lapse of mindfulness caused me to donate a few drops of blood to a leech. After that experience, I discovered I could tell when a leech attached to my foot because it first caused a slight itch that was followed by a slight sucking force at the spot.

This stretch led to a section of concrete road, a hard and rough stretch with an uneven ridged surface that joined on to a stretch of rocky and sandy laterite path. The moment one foot touched the ground, it began to protest. Ouch! Aargh! Why so rough? Where is the mind? I tried to mindfully continue walking and be aware.

I wondered how the monks could do it every day; it seemed so easy to them. Where should I place my foot for the next step? One thought gave rise to another, interspersed with the feeling of pain, pain and pain.

Then I remembered, "Don't label, just be mindful." Finally we arrived. What a relief the smooth, cool floor of the cemetery hall provided. There were many devotees; the food was plentiful; a big *sādhu* to them.

After pindacara, the thought of walking back made my jaw sag. With the feet highly sensitised, the pain was twice or thrice as bad as when walking downhill. Bhante did advise me to wear sandals, though.

Our thoughts on joining IMP6

Compiled by **Ven Kumāra Bhikkhu**

Here are some thoughts by participants of IMP6:

- ☑ I'm absolutely glad I joined IMP. I've learned more methods of meditation as well as to be more mindful. **Samacārī**
- ☑ I'm attached to the environment and all the great teachers here. **Mokkhesi**
- ☑ Rare indeed is a teacher with an all-round knowledge of the vinaya, meditation and *suttas*; yet I found one here in SBS. **Varagavesī**
- ☑ I'm glad to be able to understand the Theravada tradition, to clarify some of the views on the practices, to be introduced to the suttas and the vinaya , and to have the opportunity to interact with the monks and listen to their experiences and advice. **Santikāma**
- ☑ I've learned how to control thinking and make the heart peaceful. I've also learned that there's no "I" in this body. **Nekkhammacitta**
- ☑ It's a well conducted programme led by sincere *bhikkhus* and a most understanding and accommodating abbot. There's strong support from devotees, excellent facilities and an open, friendly atmosphere. **Cittānupassī**
- ☑ I've learnt more about what Dhamma actually is. **Khemaka**
- ☑ IMP has deepened my understanding of Buddhism. I now understand better the differences between Mahayana and Theravada. **Buddharakkhita**
- ☑ I got to know that Malaysia has a very good place to train as a monk. There's a competent teacher and a place conducive to practice. **Dhammagutta**
- ☑ I would like to thank Bhante Aggacitta and all other Bhantes for their kindness and concern and also for work well done. I hope IMP will continue and eventually more local monks will come for formal training in SBS. **Cārujīvaka**

EATING MINDFULLY

Lunch was scheduled for 12noon–1pm. Eating from an alms bowl was a serious matter. We had to consider thoughtfully that we eat alms food not playfully, not for putting on bulk, or for intoxication but for the maintenance of the body for the holy life, etc. Mindfully aware, the mind registered the chewing action, the aroma and taste of the food, the texture of the food being swallowed. Take the next mouthful—ouch, where's the mind now!

I often wondered why the alms bowl is so designed. I discovered that when I pressed a handful of food against the side, I can form a lump of food which goes easily put into the mouth without much spillage. During washing, it's easy to get rid of bits and pieces of food stuck at the sides by just swirling a little water inside the bowl and pouring it out. In the same way, rinsing the bowl after soaping is easy. The bowl may look small but its volume is big. Does anyone have any other discoveries?

It was a joke among us that if one was not mindful during pindacara, coming back uphill would be *dukkha* because the bowl would be heavier. Just one extra mango and it would be dukkha all the way.

LEARNING NEW MONASTIC SKILLS

Among the activities, making amsas and brooms were quite interesting. The materials used were easily available and inexpensive, if not free. Most of us had seen sewing machines but never used one. There was a lot of excitement as we waited for our turn to try out our sewing skills to alter or make amsa to fit ourselves.

Some people did not know that *lidi* is made from the midribs of the palm fronds. Bhante Balacitta taught us a simple method of making brooms using lidi, raffia strings, a small section of PVC pipe, and some sand. After that, we made use of the brooms to sweep the walkway of the classroom.

Bhante Kumara taught us how to construct a simple sundial and use it to determine solar noon at any place. This is very important to monks especially in places where there are no other means to determine the noon time. Bhante Kumara tipped us off that it is easier if we use a computer. He even gave us a website to refer to.

During Pali pronunciation classes, we discovered that most of us were pronouncing Pali words inaccurately. Some anglicised the pronunciation while some recited as in Thai chanting. Bhante Kumara taught us how to pronounce the cerebrals, dentals, aspirates, nasal, etc. There are many books on learning Pali but I do not think I could do it properly without guidance.

We need to learn Pali in order to read the original scriptures, otherwise we would have to rely on translations which may not be accurate. SBS monks and other monks invited for the monkhood-sharing sessions all use the *suttas* as their guide or reference in their practice. I think lay people too should read the suttas in order to know what is taught by the Buddha.

SICKNESS AND HEALTH

On the evening of the day I went barefoot for pindacara, I felt very cold. I had no fever but I was shivering even when wrapped up in my robes and blanket. Everyone was asking what had happened. When Bhante Kum ara asked whether anything unusual occurred I recollected that before reaching the pindacara hall in the cemetery, I heard something that sounded like women crying at a funeral. I was wondering how pindacara could be carried out if there was a funeral service in the hall. The sound stopped after I became mindful of my footsteps again.

Bhante Kumara told me not to worry and massaged certain points on my back and sent me healing *qi*. He also chanted some *parittas* for me. During the night, Bhante Kumara came and administered another session of qi therapy. Miraculously I felt warm throughout the night. I felt better in the morning and recovered as the day passed. I am grateful to Bhante Kumara for his kindness and compassion, and also for his healing skills without medication.

After the incident, I began to control the food that I took, to reduce the heat and wind in the body; taking more fruits and vegetables, and more fluids to balance the loss from perspiration. Health for a monk is of utmost importance in order for him to perform his duties. A strong and healthy body is needed for meditation. I find that yoga and *qigong* can help in this respect. Bhante Thitavijjo taught us yoga while Bhante Kumara taught us qigong.

ANYONE FOR MONKHOOD?

I found the two-week programme extremely beneficial. It was a healing experience for body and mind. To all who are wondering what it's like to be a monk, I would like to recommend that you come and find out for yourself in the next IMP!

We'd like to share with you the beautiful process of our inspired, collective efforts.

1 Jan The monastics go for *piṇḍacāra* at Kuala Sepetang, previously known as Port Weld, and after that, *dāna* in Sepetang Buddhist Society. Ven Kumara delivers a talk on "Merits and Precepts". Ven Kumara leaves for PJ to work on Newszine #5.

5 Jan In PJ, Ven Kumara delivers a talk in BMSM Kajang on "Determination to Walk the Middle Path".

6 Jan Ven Kumara goes to Kinrara Metta Buddhist Society, Puchong. He gives a talk on "Why are we not happy? 1st & 2nd Noble Truth" to start off their series of Dhamma talks on the theme, "Walk the Path of Ultimate Happiness".

7 Jan Ven Kumara attends a forum organised by Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia on "Counter Evangelisation". Although the title suggests an offensive stance, the purpose and substance of the forum is about understanding evangelism and what Buddhists can do to promote the Dhamma.

11 Jan Ven Aggacitta, Ven Kumara and Ven Balacitta go to Penang to conduct a bereavement service for Asalha's late grandmother.

13 Jan Uposatha Day—Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk based on an English translation of Parinirvana Sutra from *Taisho Chinese Tripitaka*, Vol 12, Sutra no. 389.

17 Jan The Ipoh Immigration Department has approved our application for two much-needed Myanmar workers.

The January 2006 issue of the Newszine has arrived, hot from the printers.

21 Jan At today's dana in Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion, Ven Kumara gives a pre-Chinese New Year talk on spring-cleaning of the mind.

22 Jan Twenty-two volunteers, led by General Administrator Liew and Transport Head Lim Poh Eng, clean the *sīmā* pond of sludge. This involves a smart strategy of netting the 200 odd carps and other fishes and putting them temporarily in plastic bags filled with oxygenated water while the cleaned pond is being refilled with clear spring water.

23 Jan After more than four years of faithful service, our Nikon CoolPix 995 is getting to be unstable, thus requiring the Sangha to get a new Olympus Camedia 5060. This will ensure that you will still be kept informed, through quality digital photos, of the happenings in SBS and of SBS monastics.

24 Jan Ven Aggacitta receives an email from our promising ex-IMPian5 Jolly Lim, informing of his decision to postpone his approved postulancy in SBS due to family obligations. We wish you the best, Jolly. May the merits accrued during your fruitful 2½ months stay here help you to overcome all obstacles to renunciaton.

26 Jan Ven Mahanama and Ven Sraddhatissa, two Bangladeshi *sāmaṇeras*, arrive from Sri Lanka for a drop-in visit. They indicate a desire to undergo training in SBS, but Ven Aggacitta has to reject their request because of probable visa problems and other reasons.

28 Jan General Administrator Liew Hee Nam leaves after 10 months' service with SBS. We appreciate very much his selfless service, often above and beyond his work duties, and wish him the best.

Uposatha Day—Ven Aggacitta gives a talk to the monastics based on Mahadarukkhandhopama Sutta (SN35.241) and Rathopama Sutta (SN35.239).

29 Jan It is the first day of the Chinese lunar calendar and the monastics give 'dog tales' sermons based on the scriptures—Abhinha Jataka Tale (#27) by Ven Balacitta, Kukkuravatika Sutta (MN 57) by Ven Kumara and Kummopama Sutta (SN 35.240) by Ven Aggacitta.

30 Jan Ven Kavissara, who stayed with us as a visiting monk last year, brings his parents and his brother and sister-in-law for a visit.

3 Feb Ven Aggacitta leaves for the Klang Valley on a "Thanksgiving Dhammadana Trip" to reciprocate lay devotees' goodwill and support that led to his miraculous recovery from ill-health. He delivers short Dhamma talks after every lunch dana at various places, and gives talks in the evening.

Hor Tuck Loon and friends donate a *legal* copy of Adobe Pagemaker (Chinese Version) and Illustrator to SBS.

6 Feb Ven Aggacitta comes back from the Klang Valley, bringing with him Ven Thitavijjo and Ven Dhammananda. (see p12)

7 Feb Ven Kavissara's father, Quah Boon Kheng, arrives for a stint as a volunteer helper. Having worked as a storekeeper before his retirement, he is a real boon to us who need help in store management.

11 Feb Upon Ven Aggacitta's invitation, Ven Varadhammo comes to visit for a week to join in a series of DhammaVinaya discussion based on Ven Santidhamma's draft manuscript "Mulesika Vinaya Vinicchaya—Seeking the Roots of Vinaya".

Three UM students are here for a 2-night stay as eight-precept-holders. They have discussions with Ven Kumara regarding their Buddhist camp, which they intend to hold in SBS later this year.

12 Feb It is Uposatha Day and Ven Aggacitta delivers a talk on Meghiya Sutta (AN 9.3).

15 Feb Ah Kheng, who has been our volunteer worker for seven months, leaves SBS. *Sādhu* for his services.

18 Feb The monastics go for memorial pindacara at Peong Poh Chin's house in remembrance of her late husband. Ven Aggacitta concludes the service with a Dhamma talk on honouring the departed.

19 Feb Ven Varadhammo and Ven Dhammananda leave SBS for Penang.

20 Feb Ven Aggacitta leaves with VC3, Dato' Peter Khoo, for the Myanmar Embassy to talk to officials there to get clearance for the documents of the Myanmar workers we are employing. It turns out that the Myanmar ambassador is a staunch *yogi* with dreams of setting up a non-sectarian Theravada meditation centre in Malaysia. The meeting is a fruitful one as he does his best to speed up the processing of the documents.

21 Feb Ven Kumara, Ven Thitavijjo and Ven Balacitta go for bereavement service in the house of Yeoh Kar Kheng's late grandmother. Ven Kumara gives a Dhamma talk counselling both the living and the departed.

25 Feb The monastics go to Mrs Long Heng Hua's house for memorial pindacara. Ven Thitavijjo gives a Dhamma talk based on Abhinhapaccavekkhitabba-thana Sutta (AN 5. 57).

26 Feb It is Uposatha day and Ven Aggacitta gives a talk based on Anuruddha-mahavitakka Sutta (AN 8.30).

27 Feb Ven Ariyañani, a Swiss nun who was in Chanmyay Meditation Centre, Myanmar, comes for a visit with some devotees from PJ. She has promised to keep December 2007 free to conduct a retreat in SBS.

2 Mar Four monks and two nuns, students of International Buddhist College, are here for a visit.

4 Mar Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk after pindacara at the Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion, based on two *suttas* from Sakkasamyutta: Dalidda Sutta (SN 11.14) and Gahatthavandana Sutta (SN 11.18). The talk focuses on how a poor

person who practises the Dhamma can outshine other *devas* upon his rebirth in heaven and how even Sakka Devaraja worships virtuous householders in the human realm.

6 Mar The monastics continue their sutta discussion on the CD recording of Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's Sutta Study Class on the Majjhima Nikaya.

7 Mar An Organic Farm meeting is held for the first time in the almost completed Farmhouse.

9 Mar SBS geotechnical engineering consultant Dr Soo Kian Sin comes with another engineer to inspect on-going earthworks near Farmhouse and proposed sites for the construction of Phase 5 buildings: a Monastic Guest Lodge and a Female Guest Lodge.

11 Mar The monastics go for house dana and bereavement service on the invitation of the late Tan Thean Ong's family.

13 Mar Today is Uposatha Day. Ven Aggacitta gives a talk based on Anuggahita Sutta (AN 5.25) and Indriyasamvara Sutta (AN 6.50).

15 Mar With the completion of earthworks near Jalan Vicara corner, we now have a spacious car park next to Main Office.

18 Mar The monastics are invited for dana in the house of the late Ng Boon Kee. Ven Thitavijjo gives a Dhamma talk on birth and death.

19 Mar SBS Management Committee 3 holds its last meeting as its term of office will end on 9 April 2006 when TIMS elects a new General Committee for the next two years. The new GC will then appoint eligible persons to form SBSMC4 (2006-08).

20 Mar Ven Hui Man of Viriya Chan Monastery, Taiwan, comes to visit with some nuns and monks. Ven Aggacitta has a discussion with him regarding *asubha, anapana* and *ch'an* practices. Ven Hui Man is an associate professor of a university and also president of the Vimurti-marga Society in Taiwan.

21 Mar Our two long-awaited Myanmar workers, Hla Kyaw and Zaw Khing, are here at last. They offer us relics and Buddha images.

Eighth day Uposatha—a Dhamma discussion is held based on Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's Majjhima Nikaya Sutta Study CD.

25 Mar The monastics are invited to Yeoh Sia Teoh's house for dana. Ven Balacitta gives the Dhamma talk.

28 Mar Ven Aggacitta, accompanied by his *kappiya*, Asalha, is in Penang to start off his Thanksgiving Dhammadana Tour of Penang, Sarawak, Singapore and JB. The tour will end on 8 April.

A Dhamma discussion with devotees in Mettananda Vihara, Penang in the evening marks the start of a series of activities conducted by Ven Aggacitta on his tour. The discussion is mainly about how to deal with unwholesome *kammic* results of the past, particularly those suspected to be the cause of ill-health.

29 Mar Ven Aggacitta and Asalha leave Penang for Sarawak.

8 Apr This is the last day of his Dhamma tour. Ven Aggacitta flies to Penang on his way back to SBS.

9 Apr TIMS holds its 17th AGM to elect its General Committee and the new GC discusses the SBSMC4 line-up.

12 Apr Today is Uposatha Day. Ven Aggacitta delivers a Dhamma talk to the monastics in Farmhouse guest room.

13 Apr Subang Jaya devotees donate a vacuum cleaner to SBS.

Tong Kok Chan of Metta Pharmacy donates a complete first aid kit for Farm House.

15 Apr Ven Balacitta gives a Dhamma talk at Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion.

16 Apr Fam Keat Hong from Ipoh brings a box of *The Noble Eightfold Path* by Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi. These are for free distribution.

17 Apr More than fifty Myanmar workers from Temerloh, Perak, visit SBS at 10.15am as part of their Myanmar New Year celebration. Ven Aggacitta gives them a Dhamma talk based on Velama Sutta and concludes with a short guided meditation session.

19 Apr Eight Myanmar workers from Kamunting help to clean Abbot's Office.

20 Apr It being an 8th day Uposatha, the monastics hold a Dhamma discussion on the concluding part of Ariyapariyesana Sutta (MN 26), based on Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's Sutta Study CD.

22 Apr A group of Monash International University (Malaysia) students and staff is here for a visit organised by their Buddhist society. After lunch dana, Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk and guided session on mindfulness meditation followed by Q&A.

In the evening, a large crowd turns up for the Saturday meditation session.

23 Apr Looi Siew Hock conveys a request from Taiping Buddhist Society for SBS monks to give Dhamma talks to National Service trainees at Semanggol (near Bukit Merah) every Friday night (8-10 pm). The monks agree to the request.

26 Apr Today is Uposatha. Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk in farm house based on Vatthupama Sutta (MN 7).

Ong Chen Heng, our electrical wireman, donates two sets of 12-inch ventilator fans for Farm House.

27 Apr Ang Teck Hock and Sam Kau Ling bring Sayadaw U Tejinda (of Shwe Oo Min Dhamma Sukha Tawya, Myanmar) and his father to SBS for a few days' stay. They bring along Dhamma books and other stuff for SBS. (see p10)

The *sayadaw* joins the SBS monastics for Vinaya discussion in the evening.

With five monks in SBS, the monastics are finally able to perform a ceremony to officially appoint Ven Aggacitta as a *navakammika bhikkhu* (lit. 'new works monk'). He is now an official sangha officer to supervise construction works.

28 Apr Ven Balacitta attends an Abhidhamma course conducted by Sayadaw U Nandamala in Santarama, Balik Pulau.

Two Mahayana monks and an Amitabha chanting group from Ipoh pay us a visit.

29 Apr Dana is held at Hexza Optical's conference room. Sayadaw U Tejinda gives a Dhamma talk in Myanmar. Ven Aggacitta translates it into Hokkien. More than 30 people turn up for the Saturday evening meditation session in SBS.

30 Apr The sayadaw joins the SBS monastics for pindacara in Taiping market. The amount of alms collected is obviously much greater than usual. The sayadaw is extremely touched and says that he has never received so much food nor seen such faith and generosity before. His father concurs.

The SBS Management Committee 4 holds its inaugural meeting. (see p26)

4 May Ven Mahañano brings Ven Kittisobhano and the assistant abbot of Wat Pah Bahn Lao, Chieng Rai for a visit. He presents Ven Aggacitta with ten copies of his Pali-Chinese dictionary. A Dhamma discussion is held at Meeting Room 2 in the evening based on Lonaphala Sutta (AN 3.99). In the CSCD, it's Lonakapalla Sutta (AN 3.101).

5 May SBS's new 4WD Toyota Hilux (AFS 7206) finally arrives. This replaces our Ford Ranger (AEH 1999), which has served us faithfully since June 2001. The change is necessary as the Ranger was not robust enough to handle the terrain here well and thus needed frequent servicing.

Mr Tan of Taiping Candles donates 3400 candle lamps for the Wesak Eve offering of lights ceremony.

6 May Dana is at Chuah Teong Seng's house. Ven Kumara gives a talk on Dhammassavana Sutta (AN 5.202) — listening to the Dhamma.

TIMS's Wesak celebration committee, Myanmar workers from Kamunting and other volunteers come to prepare for the Wesak celebration.

8 May Introduction to Monkhood Programme 6 (IMP6) starts with Admin Manager 1, Goh Keat Soon, giving a short welcoming speech, followed by Bhante Aggacitta's opening speech to introduce IMP to the 11 participants. (see back cover)

9 May Ah Leong and Ah Seng start plastering a new layer of gold leaves on the Buddha image at the Open Deck.

11 May Today is Wesak Eve. After many consecutive days of afternoon thunderstorms and evening rain, it is a great relief for everyone when the sky clears by early evening and the glorious hues of sunset are reflected in the clouds above the western horizon. For the Wesak Eve celebration, there is a change of route this year. Lighting of candles starts from the Jalan Sima-Jalan Sangha junction, branching out to the Sima, SCF, Bodhiyangana and up to the Open-air Buddha Shrine.

Ven Aggacitta gives a short talk on the significance of the occasion and guides the crowd in Buddhanussati by chanting *'araham sammasambuddho'* and in metta meditation. He then leads the monks in chanting blessings, which is followed by the sharing of merits with all beings, particularly the guardian devas of SBS whom the monastics have been invoking daily after evening *puja* to help keep the rain away during the Wesak celebrations.

After the local devotees have left, he conducts a separate session for the 50 or so Myanmar workers who have turned up to help and participate in the Wesak Eve celebration.

12 May Today is Wesak Day. Pindacara is at Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion at 10.00am. Ven Kumara gives a Dhamma talk on the significance of Wesak. Then Ven Aggacitta again leads in Buddhanussati.

Ven Varadhammo shares his monkhood experience with the IMPians.

13 May A Cambodian French nun, Sayalay Sobhana, uses bioresonance to diagnose and prescribe some natural remedies for Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumara.

14 May Our new SBS rep for Butterworth, Karunacitta Wong, brings about 30 people to visit SBS. Ven Aggacitta gives a short talk in Hokkien on using discretion to decide what is suitable to follow, based on the Kalama Sutta (AN 3.66).

16 May Tonight's meditation for the IMP6 participants is around the Bodhi tree.

20 May Ven Thitavijjo gives a Dhamma talk based on parts of Tapussa Sutta (AN 9.41) and Magandiya Sutta (MN 75) in Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion.

21 May IMP6 ends today.

22 May Five of the IMP6 participants continue to stay on for a weeklong meditation retreat. Dr Soo Kian Sin, our loyal geotechnical engineering consultant, joins them.

Sayalay Sobhana comes again to check on Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kum ara and is glad to find that their health has improved.

26 May The monastics are invited to Ah Leong's late father's house for a bereavement service. Ven Kumara gives a short explanation of Tirokutta Sutta (Khp 7).

As today is Uposatha day, Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk based on Sala Sutta (SN 47.4) to the monastics.

27 May Ven Balacitta delivers a Dhamma talk in the Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion on patience, receptivity, meeting renunciants and timely discussions on the Dhamma as part of his series of talks based on Mangala Sutta.

Members of the Yap family share with Ven Aggacitta their uncanny experience of visitations by the spirit of their late father. They report that the spirit possessed one of them, who then spoke and behaved exactly like their late father. The sharing is recorded for our archives.

Ven Phra Khru Sangharak Santacitto of Wat Chai Mongkhol, Pulau Tikus, Penang visits SBS together with a group of devotees from Dhammikarama Burmese Temple.

28 May Ven Aggacitta gives parting words of advice and encouragement to the yogis of the IMPian retreat, as today is their last day. Nekkhammacitta (Wong Kim Choi) stays on as a trial postulant.

1 Jun A group of about 50 youths, including 23 Thais, from YBAM-YBAT Intercultural Youth Exchange Programme visits SBS. Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk on "Malaysian Theravada Buddhism".

Ven Kovida from Pangkor is the first of the monks from out of town to arrive for SanghaSannipata2006.

2 Jun Ven Varadhammo and Ven Mahañano, arrive from Penang today.

3 June SanghaSannipata2006 starts today. Ven Aggacitta delivers the opening speech, based on the first seven factors of Bhikkhu Aparihaniya Dhamma (things that conduces to the non-decline of monks), after which the monks introduce themselves to the assembly. In the afternoon, Ven Aggacitta, Ven Dhammavuddho and Ven Mahañano share their experiences on the theme "Ownership and Management of Monastic Residences". At night, the 17 monks at the gathering watch "What the Bleep Do We Know?", a thought-provoking film that correlates spirituality and progressive science. (see cover story)

A group of well-wishers from the Klang Valley donates an amplifier and speakers for our new Main Office building and an interphone system to replace our (fourth) PABX system that was damaged by lightning.

4 Jun On the second day of SanghaSannipata2006, Ven Aggacitta's presentation of "Guidelines from the Pali scriptures" develops into a lively discussion that flows into the topic of the subsequent session on "Options for Better Sangha-laity Harmony". After lunch dana, the discussion continues till 3.15 pm. Ven Kumara then presents his analysis on the opinions of monks and lay people who manage monastics residences in Malaysia. This analysis is based on the responses gathered via a questionnaire survey. Later in the day, the monks talk about:

- forming a registered Malaysian Theravada Sangha Association. The majority felt that it was premature to do so.
- how to encourage more monks to

attend the annual meeting (only 14 out of more than 60 invited have come) and
- how to reciprocate the *añjali* of non-Theravadin monks.

The majority of monks are very appreciative of the meeting. They feel that it fosters fellowship and deepens understanding through the sharing of experiences and learning. Next year's meeting is tentatively fixed for 2 & 3 June 2007, to be held in either Aloka Meditation Centre (Melaka) or Balik Pulau Buddhist Hermitage (Penang). Ven Varadhammo and Ven Kovida stay back after the meeting.

7 Jun Ven Varadhammo leaves for Kuala Lumpur.

Robert Carleton Moult, an Abhidhamma teacher at Brickfields MahaVihara, arrives for a short personal meditation retreat.

10 Jun The monastics are invited to Tan Hock Beng's parents' house for dana. Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk on "How to repay one's debt to parents".

Later he meets INTI yogis and gives a short talk on "What is meant by taking refuge."

Tan Kok Fuh brings another group of school children for a visit. They have a Dhamma discussion with Ven Kumara. For this Uposatha day, Ven Aggacitta gives a talk to the monastics and INTI yogis on "Modes of Progress in Meditation" based on Anguttara Nikaya (AN 4.192, 163, 167, 168, 169).

Ven Kovida returns to Pangkor.

14 Jun Ven Thitavijjo leaves for Ipoh to join a Goenka Vipassana retreat.

SBS monastics leave for Mettananda Vihara in Penang. Heng Ghee passes them a stack of books from See Chim Han for SBS library.

As Ven Aggacitta has a sore throat and a hoarse voice, Ven Kumara takes over and delivers the Dhamma talk on "What and How to Offer to the Sangha" in Than Hsiang Temple in the evening.

15 Jun After lunch dana, Ven Kumara gives a Dhamma talk on "Giving & Generosity: What's the difference?" at Mettananda. In the evening, with the help of Ven Aggacitta, he conducts a lively sutta study-discussion on Salt Crystal (Lonaphala/Lonakapalla) Sutta (AN 3.99/101) for a group of 25-30 people. (see p49)

16 Jun Ven Balacitta gives a Dhamma talk based on Byagghapajja Sutta (AN 8.54) in Mettananda Vihara, Penang, after lunch dana after which the monastics return to Taiping

17 Jun The monastics are invited to the late Teoh Chye Hock's house for memorial dana. Ven Kumara delivers a Dhamma talk based on Tirokutta Sutta. In the evening, a large group of about 30 people turn up for the Saturday meditation sesssion.

Today is an eighth day Uposatha. The Dhamma discussion is based on Kalama Sutta (AN 3.65) from Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's CD.

21 Jun Ven Aggacitta and Ven Balacitta begin Dhamma propagation in Kamunting Detention Camp. Ven Balacitta delivers a Dhamma talk in Cantonese to eighteen inmates who show interest.

22 Jun Some mysterious noise is heard coming from the construction site of Main Office at 8.00pm. It sounds like someone shoving and banging on planks. Bhante Aggacitta even sees a plastic bottle being thrown out from the bulding onto the ground where there's a street lamp. Upon investigation, we find nobody there.

24 Jun Ven Balacitta continues with his series of Mangala Sutta Dhamma talk in Hokkien Cemetery Pavilion. Today's topic covers the blessings of self-control, the holy life, seeing the noble truths and realisation of *nibbāna*. Ven Aggacitta has a discussion on meditation with a visiting Kajang group from 10.20-11.00am.

Ven Aggacitta gives an Uposatha Day talk based on Dhammika Sutta (AN 6.54), cautioning against having ill feelings towards people living the holy life, including those of other spiritual groups.

Ven Thitavijjo returns from a Goenka Vipassana retreat in Ipoh.

29 Jun Ven Kum ra leaves for Fo Guang Shan Dong Zen temple, Jenjarom, Banting, to conduct Dhamma sessions for the 25th InCoVar Dhamma Camp.

30 Jun Ven Thitavijjo leaves for KL en route to UK to settle his personal affairs. He has spent almost five fruitful months (for himself as well as for others) as a visiting monk in SBS. We hope he will be back to join us in our training programme as soon as possible.

At the InCoVar camp, Ven Kum ara conducts a Dhamma sharing session "The Simple Way". It's a Q&A session in which the participants are encouraged to ask any questions they have in mind. The participants find it delighting and edifying. Many also find the metta meditation session to be beneficial as it calms their mind, while others are apparently too tired or sleepy.

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Glossary of Non-English Words

Terms below are in Pali unless otherwise stated. Italicised words in the explanations below (e.g. *Theravāda*) are separately explained.

Abhidhamma A later collection of analytical treatises based on lists of categories drawn from the teachings in the *suttas*

Āgamas the Northern Buddhist Tradition's equivalent of the *Pāli Nikāyas*

Akusala unskilful; unwholesome

Anāgāmī non-returner, one who has abandoned the five lower fetters, and who after death will not return to this world of humans and *devas*, but either reappear among the *brahmas* or attain *Nibbāna*

Aṁsa small robe, just wide enough to cover the chest and left forearm, worn over the left shoulder

Ānāpānasati (meditation practice in which one maintains) mindfulness of breathing

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

Arahant liberated person who has eradicated all mental defilements

Asubha (contemplation on) unattractiveness, loathsomeness (of the body as an antidote to lust and complacency)

Āvāsa (monastic) residence

Bhāvanā (mental) development; meditation

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

Bhikkhu *Theravāda* Buddhist monk

Bodhisatta sentient being destined to be a Buddha in the future

Brahma "great one"; inhabitant of non-sensual heavens

Buddhānussati (meditation practice of) repeated recollection of the Buddha's virtues

Ch'an (Chinese) meditation (Pali: *jhāna*)

Dāna act of giving, offering

Deva deity

Dhammaduta messenger of the Dhamma

DhammaVinaya "Doctrine & Discipline" (used by the Buddha to denote the 'religion' he founded)

Dhutaṅga ascetic observance

Dukkha suffering

Durian (Malay) a tropical fruit with a hard thorny shell

Jhāna meditative concentration

Kamma (intentional, moral) action

Kammic (of action) bearing result

Kappiyakāraka "allowable maker"—a steward who makes things allowable for *bhikkhus*

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

Kilesa (mental) impurity, defilement

Kusala skilful; wholesome

Kuṭi hut or small house

Lidi (Malay) vein of leaf from coconut tree

Mahāyāna "Great Vehicle" – one of the two main traditions of Buddhism (the other being *Theravāda)*

Maraṇassati (meditation practice of) reminding oneself of the imminence of death

Mettā loving-kindness

Muditā empathetic joy

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

Nikāyas collections; usually referring to the collections of *Theravāda Pāli suttas*

Pāli ancient language in which *Theravāda* scriptures are preserved

Paññā wisdom, insight

Pāramī completeness, perfection (of the individual leading to the attainment of *Nibbāna)*

Parinibbāna final passing away of an *arahant*

Paritta protection; protective chant

Phayar (Myanmar word-end-particle) respectful form of address towards monks, royalty, etc.

Pāṭimokkha monastic code comprising summary of major rules and etiquette

Piṇḍacāra Buddhist monks' practice of going on alms round

Pūjā honour; respect; devotional offering

Qi essence or energy

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

Sādhu well done, excellent

Sāmaṇera novice Buddhist monk preparing to become a *bhikkhu*

Saṁsāra round of birth and death

Satipaṭṭhāna establishment of mindfulness

Sāsana (the Buddha's) teachings or dispensation

Sayādaw (Myanmar) venerable teacher

Sīla morality, virtue

Sīmā (monastic) boundary, territory

Sutta [or **Sutra** in Sanskrit] discourse

Theravāda "Doctrine of the Elders" – one of the two main traditions of Buddhism (the other being *Mahāyāna*). It claims to be the earliest, most authentic extant record of Gotama Buddha's teachings and emphasises more on striving for personal liberation

Theravādin advocate or follower of *Theravāda*

Tipiṭaka "Three Baskets"; the full set of canonical *Theravāda* scriptures preserved in *Pāli*

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

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

Vinaya monastic law and regulation

Vinaya Pitaka "Discipline Basket"; part of the *Tipiṭaka* that contains a compilation of monastic rules and regulations

Vipassanā insight (meditation)

Abbr.	Text	Reference according to
AN	Anguttara Nikaya	book number: (chapter number:) sutta number
Dhp	Dhammapada	verse number
MN	Majjhima Nikaya	sutta number
SN	Samyutta Nikaya	samyutta number: sutta number
Khp	Khuddakapatha	sutta number

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

IMP6

Healing Body and Mind

People go to ashrams in India and other such places to destress and to rejuvenate body and mind. You do not need to do that. Just join a 2-week programme in SBS and this is one of the benefits, among others.

By Carujivaka Ooi Keng Chew

Have you ever wondered what it is like to be a monk? How does a monk live his life? What if you became a monk? And so on and so forth...

These thoughts had lingered in my mind ever since I saw a poster and newsletter about an Introduction to Monkhood Programme (IMP) organised by SBS. At that time I was working and decided to try out the programme after I retired.

I was both excited and apprehensive when I received an email from Bhante Kumara—my application was approved but can I see the programme through to the end? I had been remiss in my meditation practice, and was weak in the Dhamma.

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