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Sāsanārakkha Newszine

News and views from Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary



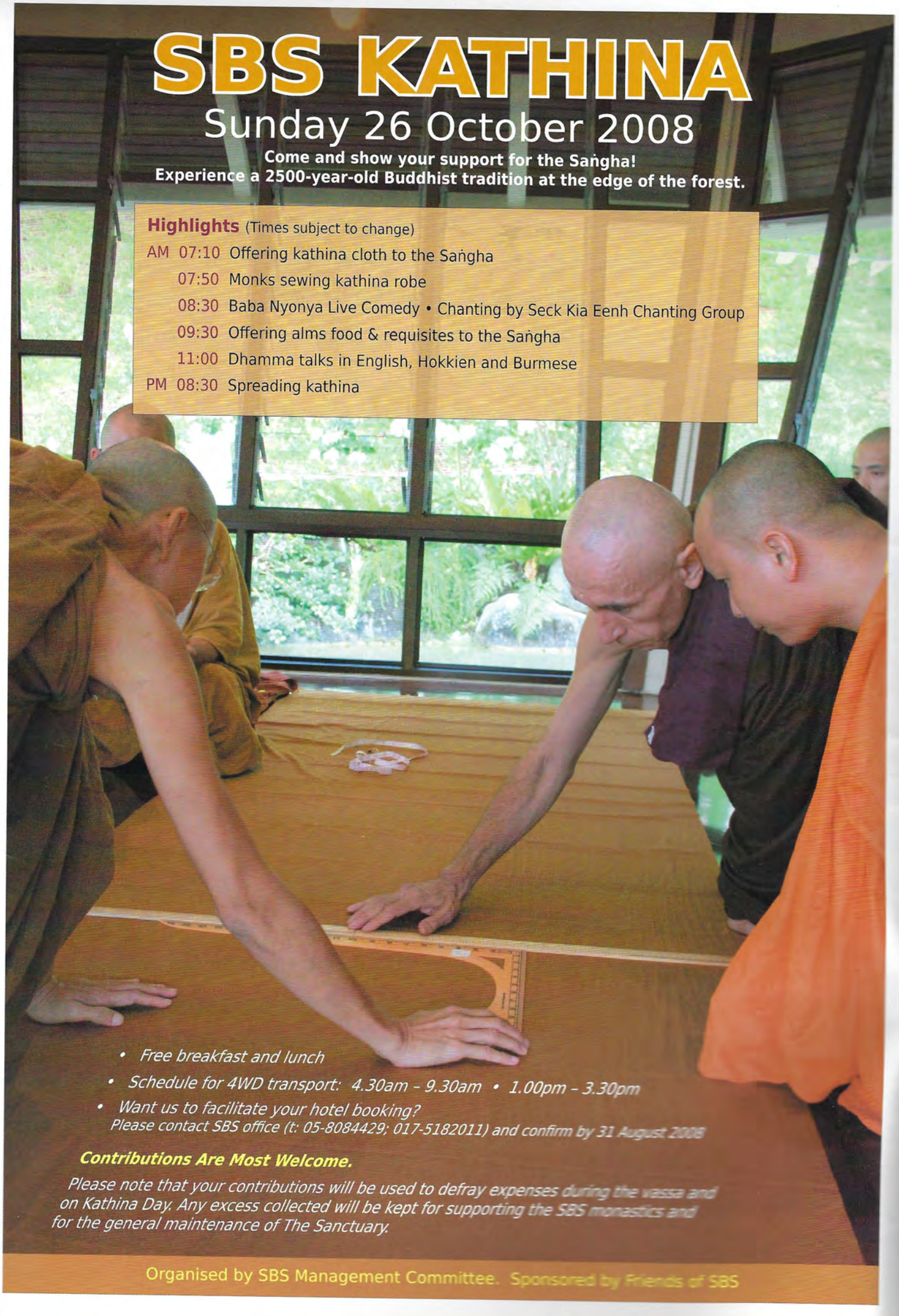
Good Things End

Buddhist Misconceptions about Union with Brahma

Destined to Teach

Barrage of Baggage

Looking Through the Haze



SBS KATHINA

Sunday 26 October 2008

Come and show your support for the Saṅgha!
Experience a 2500-year-old Buddhist tradition at the edge of the forest.

Highlights (Times subject to change)

AM	07:10	Offering kathina cloth to the Saṅgha
	07:50	Monks sewing kathina robe
	08:30	Baba Nyonya Live Comedy • Chanting by Seck Kia Eenh Chanting Group
	09:30	Offering alms food & requisites to the Saṅgha
	11:00	Dhamma talks in English, Hokkien and Burmese
PM	08:30	Spreading kathina

- *Free breakfast and lunch*
- *Schedule for 4WD transport: 4.30am – 9.30am • 1.00pm – 3.30pm*
- *Want us to facilitate your hotel booking?*
  Please contact SBS office (t: 05-8084429; 017-5182011) and confirm by 31 August 2008

Contributions Are Most Welcome.

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

Organised by SBS Management Committee. Sponsored by Friends of SBS



Abbot's Address

GOOD THINGS END BETTER THINGS GROW

"Only now do we see durians," chuckled Pa Auk Sayadaw as we passed a fruit-laden tree during a guided tour of SBS grounds. (See p60) "*Phayah*[1]?" I responded with a puzzled look, for my first thought was, "Why did he say that? Surely he must have seen durians before in Burma." Sensing my bewilderment, U Koṇḍadhāna, Sayadaw's attendant, explained.

Sayadaw and his entourage had arrived in Penang from Singapore the day before and stayed in Sītavana Monastery, Ayer Itam, which is also in a durian orchard, but on a higher hill slope. The trees there were not fruiting—thus Sayadaw's remark.

The tree that caught Sayadaw's attention was fruiting quite profusely. Hopefully this is not a sign of its impending death. Another tree next to the newly completed Female Gārava Lodge (FGL) is also fruiting profusely. In the process of construction its branches nearest to the FGL roof were lopped off for safety reasons. Standing nearby the tree, we discussed plans to replace it with a more manageable tree after the durian season. Soon afterwards, as though sensing our deadly intention, it began to fruit like never before, apparently testifying to the popular belief that plants and trees tend to give their best just before their end.

During the durian season, visitors might be alarmed to notice unripe durians strewn at the feet of some trees which are fruiting abundantly. Some might remark, "What a waste." Isn't it logical that the higher the yield, the greater will be the profit? From one point of view, this may be true. From another, selective pruning of young fruits decreases the quantity but increases the ***quality*** of the yield because the remaining fruits can obtain more nourishment from the tree; thus, if better quality fruits sell at a higher price, then the net profits may even exceed that of lower quality fruits sold at a cheaper price.

Perhaps by now you must be wondering what I'm trying to get at. Is somebody planning to 'disrobe' (i.e. leave the monastic order)? Will there be some drastic policy changes in SBS? Now that the physical development of SBS is almost complete, will I be reverting to my previous reclusive lifestyle?

I hope to draw an analogy to explain the issue at hand. You may notice that *Sāsanārakkha Newszine* #10 is a bumper issue filled with interesting and profound news and views from SBS. This can be compared to the glorious fruiting of a dying plant or tree. Moreover, "10" is an auspicious number to end this series: "1" signifies oneness or unity, and "0", void or emptiness, the consummation of *samatha* and *vipassanā* respectively!

How does selective pruning apply here? Producing a good quality publication is by no means an easy task, for much time and effort is required to accumulate and prepare its contents. Then we monastics shall have to vet most of the articles to ensure that our views are not misrepresented and the usage of Pāli terms is correct. In addition to my other duties pertaining to office and field administration, building development, teaching the laity and vetting material for the website, it has drawn much of my resources away from a far more important task: training the monastics.

1 (Myanmar) respectful form of address for monks, royalty, etc.

TURN TO NEXT PAGE

For me the founding of SBS has been a most rewarding experience in terms of growth in both worldly expertise and spiritual development. It seemed as though the basic skills of design, building construction, planning, management and personal relations that I had avidly learnt during my lay life were meant to be used to serve the Sāsana and to be honed in the process. I have enjoyed every minute of my service despite the physical stress that occasionally ensues.

My position as the founding abbot has also complemented my ten years of forest solitude, giving me many opportunities to develop those spiritual qualities that otherwise could not have blossomed in seclusion when I was virtually cut off from social intercourse. At the same time, I am thankful for my early years of forest solitude which have fostered in me courage, strength and perseverance to effectively deal with latent mental defilements that can disproportionately manifest during long periods of seclusion. During that period of 'social-disengagement' I was able to devote my time and effort to the study (in the Pāli and Burmese languages) and practice of orthodox Theravādin DhammaVinaya. However, despite my very strong foundation in this orthodoxy, I am still receptive to plausible notions that challenge its authenticity and validity. After all, I am still a Truth-seeker at heart—one who believes that Truth can be comprehended from many angles and expressed in various ways.

With vastly improved means of communication and the wonder of IT, I am exposed to more and more of such challenges that compel me to verify the status of my acquired knowledge and experience: Are they really in accordance with what the Buddha was supposed to have taught as recorded in the Pāli *suttas*? Given that there are many levels of Truth, does my understanding correspond to Reality? Am I teaching the right thing?

The training of monastics has many implications. In order to do so effectively, one needs to have enough knowledge, practical experience, wisdom and skill in the threefold training of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*—qualities that are in a continual process of growth and development. At the root of it all, knowledge comes first, followed by practice and its embodiment. Now that my acquired knowledge and experience are being challenged, I have little choice but to devote more time to research so that I can teach with conviction and a clear conscience.

In other words, I shall have to start selective pruning so that my limited resources can be effectively channelled towards a greater end. At the top of the list is *Sāsanārakkha Newszine*, to be followed by my other duties which I shall prioritise in due course.

My profuse thanks to the production team for their excellent performance, particularly to the editor-in-chief for having shouldered the yoke.

I hope our readers have enjoyed and benefited from this series of *Sāsanārakkha Newszine*. Let us rejoice that good things must end so that better ones can grow!



Editor's Thoughts

Swan Song

A "bumper issue", said the abbot in his address, "Good Things End, Better Things Grow", of this swan song of *Sāsanārakkha Newszine*. The ride along its production line was also bumpy, a real bummer, at times. Not a few articles came in at the eleventh hour and the editors and proofreaders burned the candles at both ends to ensure that the quality you have come to expect of the newszine was maintained. Ven Aggacitta and Ven Kumāra worked just as hard with us.

Although the abbot in his address says that they have to "vet articles", do not take this for the whole truth. They do more. For each issue, from the initial planning right down to supervising the layout work, they were involved, especially with the nitty-gritty. Now you know the secret ingredient that makes the newszine so palatable! Now you can understand the inevitable choice that had to be made between training monastics and producing the newszine.

So, savour each morsel—there is something for everyone. For the more seriously inclined, we have four articles on meditation—mind you, not the 'sit down and close your eyes kind'. If this has whetted your appetite, then read, "Barrage of Baggage", "Looking Through the Haze", "A Learning Experience", and "Dynamic Meditation". A very special feature related to meditation is "Destined to Teach" an interview with Sayadaw U Tejaniya".

For the more academically inclined, read "Rise and Fall of Buddhism" together with "Buddhist Misconceptions about Union with Brahma". "Pāli in Context" gives you some insights into the language of the Pāli Canon.

Prefer lighter reading? Then laity events and activities in SBS will surely interest you: "Lights and More Lights", "Fun and Frustration", and "Teenager Dhamma Camp", to name a few.

Our gratitude to all whose sweat and tears have made *Sāsanārakkha Newszine* a success. This includes not only the members of the production team but our readers as well. No encores, please.

Thank you, all.

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Cover photo shows, from left to right, the Venerables Pa Auk Sayadaw U Ācinṇa, U Aggañña and U Tejaniya together with Ven Aggacitta

We've Got Mail

✉ Thank you for the short Dhamma talk on "Seven Vows of Sakka Devarāja". It is interesting and informative. I enjoyed it. Thank you SBS, for transcribing Dhamma talks given in Taiping so that they are available to people who do not reside in Taiping.

Teoh Szu-ih

✉ I've always believed that Buddhism benefits people. Thus, it would be good if SBS can organise some leadership programmes to train young people to be future leaders in the spread of Buddhism.

They can show people how to incorporate Buddhism into daily life, work and business. By showing others the benefits of applying Buddhism in daily life they can convince others of the benefits of Buddhism.

So SBS should attract more teenagers, especially university and college students to train them to be future leaders in the propagation of Buddhism.

Kia Sheng

Our programme head replies:

Although SBS is primarily a training centre for monastics in the study and practice of DhammaVinaya, it also provides facilities and organises programmes for the training and education of laymen to be future Buddhist leaders. Children and Teenagers' camps have been regularly held at SBS. One such camp is the Teenager Dhamma Camp held on 30 May – 2 June (see p60). Participants comprised students from various secondary schools in Taiping, Penang and Kuala Lumpur. A few university and college students served as facilitators and had their first taste of Dhamma in this camp. We hope that you, being one of them, will therefore be inspired to help promote SBS and its programmes as well as convince your friends of the benefits of practising the Dhamma in their daily lives.

✉ I read your proposal with great interest. In my humble opinion, your approach, combining scientific research data on NDE and OBE with personal anecdotes and with interpretations of more or less systematic conceptualisations of death and intermediate states, such as they have developed in different regional varieties of Buddhism, is very interesting and commendable indeed. Your proposal is well-designed and very stimulating; my compliments.

Henk Blezer

Ph.D. in Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, research fellow at University of Leiden, Netherlands, responding to an invitation to speak in C2RC 2008. He unfortunately had to decline.



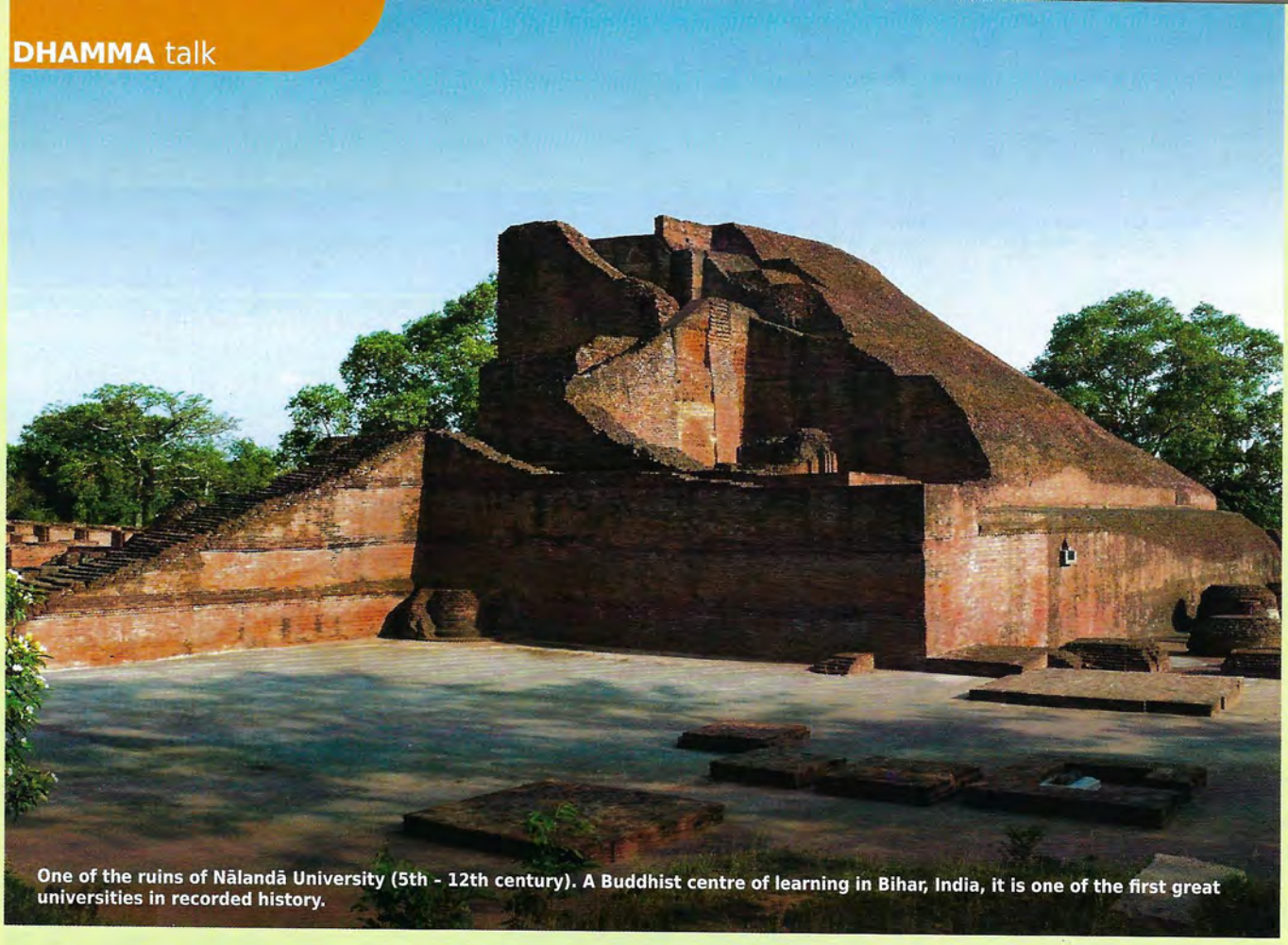
Dhamma Talks from SBS

January to June 2008—delivered in and around Taiping, Perak

Why Keep the Five Precepts? Ven Kumāra, 12 Jan	Although there are many unwholesome acts we should refrain from doing, these five are singled out because, compared to other such acts, these have graver repercussions on our lives and that of others.
Merits of Dāna Ven Ṭhitavijjo, 20 Jan	A comparison between the destinies of people who do *dāna* and those who do not.
For Present and Future Welfare Ven Balacitta, 26 Jan	What we should do for our well-being in the present and in the future.
Five Types of Losses Ven Aggacitta, 2 Feb	While the loss of relatives, property or health will not directly lead to rebirth in the woeful planes, the loss of one's moral integrity and right views can. So one should train one's mind to react positively to negative circumstances and endeavour to maintain one's morality and right views.
Appearance is Deceptive Ven Kumāra, 7 Feb	A Jātaka fable—for this Chinese New Year of the Rat—on a rat king and a jackal. The moral of the fable is: not to be deceived by the saintly appearance of religious people but to evaluate them through wise observation.
Paying Respects and Honouring Parents Ven Ṭhitavijjo, 8 Feb	The importance of paying respects and honouring parents, based on Mānatthaddha Sutta (SN 7:15) and Maṅgala Sutta. Listeners are advised to obtain blessings not just by wishing for them on this auspicious day but by acting appropriately throughout the year.
Seven Vows of Sakka Devarāja (SN 11:11) Ven Balacitta, 9 Feb	Vows made when Sakka was a human being named Magha in his previous lifetime.
Happy Birthday or Suffering Birthday? Ven Aggacitta, 16 Feb	As the Buddha specifically states that birth is suffering, how can Buddhists wish one another "Happy birthday"? Although birth is suffering, to be born as a human being, to encounter the Buddha's teaching and to practise the Dhamma are happy, auspicious events.
Letting Go Ven Kumāra, 23 Feb	"Letting go" does not mean forgetting, ignoring or being careless. Rather, it is done through understanding and accepting things as they are. By doing so, one may then live a happier life.
Immeasurable Suffering Ven Ṭhitavijjo, 1 Mar	Based on Anamatagga Saṁyutta (SN 15). Our *dukkha* (suffering) is not of one life only, but of countless lifetimes. Therefore one should realise the rarity of human existence and seize the chance to end that immeasurable amount of suffering.
Rise and Fall of Buddhism Ven Balacitta, 8 Mar	A talk on the rise and fall of governments and Buddhism, touching also on the difference between the Buddhist goal of liberation from defilements and Brāhmaṇistic non-duality. (see p8)
Four Courses of Action Ven Aggacitta, 15 Mar	Based on Ṭhāna Sutta (AN 4:115). Our actions can be pleasant or unpleasant to do and when done will lead to something profitable or unprofitable.
Five Types of Contemplation (AN 5:57) Ven Ṭhitavijjo, 22 Mar	Daily contemplation of five subjects—old age, sickness, death, loss of loved ones and inheritance of one's own *kamma*—can prevent many unskilful actions.

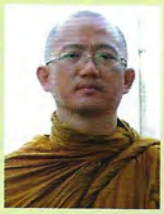
How to Handle Depression Ven Balacitta, 29 Mar	There is no better way than meditation to counter depression. Devotees are encouraged to come for the Saturday evening meditation session.
Four Unthinkables Ven Aggacitta, 5 Apr	Based on Acinteyya Sutta (AN 4:77), these are: the range of the Buddha's abilities, the range of *jhāna*, the results of kamma and the origin of the world. Thinking of these by mere conjecture may lead to some degree of madness and suffering.
Dhamma Tour East Ven Kumāra, 12 Apr	Ven Kumāra recounts his one-month Dhamma tour of East Malaysia—travelling, meeting people, having a personal retreat, his observations of the places he went to, giving Dhamma talks and conducting workshops in various Buddhist centres in Sabah and Sarawak. (see also p46)
Six Sāraṇīyadhammas (AN 6:12) Ven Aggacitta, 19 Apr	Conditions worthy of remembering that will lead to endearment, feeling of respect, fellowship, lack of disputes, harmony and unity: beneficial actions of the body, of speech, and of the mind; sharing; being virtuous and having right views.
"What Bliss! What Bliss!" Ven Ṭhitavijjo, 26 Apr	The going forth of Bhaddiya, the Sakyan king, and how he found bliss while meditating alone in the forest, which is contrasted to his feelings of insecurity when he was a king well-guarded in his palace.
Liberation from Suffering Ven Balacitta, 3 May	How to be liberated from suffering through understanding the Four Noble Truths and practising the Noble Eightfold Path.
KaraṇīyaMettā Sutta Ven Aggacitta, 10 May	Explaining KaraṇīyaMettā Sutta and a verse, beginning with *"Yasmiṁ padese"*, on dedicating offerings to *devas* after dāna to the Saṅgha in a new dwelling place.
Who Is the Buddha? Why Take Refuge? Ven Ṭhitavijjo, 24 May	Based on Doṇa Sutta (AN 4:36). The Buddha will not become a deva nor a human being (again), but he is an Awakened One, born in the world, grew up in it, but not tainted by it. We should understand the reasons, based on right faith, why we take refuge in the Buddha. We should not regard him as a god who brings salvation and worldly success.
Why Do We Meditate? Ven Balacitta, 31 May	The practice of *samādhi* or meditation helps us to prepare the way for the destruction of *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (aversion) and *moha* (delusion). Meditation must be done with morality and wisdom.
Five Niyāmas (Orders) Ven Aggacitta, 7 June	The possible causes of natural calamities and the consequent human suffering. *Metta-karuṇā* for animals, especially insects. Their mass extermination could also be a remote contributory cause for human suffering in natural disasters.
Acceptance of Things as They Really Are Ven Kumāra, 14 June	This does not mean we ignore our problems but rather we accept them with understanding so that we can handle them better.
Awareness in Daily Life Sayadaw U Tejaniya, 21 June	What is your state of mind when performing meritorious acts? Is it wholesome or unwholesome? If you are aware, you will know. The practice of awareness is not difficult. One just needs to know how to do it now!
Giving and Moral Virtue Ven Ṭhitavijjo, 28 June	Based on AN 5:43, 5:148, 5:31 and 8:35. The importance of giving (*dāna*) and moral virtue (*sīla*) to complement mental development (*bhāvanā*) so that we progress smoothly on the Noble Eightfold Path from life to life until final liberation.

Some of the Dhamma talks are transcribed, edited and published on www.sasanarakkha.org/dhamma/. To receive them by email, subscribe to the SBSmail egroup by sending a blank mail to sbsmail-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.



One of the ruins of Nālandā University (5th - 12th century). A Buddhist centre of learning in Bihar, India, it is one of the first great universities in recorded history.

RISE and FALL of Buddhism



Ven Balacitta

gave a Dhamma talk touching on impermanence and enlightenment, two topics which are central to Buddhist teachings. This is followed by a discussion on points raised in the talk.

There is a book written in China more then 500 years ago entitled *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*[1]. The very first sentence of the book reads, "Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall." The whole book is about how a particular kingdom rose and fell—an obvious indication of impermanence. As all kingdoms will fall one day, recorded history has no mention of a "never ending kingdom". The fall could be due to the negligence of the ruler or the government in carrying out their duties, to external attack, or both. However, if a kingdom is fortunate enough to be ruled by someone who is righteous and wise, then the kingdom may not fall easily.[2]

The same rise and fall occurred with Buddhism. Buddhism started in India at about 500 BC and flourished for more than one and a half millennium, but virtually disappeared from the end of the 12th to the beginning of the 13th century. Beautifully, in the middle of the 20th century, Buddhism was revived in that country. All these indicate the transient nature of all things.

We, as Buddhists, follow the Dhamma that is actually none other than the Buddha's teachings. Siddhattha Gotama the Buddha lived about 2,500 years ago and taught the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path to free beings from suffering in *saṁsāra*. Today in our country, there is an increasing interest in the Buddha's teachings. We can see many Buddhist societies formed, monasteries and meditation retreat centres built; many people practise meditation, and many more offer alms to monks. Significantly, more young men (who are not locals of Thai or Sinhalese origins)[3] go forth to become monks.

1 The writer's opinion is that this book is very interesting but contains unwholesome material. Many arts of deception can be learnt. It is not helpful for spiritual seekers.
2 This opening paragraph is Ven Balacitta's way of connecting his talk to the occasion, which coincided with National Elections Day in Malaysia, 8 March 2008.
3 It is not uncommon for such locals to become monks as part of their indigenous Buddhist culture and custom.

If any monk, nun, or lay follower persistently upholds views that are contrary to the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path... this person... is actually contributing to the decline of the Buddhasāsana.

While all these are indications that Buddhism is on the rise in this country, it will soon decline if monks, nuns, and lay followers live without respect for the Teacher, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, the training (*sikkhā*) and mental steadiness (*samādhi*). This is stated in SaddhammaPaṭirūpaka Sutta (SN 16:13).

If any monk, nun, or lay follower persistently upholds views that are contrary to the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path, then we can say that this person has no respect for the Teacher and is actually contributing to the decline of the Buddhasāsana. It will be highly meritorious if we can correct this person.

Brāhmaṇic and Buddhist Notions of Enlightenment

There is a common misunderstanding about the Buddha's teachings harboured by many people including some monks, nuns, and lay followers—to equate the highest goal of Nibbāna (which is the total extinction of greed, hatred and delusion; the exact opposite of impermanence and suffering) with the Brāhmaṇic teaching of enlightenment: union or being one with Brahma, the Higher Self.

Some of you might ask, "What is the problem with this equation? Is it not true that only the terminologies differ but the goal is actually the same, just as all roads lead to Rome?" Well, actually if you are not a Buddhist, maybe I will just smile a little and keep silent until the time is right to speak, as in this way, we can live in harmony. But since you all have taken the Three Refuges, I will share what I have learnt and believe in at this point in time.

The Brāhmaṇic teaching is actually derived from the Vedas. The Vedas were orally handed down from generation to generation by brahmin priests long before the time of the Buddha. In Buddhism, a Brahma is actually a being who dwells in the heavenly world known in Pāli as *brahmaloka* (brahma world). That world is not the state of Nibbāna because beings there have a limited life span—therefore it is impermanent. There are a few *suttas* in the Pāli Canon which indicate that the path to this Brahma world can be gained through the cultivation of the *brahmavihāra* meditations, i.e. loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. As we all are aware, the way to Nibbāna is more than just the brahmavihāras; it is none other than the Noble Eightfold Path. Logically if one practises in a way which includes all the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path and attains liberation, then no matter what the resultant state of liberation is called, it should be the same—but, as recorded in our Pāli Canon, the way to union with Brahma does not have all these factors.

During the Buddha's time, as recorded in Tevijja Sutta (DN 13), there were already many different brahmin teachers, each proclaiming that the path they taught could lead one to union with Brahma (*brahmasahabyatā*). Sometimes arguments broke out among those brahmins with regard to the path. Once, a brahmin asked the Buddha if all these different paths will eventually lead to the same goal, that is, union with Brahma. The Buddha did not answer the brahmin immediately but instead, questioned him on whether those Vedic teachers or their predecessors had ever met Brahma personally. When the brahmin answered in the negative, the Buddha then told him that it would be impossible for them to lead others to be in union with Brahma. Finally, the Buddha proclaimed that one can go to the Brahma world through the development of any of the four brahmavihāra meditations. Thus, we can see that "union with Brahma", which the Buddha equated with being reborn in the Brahma world, is different from Nibbāna because the path is different.

In PaṭhamaMettā Sutta (AN 4:125) the Buddha said that those who maintain their practice of the four brahmavihāra meditations at the time of death will be reborn in the Brahma world. If they are uninstructed worldlings, when they pass away from that Brahma world they can even be reborn in a woeful destination. This again indicates that merely to be in "union with Brahma" is impermanent and cannot be equated with Nibbāna. On the other hand, if they are instructed noble disciples of the Buddha, they attain Nibbāna there in brahmaloka.

It is not mentioned in that sutta why uninstructed worldlings can even take rebirth in the woeful realms while instructed noble disciples attain Nibbāna in brahmaloka. But what I can reason out is that the uninstructed worldlings just practise the four brahmavihāra meditations, the wholesome effects of which will eventually expire. Then, because they are not yet freed from the woeful realms, they can still take rebirth there. In contrast the instructed noble disciples already know the Noble Eightfold Path and upon attainment of the first stage of sainthood, will no longer take rebirth in the woeful realms but can even attain Nibbāna in brahmaloka.

Although there are differences in the paths to Nibbāna and the Brahma world, we should not look down on the cultivation of the brahmavihāras because it is actually encouraged by the Buddha in many suttas. But we can or should question the authenticity of anyone claiming to be an enlightened holy person (e.g. through such a practice), but who acts immorally.



Internal Rise and Fall

Earlier, I mentioned the rise and fall of kingdoms in the world, evident from history books. There is yet another rise and fall that is more important for us to know. It is the arising and passing away of our internal world, manifested through the five aggregates—our so called body and mind. To be able to learn this truly, we have to develop right mindfulness. Mastery of this could free us of attachments. When one is free from all attachments, one will be unaffected by whatever happens in the outside world. One is at peace all the time.

Bhante Aggacitta is guiding the public in the practice of right mindfulness in SBS almost every Saturday night. You all are invited to come and participate. Some of you may have already learnt how to meditate but it is still beneficial to join in. It is good to associate with spiritual people who are infused with good wishes. They always wish for your well being, for your spiritual progress, for your happiness.

DISCUSSION

An earlier version of this Dhamma talk was mailed to subscribers of sbsmail@yahoogroups.com and some members of the group responded with comments and suggestions. We reproduce two such mails and Ven Balacitta's responses to them. Ven Aggacitta comments on this topic in a separate article that follows.

✉ Uphold Buddhism, learn from Three Kingdoms

As a lay follower, I would be interested to know more (reasons) why Buddhism declined in the past and what steps should be taken, with the benefit of hindsight and historical reasons of the earlier decline, to prevent any further decline in Buddhism, now that Buddhism has again gained popularity from the middle of the last century. The lengthy discussion comparing Brāhmaṇic practices should not be the key reason alone for the decline in Buddhism in the past. And it may be beneficial too if more advice could be given to lay followers like (besides practising mindfulness ourselves) on how we can encourage and inculcate the goodness of Buddhism in our friends, neighbours and other people in the world, and hence, uphold the rise of Buddhism on earth!

I have read Romance of the Three Kingdoms. *It is actually terribly unwholesome (as Ven Balacitta pointed out) but there is much one can learn from the evil, cunning, treachery and all kinds of misdeeds by mankind of that era and up till now! On the other hand, honour, justice and intelligence shine through in the likes of Liu Bei, Kuan Kong and Kong Ming. The book actually helps me a lot in my day-to-day dealings with all kinds of people I come in contact with socially and in business. It helps me foresee the evil as well as goodness in others usually before their true intentions become evident.*

My notes and observation above should not be taken in any way as a criticism of Ven Balacitta's article. I am only seeking for more reasons why Buddhism fell in the past and for more advice to us lay followers to spread the message of the Buddha.

Jeṭṭha

Ven Balacitta's response

History books tell us that Buddhism in India declined because of external attack by some Muslims which led to the complete destruction of many Buddhist establishments and the monastic order. If one does not probe further, one could mistakenly think that Buddhism declined just because of this single reason.

Actually, one should not attribute it totally to the external attack but should also consider the possibility of the internal decadence of the majority of the monks at that time.[4] For how could it be possible for a Dhamma practitioner to backslide?

If all the monks, out of respect for the Buddha, would just practise what the Buddha praises, such as living in the wilderness, being satisfied even with wearing rag-robes, and going for alms round; and not, just for the sake of fine material gain, neglect these virtues and take up residence in towns, cities, or royal capitals engaging in many kinds of misconduct, what kind of decline could there be? Buddhism would have been upheld, and not declined.

In order for a person to spread the message of the Buddha effectively, one has to really understand, accept and practise the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha only taught those who would listen, and even then he did not simply teach the same message to everybody. When the Buddha perceived that someone was not spiritually mature enough, he taught generosity and morality leading to heavenly

4 "Chinese scholars travelling through the region between the 5th and 8th centuries CE, such as Faxian, Xuanzang, I-ching, Hui-sheng, and Sung-Yun, began to speak of a decline of the Buddhist Saṅgha, especially in the wake of the White Hun invasion. A continuing decline occurred after the fall of the Pala dynasty in the 12th century CE, continuing with the later destruction of monasteries by Muslim conquerors." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decline_of_Buddhism_in_India (citing Doniger, Wendy (2000). Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of World Religions. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1378. ISBN 0877790442).

bliss. To someone who was spiritually mature, he progressed to elucidating the drawbacks of sensual pleasures, the benefits of renunciation and the Four Noble Truths for the purpose of liberation.

If one can really accept the relevant message of the Buddha and practises sincerely, abandoning what ought to be abandoned, I believe that one can inspire many people—just one's mere presence is enough to spread the message of the Buddha. How much more so when one speaks the Dhamma? *Sādhu* to such noble disciples of the Buddha! May we practise the Dhamma well.

✉ Open-mindedness may not always be wise

Thanks for uploading the transcript of Ven Balacitta's talk "Rise and Fall of Buddhism" onto sbsmail@yahoogroups.com. Sādhu to Ven Balacitta for giving such a pertinent and timely talk! I especially resonated with this paragraph:

> "There is a common misunderstanding about the Buddha's teachings harboured by many people including some monks, nuns and lay followers to equate the Buddha's teaching of the highest goal, enlightenment, Nibbāna, with the Brāhmaṇic teaching of enlightenment—the union or being one with the higher self, the Brahma."

I've heard so much of such similar 'equations' from some segments of the community and the scary thing is that, some of these people are also teaching and leading others in the same direction!

For example, I have noticed a loosely defined term "openness" or "open-mindedness" often used by some Buddhists to justify their dabbling into alternative practices and adopting 'altered' views; or to conveniently label other Buddhists who are not similarly inclined as "not open-minded". At the other extreme are groups who readily condemn and ostracise their fellow brothers and sisters in the Dhamma for adopting any form of practice that, in their opinion, are not contained in the scriptures.

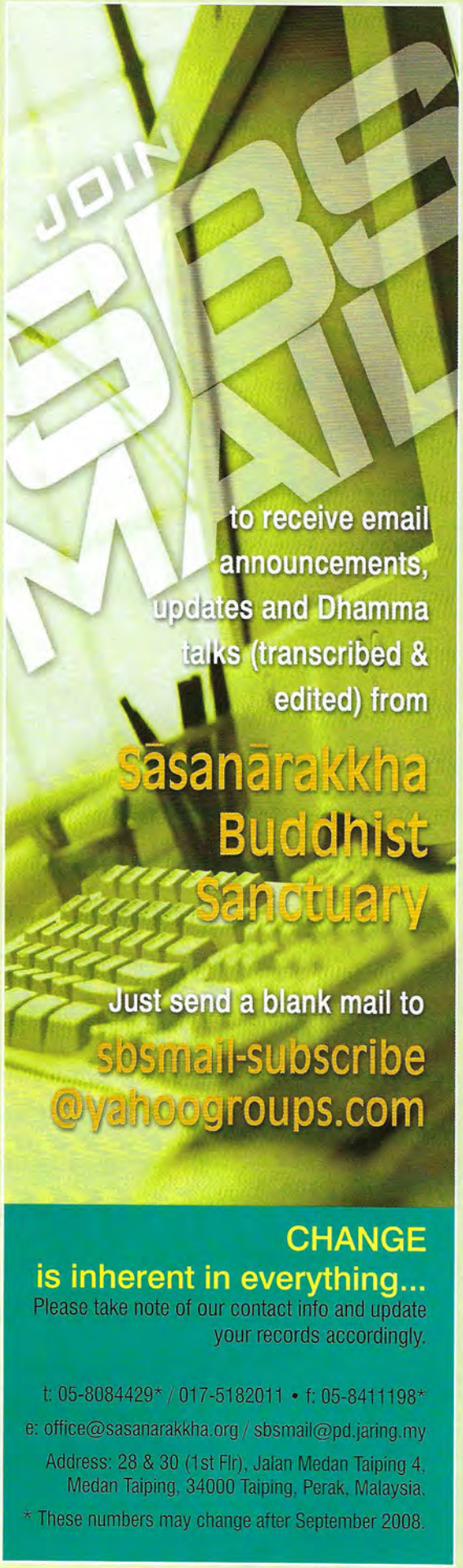
Although I personally am not opposed to alternative practices (like yoga, qigong, etc.) if they can support our spiritual journey, I feel that maintaining right views and a clear perspective of one's motivations is crucial to protecting one from getting lost in the massive 'jungle' out there. After all, isn't it true that there is just a very fine line between being open-minded and falling into the trap of delusion or wrong views? It is my perception that genuine and discerning open-mindedness is backed by wisdom.

Ven Balacitta's talk on this subject strikes me as being pertinent in this age. I wonder if Ven Balacitta could perhaps elaborate more on the fundamental differences of the concept of enlightenment between the Brāhmaṇic teachings and the teachings of the Buddha?

Max

Ven Balacitta's response

I suggest that you read Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's article "Dhamma and Non-duality" (http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_27.htm). He is a highly learned scholar and has much to say about this matter. It is better to read his article directly. I think many will be stunned by his revelations.



Buddhist Misconceptions about Union with Brahma

After the demise of the Buddha, doctrinal differences and geographical distances brought about the divergence of Buddhism into myriad schools. Even these schools disputed over interpretations and ideologies within our Buddhist framework. So it is not surprising that misconceptions arise when we attempt—all too often naively or with a biased agenda—to understand the views and practices of other spiritual systems. In this article, **VEN AGGACITTA** shows the importance of doing proper research with an objective and open-ended attitude—in the true spirit of a Truth-seeker—if we genuinely want to understand.

Behind the Scenes

One might wonder why Ven Balacitta picked on this one particular factor that could lead to the decline of Buddhism, while many scholars are still uncertain of the exact causes that led to its downfall and eventual assimilation by Hinduism in India. When we investigate the circumstances surrounding the Dhamma talk, it becomes apparent. Two days before the talk, there was a Dhamma discussion in SBS during which one of the monastics described his practice of *satisampajañña* as "being in the present moment, practising non-duality by not discriminating, by being one with everything." This was challenged by several monastics as something un-Theravādin and related to Mahāyānist and Brāhmaṇical[1] views and practices. Obviously, Ven Balacitta was one of them and his understanding of non-duality in the ultimate sense is "union with Brahma".

Although I was present when Ven Balacitta gave this talk during a house *dāna*, I did not give it much thought until the transcribed version was submitted for inclusion in this issue of *Sāsanārakkha Newszine*. In the course of content-editing, I suddenly realised that it contained some misconceptions prevalent among many Buddhists, including myself. This ignited the spirit of enquiry that led me to many hours and weeks of research into the history and evolution of Vedic and Upaniṣadic[2] thought and its impact on the Buddha's teachings. Since an earlier transcribed version of the talk had already been broadcast through sbsmail@yahoogroups.com, I feel that I should make the clarifications here.

The three prevalent misconceptions found in the transcribed talk are:

1. the Vedas teach the union or being one with Brahma, the Higher Self
2. the translation of *brahmasahabyatā* as "union with Brahma"
3. the Buddha equates being one with Brahma, the Higher Self, with rebirth in the brahma world.

This article objectively addresses these issues from an historical perspective and concludes with some caution over the possible deceptiveness of semantics that could lead to unwholesome disputes.

1 You will see what this means under **1.3 After the Vedas**, where the Brāhmaṇas are explained.
2 You will find definitions of these terms in **1.0 Vedic and Post-Vedic Teachings in Brief**.

1.0 Vedic and Post-Vedic Teachings in Brief[3]

To begin with, I give a brief history and description of Vedic and post-Vedic teachings so that we can better understand the nature of these misconceptions.

1.1 Origins of the Vedas

Veda is a Sanskrit word meaning "knowledge" and the Vedas are considered the most sacred set of scriptures in Hinduism, a composite religion merging many often divergent teachings from the brahmin priests and other sages of India since the time of the Vedas. The antiquity of the Vedas is difficult to determine, but the general consensus seems to be that they were first composed between 1500 – 900 BCE.[4]

1.2 Contents of the Vedas

Ṛg (*Pāli*, **Iru**), **Yajur** and **Sāma Vedas** comprise the collection of the Three Vedas commonly referred to in the Pāli Canon as a set, but never individually. Essentially **Ṛg Veda** (Knowledge of Praise)[5] is dominated by thousands of hymns praising the pantheon of Aryan gods for the singers' continuous good fortune and political power. It introduces the class system, obviously as a convenient tool to maintain the status quo of the fair-skinned Aryan rulers over the dark-skinned natives. A rare philosophical hymn about genesis[6] is found and there are beginnings of philosophical speculations through the notion of *ṛta*, an overarching order that transcended even the gods.[7] **Yajur Veda** (Knowledge of Sacrifice)[8] is a manual of rites for sacrifices and ceremonies mentioned in the Ṛg Veda while **Sāma Veda** (Knowledge of Chants)[9] contains the melodies for the sacrificial chants. A fourth Veda called **Atharva** (*Pāli*, **Āthabbaṇa**) was later added to the original three. It is attributed to the sage Atharva and primarily contains magical spells and incantations, and procedures for marriages, funerals and coronation rites, etc. Elements of philosophy and abstraction seem to be creeping in, as two hymns praise the deity of time, and *kāma* (desire, sensuality) is praised as "the first seed of the mind" that generated heaven. However, it is significant that ethics and the belief in the Law of Karma are conspicuously absent in the Vedas. Scholars consider these four Vedas as poetic liturgy, collectively called *mantra* or *saṁhitā*.[10]

1.3 After the Vedas

Another class of scriptures called the **Brāhmaṇas** followed the Vedas. It is estimated that they were composed in prose between 900 – 700 BCE[11]. They are essentially commentaries on the four Vedas, specifically on the procedures and cosmic symbolism of sacrificial rites. The class system was now fully established, making the brahmin priests indispensable in the performance of any sacrifice—thus the name of this class of scriptures. Herein are found the belief in and a growing importance given to

- the consequences of action
- the power of the word, i.e. chanting mantras like *auṁ* while making sacrifices
- the power of the mind over even the word
- the belief in repeated lives through reincarnation.

The increased emphasis given to understanding the significance of the sacrificial rituals, rather than mere compliance with them distinguishes this class of scriptures from the Vedas proper. As knowledge rivalled the value of ritual, the issue of liberation from an endless cycle of birth and death became more pronounced.[12]

Following the Brāhmaṇas are the **Āraṇyakas** and **Upaniṣads**, which are later works discussing and interpreting earlier works, especially the Vedas, and introducing philosophical and mystical speculations.

The **Āraṇyakas** (Forest Teachings) are the product of ascetic brahmins who retreated into the forest to study the spiritual doctrines with their students, leading to less emphasis on the sacrificial rites that were still performed in the towns.[13]

The word **"Upaniṣad"** is derived from *upa* (near), *ni* (down) and *ṣad* (sit), referring to "sitting down near" a teacher in order to receive secret teachings. These esoteric teachings are contained in the Upaniṣads, known also as Vedānta (the culmination of the Vedas). There is a large number of Upaniṣads, of which the earliest were

3 The classification of Vedic and post-Vedic teachings in this article may differ from that made by other scholars on Hinduism. For a different classification, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedas.

4 Sanderson Beck, *INDIA and Southeast Asia to 1800*; Web edition: http://san.beck.org/EC7-Vedas.html. For a more antiquated estimate, see http://www.tamilnation.org/heritage/hindutimeline.htm and http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_antiquity.asp.

5 History of Yoga, www.abc-of-yoga.com.

6 This is the famous Nāsadīya hymn found in book 10 (RV. 10.129). Some modern scholars opine that books 1 and 10 of the Ṛg Veda, which incongruously express metaphysical thoughts of genesis, are later additions. (see, e.g. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigveda).

7 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishad.

8 History of Yoga, www.abc-of-yoga.com.

9 Ibid.

10 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishad.

11 Sanderson Beck, *INDIA and Southeast Asia to 1800*. But K. N. Jayatilleke, in *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, Delhi, 1963, p 482, gives a variant estimate—Ṛg Veda: 1200 – 1000 BCE; Brāhmaṇas and Atharva Veda: 1000 – 800 BCE; Āraṇyakas: 800 BCE; Early, Middle and Late Upaniṣads: 800 – 600 BCE and Buddha's lifetime: circa 600 BCE.

12 Sanderson Beck, *INDIA and Southeast Asia to 1800*.

13 Ibid.

composed circa 500 BCE;[14] by the 17th century, there were over a hundred.[15] In a massive verse index, *Upaniṣad-vākya-mahākośa*, 223 extant texts that call themselves Upaniṣads are named.[16] The famous philosopher, Shankara (8th century), is thought to have composed commentaries on 11 Upaniṣads that are included in a list of 15 'principal' Upaniṣads generally considered to be the oldest ones.[17] In this article, the terms "Early, Middle, Late Upaniṣads" refer to the chronology of these 15 texts.

The primary message of the Upaniṣads is that liberation from the cycle of birth and death, or immortality, can be achieved by certain practices culminating in the realisation that the individual spirit *(ātman)* is the same as the cosmic essence (*Brahman*).[18] Shankara's exegesis of the Upaniṣads describes Brahman not as God in the monotheistic sense; he ascribes to it no limiting characteristics, not even those of being and non-being. Thus, his philosophy is named *advaita*, "not two" or 'non-duality'.[19] Among the many schools of Vedānta, currently the most well-known in the West seems to be Advaita (Non-duality).

1.4 Conception of Ātman and Brahman

The doctrine of *ātman*, the individual spirit, was first introduced in the Āraṇyakas[20] but it gradually evolved through the Early to the Late Upaniṣads. The complex evolution of the conception included ideas of "ātman being some sort of quasi-physical soul surviving death" –> "something like *prāṇa* (life-energy, especially of breath) but different from it" –> "consciousness (*vijñāna*)" –> "universal, impersonal Reality that is indeterminable and ineffable".[21]

In Sanskrit the word *brahma* has two genders: masculine, *Brahmā*, the creator-god; and neuter, *Brahman*, the cosmic essence. Neither of these is found in the Vedas, although later commentaries—starting with the Brāhmaṇas and maturing in the later Upaniṣads—import this conception of brahma into the philosophical hymns about genesis found in the Vedas. Initially, the creator and controller of beings was attributed to the god Prajāpati, but he was later identified with Brahmā.[22] The conception of Brahmā and of *brahmaloka* as a place is dominant in both the late Brāhmaṇas and the Early Upaniṣads, while the idea of Brahman dominates the Middle and Late Upaniṣads.

More specifically, in the Brāhmaṇas and Early Upaniṣads

- the usage of Brahmā and Brahman is not strictly distinguished although the idea of the creator-god prevails
- brahmaloka is the highest world to be attained only after death.[23]

By the time of the later Upaniṣads, Brahman has clearly become a state attainable in this very life when the mystic realises that ātman and Brahman are essentially the same. However, the earlier view of the brahmaloka was still too strong to be discarded.[24] It is therefore not surprising that the Bhagavadgītā, composed circa 5th – 4th century BCE[25], tries to reconcile these opposing views by combining the Absolutism of Brahman and the theism of Brahmā. Thus it personifies Brahman as Iśvara (Controller), Paramātma (Higher Self) or Puruṣottama (Greatest Person).[26]

2.0 Clarification of Misconceptions

Now that we have some knowledge of the Vedas and post-Vedic scriptures, I shall deal with the three misconceptions mentioned earlier.

2.1 The Vedas teach the union or being one with Brahma, the Higher Self

As we can see from the description above (1.2), the Vedic teachings are essentially materialistic and political although there are beginning signs of philosophical considerations in it. So it is a misconception to say that the Vedas teach the union or being one with Brahman, the Higher Self, because this notion was not even in the Vedas.

2.2 Translation of Brahmasahabyatā as "union with Brahma"

When Maurice Walshe decided to retain Rhys Davids' translation of *brahmasahabyatā* as "union with Brahma", he was quite aware that it should be more correctly rendered as "fellowship with Brahma". In his introduction to *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, he explained that he wanted to be ambiguous to show that both interpretations—a mystical union versus merely belonging to the company of Brahmā—may well be implied here.[27] However, with current perceptions of the many paths to spiritual awakening, I feel that such a stance may tend to further confuse rather than assist genuine Truth-seekers.

14 See also note 11. Jayatilleke's estimated chronology of the Late Upaniṣads is only until the Maitrī Upaniṣad.
15 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishad.
16 S. Gajanan Shambhu Sadhale, *Sri Garibdass Oriental Series, No. 44*, Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, 1987. Cited in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishad.
17 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishad.
18 Sanderson Beck, *INDIA and Southeast Asia to 1800*.
19 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishad.
20 Ibid.
21 Upadhyaya K. N., *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgītā*, Delhi, 1971, pp 81 – 83.
22 Ibid., p 391.
23 Jayatilleke K. N., *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, Delhi, 1963, p 477 – 8.
24 Ibid., p 478.
25 Upadhyaya K. N., *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgītā*, p 29.
26 Ibid., p 393.
27 Walshe, Maurice (tr.), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications, 1995, p 43.

A thorough search on the usage of the word *sahabyatā* in the Pāli Nikāyas reveals that it does not have any metaphysical or mystical connotations and can be more accurately translated as "in the company of". It is used in a variety of contexts involving rebirth in the company of—besides Brahmā—other *devas*, brahmins, *khattiyas*[28], householders, *nāgas* (celestial serpents), elephants, dogs, cattle, etc.

In point of fact, the Brāhmaṇical beliefs and practices—including the obsession with gaining rebirth in brahmaloka—criticised by the Buddha in Tevijja Sutta can be found described in the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Early Upaniṣads, where the conception of ātman being essentially the same as Brahman had not yet been formed.[29]

It should be noted that the post-Vedic conception of Brahmā and brahmaloka is not identical with that in the Pāli scriptures. In Hinduism there is only one Brahmā, a creator-deity. In the Pāli suttas, however, we find several different coexisting Brahmās described (one for each of the many worlds), some of whom think they are 'all powerful' creators, a belief that the Buddha refutes.[30] The myths, characters, and functions of these Brahmās are quite distinct from those of the Vedic Brahmā. However, at least one of the Brahmās (i.e., Mahābrahmā, or Great Brahmā) of the Pāli scriptures is identified as being the object of worship of pre-Buddhist brahmins.[31]

To summarise, the translation of *brahmasahabyatā* as "union with Brahma" is misleading because it implies the misconception of a mystical or metaphysical oneness with Brahmā, when *sahabyatā* simply means 'rebirth in the company of'.

2.3 The Buddha equates "union with Brahma, the Higher Self", with rebirth in the brahma world

In the first place, the realisation that ātman is essentially the same as Brahman was never referred to in the Upaniṣads as 'union with Brahmā', nor was Brahman called 'the Higher Self' there. As mentioned above (1.4), it was only in the Bhagavadgītā, which was composed circa 5th – 4th century BCE, i.e. after the Buddha's lifetime, that such a reference was made to reconcile the divergent beliefs within a prevalent religious culture.

Secondly, although the Sanskrit word *ātman* can be transcribed into Pāli as *atta*, and both share a common meaning of 'self' (as in a reflexive pronoun), the usage of *atta* in the sense of 'an ineffable, ultimate, metaphysical Reality' cannot be found in the Pāli suttas, nor can the usage of the neuter Brahman.[32]

Nowhere in the Pāli Nikāyas did the Buddha explicitly deal with this Upaniṣadic notion of awakening; even his doctrine of *anatta* (not self) was not specifically aimed at refuting it. As Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi writes,

> While it is true that the anatta doctrine excludes Upaniṣadic ideas about the self, the purpose for which the Buddha expounded it was not to negate any particular theory of the self but to correct the universal human proclivity to seek a substantial basis of personal identity amidst the five aggregates.[33]

So, it is a misconception to say that the Buddha equates "union with the Higher Self" with rebirth in the brahma world because the issue of "union with the Higher Self" is apparently unheard of in the Pāli suttas.

3.0 Food for Thought

Not only has this probe into the Indian quest for Truth been an eye-opener for me, but it has also triggered off a chain reaction within a huge box of boxes within boxes, prompting me to open one box after another to get to the virtually bottomless bottom of it all. But with time as one of the major constraints, I have had to bring my steps to a halt somewhere, with my feet dangling in a void, vainly feeling for a secure footing.

Modern scholars are in general agreement that the Early and Middle Upaniṣads were composed before the Buddha's time—however one dates his birth or death—and that the Bhagavadgītā after that.[34] But the puzzle remains: Why then was this metaphysical conception of ātman and Brahman not debated by the Buddha or his contemporaries? Could it be so esoteric that it was unknown to the uninitiated? Or was the teaching confined to a geographical area quite remote from the Middle Kingdom (Majjhimadesa) within which the Buddha preached? These are the boxes I have not had the time to open.

Whatever could be found in those boxes, the fact remains that the teachings in the Upaniṣads are by no means homogeneous or consistent (as when compared to that in the early Pāli suttas). They are actually records of individual quests for Truth and deliverance that were 'pushed, pulled and kneaded' to fit into the overwhelming orthodoxy of the Vedas.[35] The seekers were not mainstream brahmins inexorably bound by Vedic ritualism, but individualists who tapped the pre-Vedic heritage of the meditative, mystical *śramaṇas*—world renouncers who were the

28 (Sanskrit: *ksatriyas*) members of the ruling class, one of the social divisions during the time of Gotama Buddha.
29 Jayatilleke K. N., *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p 478 – 481.
30 See, e.g. Brahmajāla Sutta (DN 1), Pāthika Sutta (DN 24), Brahmanimantanika Sutta (MN 49).
31 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahma_(Buddhism).
32 For greater clarity on the differences between the Upaniṣadic ātman and the Buddhist atta, see Helmuth von Glasenapp's "Vedanta and Buddhism: A Comparative Study" (http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/vonglasenapp/wheel002.html).
33 Bhikkhu Bodhi, *'How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*. Richard F. Gombrich. London and Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Athlone, 1996: Reviewed by Bhikkhu Bodhi' in *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. 4 1997, p 293.
34 See, e.g. Upadhyaya K. N., *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgītā*, p 29.
35 Jayatilleke K. N., *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p 32.

When scholars meet they argue endlessly over their differences; when contemplatives meet they celebrate the similarities of their experience.

object of the orthodox brahmins' disdain—in their earnest quest for deliverance.[36]

Based on my research so far, it seems to me that Vedānta is, in effect, a spiritual revolution against the orthodox sacrificial ritualism of the Vedas, led by brahmins who had to somehow justify their mystical experiences by appealing to the authority of the Vedas through their ingenious re-interpretation of the saṁhitās. So the Vedāntin message of deliverance may not rightly belong to Brāhmaṇical views and practices, but more to those of the mystical śramaṇas, to which the Buddha and his disciples also belong.

Below I present the findings of those scholars who have opened more boxes than me, so that we can be feasted with even more food for thought.

3.1 Could Ātman be a Misnomer for the Ultimate Reality?

In tracing the evolution of the conception of ātman until its culmination in the post-Vedic scriptures, K.N. Upadhyaya laments,

> Now the true import of this impersonal Ātman can hardly be brought out in its translation as 'Self', which is usually done for want of a more adequate term, or ***perhaps to retain the terminology of the long tradition*** [italics mine]. This rendering jars on the ear, for it inevitably suggests something individualistic, personal or selfish; whereas the Ātman has now come to mean the universal, impersonal and the only Reality indeterminable and ineffable, the realisation of which was the attainment of immortality. This immortality was no more a heaven, however fine, but a transcendence of it. It is not the accomplishment of desires, but the abandonment of the same; not an unending continuation of existence, a perpetual afterlife, but the absolute transcendence of empirical existence, the precise negation of this world. It is knowing the true Self and turning back from the world. It needs no clarification that all this was feeling the way towards the Buddhist approach.[37]

Peter Harvey, after pointing out that the ultimate Self of the Upaniṣads shares certain qualities with Nibbāna (both being permanent, beyond suffering, and unconditioned), may have unwittingly echoed Upadhyaya's sentiment when he wrote,

> If the later *Upaniṣads* came to see ultimate reality as beyond the sense of 'I am', Buddhism would then say: why call it 'Self' then?[38]

3.2 Difference between Vedāntin and Buddhist Conceptions of Deliverance

The remarks made by the two learned scholars above (3.1) point to a plausible notion that the realisation of the Ultimate Reality ***could be the same despite the semantic difference.*** Yet philosophically, the Vedāntin and Buddhist conceptions of deliverance are diametrically opposite, according to Prof Dr H. V. Glasenapp:

> The essential difference between the conception of deliverance in Vedanta and in Pali Buddhism lies in the following ideas: Vedanta sees deliverance as the manifestation of a state which, though obscured, has been existing from time immemorial; for the Buddhist, however, Nirvana is a reality which differs entirely from all dharmas as manifested in Samsara, and which only becomes effective, if they are abolished. To sum up: the Vedantin wishes to penetrate to the last reality which dwells within him as an immortal essence, or seed, out of which everything has arisen. The follower of Pali Buddhism, however, hopes by complete abandoning of all corporeality, all sensations, all perceptions, all volitions, and acts of consciousness, to realize a state of bliss which is entirely different from all that exists in the Samsara.[39]

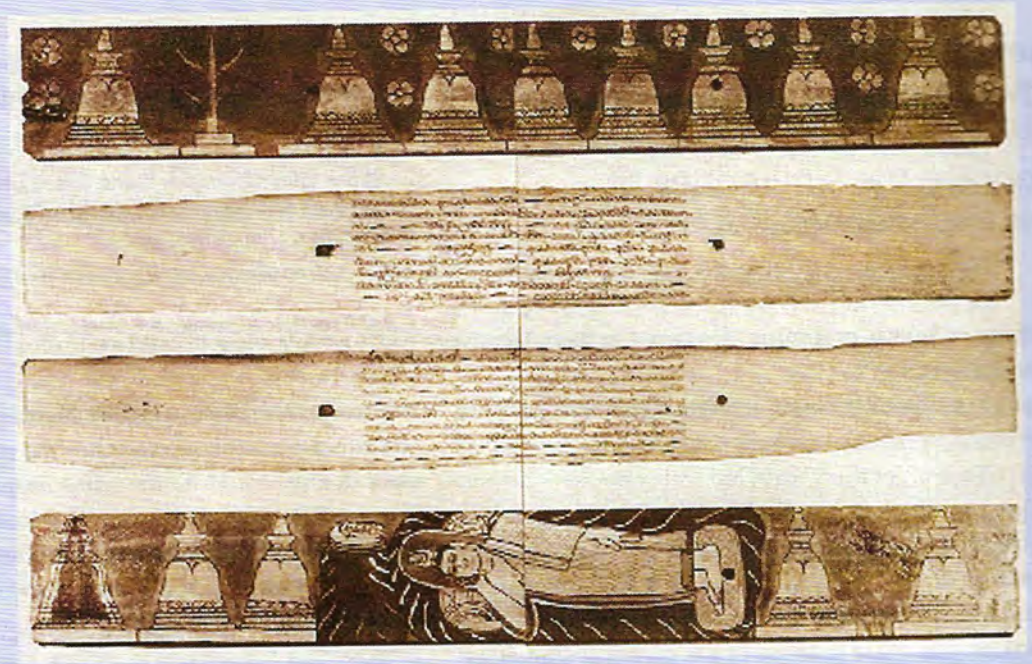
3.3 Don't Mistake the Finger for the Moon

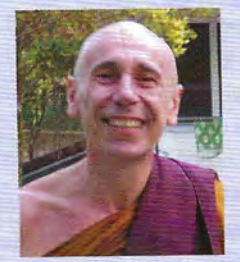
Let me conclude with some profound words that I came across some 30 years ago when I embarked on my spiritual quest. Much as I would like to give credit to their author, my memory fails me; even a persistent search in the Internet was not successful.

> When scholars meet they argue endlessly over their differences; when contemplatives meet they celebrate the similarities of their experience.[40]

As I quoted these words recently, one of my students remarked, "But the opposite is true nowadays!" Perhaps if we all endeavour to be meditative scholars or learned meditators, then we might lessen the tendency to not see the wood for the trees; or to use a Buddhist expression—to mistake the finger for the moon it is pointing at.

36 Upadhyaya K. N., *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgītā*, pp 64 - 68.
37 Ibid., p 83.
38 Harvey P., *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāṇa in Early Buddhism*, Curzon Press, 1995, p 34.
39 Helmuth von Glasenapp, "Vedanta and Buddhism: A Comparative Study".
40 I vaguely remember coming across them while browsing through *The Whole Earth Catalogue* in the late 70s.





Pāli in Context

by Ven Dhammananda (in collaboration with Ven Aggacitta)

SBS Monastics learn Pāli through interesting lessons—pronunciation and grammar; word-for-word translations and paraphrases of extracts from the suttas.

Meaning and History

Pāli[1] is a term used by the commentators to refer to the collection of 'original' teachings attributed directly to the Buddha and his immediate disciples, in order to differentiate the 'original' teachings from the commentaries. Eventually, the language in which the 'original' teachings were preserved came to be called ***Pālibhāsā*** (Pāli language) and it was later abbreviated to just ***Pāli***.

The Buddha probably spoke the dialect of the people he was addressing, for he did not allow his teachings to be versified in Sanskrit (as in the scriptural tradition of the brahmin priests) but instead to be learned in one's own dialect[2]—obviously, so that one could deeply understand its meaning and message. Shortly after his passing away, a group of 500 *theras* (elders) who were *arahants* gathered in order to preserve the Buddha's teachings. They recollected, collated and agreed upon the contents of the DhammaVinaya and recited the final version in unison. That gathering is now known as the 1st Council.

According to the Theravādin tradition, Pāli was used in that first mass recitation. However, modern scholars are of the opinion that Pāli as a scriptural language was synthesised from a few closely related NE Indian dialects spoken around the time of the Buddha and it assumed its final form in the 3rd century BCE during the 3rd Council sponsored by King Asoka. It was during this council that the 'original' teachings were closed to further addition, i.e. canonised as the Pāli Tipiṭaka (Three Baskets)—now popularly known as the "Pāli Canon".

About 200 years after the 3rd Council the whole Canon was first inscribed on palm leaves in Sri Lanka. Prior to that, the teachings were orally transmitted by the monks. However, the oral tradition of monks memorising and reciting texts in Pāli is still very much alive today.

In effect, what we have today are not the Buddha's own words directly from his lips, dictated or written by him, but the recollected memory of his words—accumulated from various sources, collated, edited and categorised—as texts which monks remembered and passed down from generation to generation till the present time. We are very fortunate to now have the teachings recorded in Pāli in a variety of scripts and translated into many languages including English.

1 A search in the five Nikāyas, using the search engine of Vipassanā Research Institutes's Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana CD-ROM, shows that the word "pāli" occurs only twice—in the Mahāvagga (Great Chapter) of the Vinaya Piṭaka—in the context of "embankment".
2 Horner, I. B. (tr.), *The Book of the Discipline Vol. V*, P.T.S. Oxford, 1997, p 194.

Throughout the centuries Pāli has become the lingua franca for all Theravādins, including scholars, in the world. So no matter where in the world you go, if you get in touch with the Theravāda Saṅgha you will be exposed inevitably to Pāli when you take the Three Refuges, observe precepts, chant *parittas* (protective verses), etc. Believe it or not, you already know some Pāli!

On the Road to Pāli

My first exposure with Pāli was through listening to and chanting *suttas* at monasteries in Thailand. The monotony of the chanting—not knowing what it meant—was tedious. After going through numerous meditation retreats elsewhere, I would meet with Bhante Aggacitta and spend some time at SBS. This gradually changed my views on the importance of studying Pāli grammar, memorising Pātimokkha (Buddhist Monastic Code) and reciting the suttas. I came to the realisation that a healthy balance of study, character development and meditation within the framework of the Buddha's gradual training (*anupubbasikkhā*)[3] is the path I would like to follow.

Bhante Aggacitta and Ven Kumāra introduced me to international Pāli pronunciation. I was deeply inspired to spend many hours daily reciting Pātimokkha and the suttas. It was an intense experience.

In my third *vassa*, I noticed Ven Ṭhitavijjo in SBS assiduously engaged in studying Pāli. He has been a great source of inspiration for Ven Balacitta and myself in our Pāli studies. One day in January 2008 he passed me *A New Course in Reading Pāli* by J. W. Gair & W. S. Karunatillake, together with a CD-ROM containing the MP3 recording of Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi teaching the whole book lesson by lesson. When Bhante Aggacitta knew about this, he encouraged all the monks to study the book and gladly gave us a weekly tutorial.

Manner of Study

Our Pāli lessons worked on a few levels. First, one by one, we had to read aloud the text to be translated for that day. In reading, we had to articulate our pronunciation according to the following criteria:

- Long/short syllables
- Double consonants
- Aspirated/non-aspirated consonants
- Retroflex/Dental consonants
- Nasals according to their respective consonantal group.

After that we did individual word-by-word translation with an analysis of inflections, numbers and genders. Next we improvised a personal paraphrase in English of the text, line by line. Bhante Aggacitta stopped us at times for clarification, and elaborated on grammar, style and meaning. It was enriching to hear a variety of styles. Dhamma understanding was the final sharing, when Bhante enquired about the practical significance of the translated text for each of us.

I was pleasantly surprised to discover that I was able to keep up with the others in this course, in comparison with an earlier attempt when I joined a Pāli class based on passages from the Vinaya Piṭaka[4]. This was very encouraging for me and kept me going with my Pāli study.

A Taste of Understanding Pāli

To give you a taste of the benefits of learning Pāli, please look at the following examples.

Text 1. Taking Refuge

Pāli	Literal Translation	My Paraphrase Translation
Buddhaṁ	To the Buddha	I go to the Buddha for refuge.
saraṇaṁ	as a refuge / who is a refuge	
gacchāmi	I go.	

Understanding the text this way makes it clearer to me. What about you?

Text 2. The Mind (AN I,iv)—extract

Pāli	Literal Translation	My Paraphrase Translation
Cittaṁ,	Mind,	The mind, O monks, which is untamed leads to great harm.
bhikkhave,	O monks,	
adantaṁ	untamed	
mahato	to great	
anatthāya	to non-benefit (i.e. harm)	
saṁvattati.	leads.	

3 See, e.g. MN 27, 51, 107.
4 "Discipline Basket"; one of the three divisions of the Pāli Canon; it contains a compilation of monastic rules and regulations.

When we are listening to a Dhamma talk or reading a Dhamma book, how can we authenticate what has been said or written? ... the best would always be to compare with the Pāli texts.

Now let us compare my translation of the same expanded text with those of other well established translators.

Text 3. The Mind (AN I,iv)

Pāli	Literal Translation	Paraphrase Translations
Nāhaṁ,	I do not,	"I do not see even one other thing, O monks, which thus untamed, leads to great harm as this, O monks, the mind. The mind, O monks, which is untamed leads to great harm." Dhammananda
bhikkhave,	O monks,	
aññaṁ	other	
ekadhammaṁ pi	one thing even	
samanupassāmi;	see/perceive/envisage	"I do not envision a single thing that, when untamed, leads to such great harm as the mind. The mind when untamed, leads to great harm." Bhikkhu Ṭhānissaro
yaṁ	which	
evaṁ	thus	
adantaṁ	untamed	
mahato	to great	"Monks, I know not of any other single thing so conducive to great loss as the untamed mind. The untamed mind indeed conduces to great loss." F.L. Woodward
anatthāya	to non-benefit (i.e. harm)	
saṁvattati;	conduces;	
yathayidaṁ,	as this,	
bhikkhave,	O monks,	"No other thing do I know, O monks, that brings so much harm as a mind that is untamed. Such a mind truly brings much harm." Ñāṇaponika Thera
cittaṁ.	mind.	
Cittaṁ,	Mind,	
bhikkhave,	O monks,	
adantaṁ	untamed	"I do not perceive even one other thing, O monks, that leads to such great harm as an untamed mind. An untamed mind leads to great harm." Bhikkhu Bodhi
mahato	to great	
anatthāya	to non-benefit (i.e. harm)	
saṁvattati.	leads.	

Do you see the difference in translations? Do they express the meaning clearly; do they add extra words or different words? Which one appeals to you most? What would be *your* translation? We read a translation of a sutta and take it as the word of the Blessed One. But is it?

How would you answer these questions? If you do not study or know Pāli well, you will never be able to find out whether a translation is accurate or not. So you have to take it on faith. And I did just that. But I wanted to get a better feel of this language which is closest to what the Buddha spoke. Everything else is translation. The Pāli of the Canon has the most authentic flavour of the Buddha's words.

We can never verify the exact words of the Buddha because there are no video tapes of the Buddha giving discourses as there are of many contemporary teachers (e.g. J. Krishnamurti, S. N. Goenka, Eckhart Tolle, etc.). The Pāli Canon is the closest we can ever get to what the Buddha said.

When we are listening to a Dhamma talk or reading a Dhamma book, how can we authenticate what has been said or written? Fortunately, we have a few very good English translations of the Nikāyas and other texts. But the best would always be to compare with the Pāli texts. So this is one of the reasons why some are studying Pāli.

Pāli and Meditation

Some might say that it is not necessary to know Pāli in order to practice meditation. I would agree with that. But in order to practice correctly and to benefit from it, one has to have good, practical knowledge of the Teaching. This can be obtained under the guidance of a reliable, knowledgeable, and experienced teacher. Of course one must also have right attitude, diligence, and so forth. To which degree one wishes to study Pāli is, I think, a personal preference. And let us leave it there. It is up to you.

In this article I have attempted to highlight the usefulness of understanding Pāli while we are walking this precious Path. Hopefully you have benefited from it.



A Host of Impressions

Ven Sambodhi, a Czech monk, stops over for a short personal retreat on his way to Australia. He takes with him a collage of impressions.

Untimely Arrival, Fortuitous Welcome

The overnight bus from Singapore arrived at the Kamunting bus terminal near Taiping after a two-hour delay—checks at the Singapore border were way too careful because two weeks ago an Indonesian terrorist had escaped from prison. No one was waiting for me. As a monk without money and a cell phone, I should have felt at least a bit nervous. But I did not. Something told me it would work out.

I walked slowly around the terminal until three elderly Muslim gentlemen, curious about this strangely clothed Westerner, asked me what I wanted. I showed them a piece of paper with Sister Uttarā's phone number and one of them, without being prompted, called the number. Within 10 minutes, a faithful SBS family member arrived and drove me to his house nearby.

There, I was offered a delicious breakfast on a plate and an even more delicious lunch into my alms bowl for later. Then we set out for Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS). When I saw the steepness of the winding road towards the monastery I thought that every supporter here must possess a 4WD!

My Dream Kuṭi

The *kuṭi* I was assigned stands on the edge of the property, with a beautiful view of the town of Taiping a few kilometres below. I instantly fell in love with the kuṭi's design. It has a handy wooden porch on two sides and the two walls on those sides are actually sliding doors, so when they are pushed aside one feels as if one is living out in the open, with just a roof above one's head. Although the kuṭi of my monk-colleague, a former violoncellist, Ven Dhammananda was not far, it is hidden from view by the roof of my kuṭi. Hence I did not feel a lack of seclusion.

The thought arose in my mind: *If I ever build a monastery, I will borrow the design for kuṭis from here….*

Bizzare Alms Round in the Market

Sunday is a special day in that monks from the monastery go on a true 'unarranged' alms round in the nearby town market. Walking among stalls with foods of various kinds heaped up on the tables, including all sorts of meat and with crowds of people all around, was quite an overwhelming experience—almost bizarre—and I felt I had to keep my eyes and ears under check as constantly as I could. While watching the busy sellers a thought arose: *Poor people, they have to work even on Sundays….*

Just a Bit of Exercise

Next morning we walked down for the usual pre-arranged *dāna* at a corner of a large Chinese cemetery located close to the foothill. Earlier while in Sri Lanka, a Malaysian monk remarked to me about how terribly steep and difficult the walk down and back up was, but now, when I trekked it myself, I could see the monk had very little knowledge or experience in climbing hills. Compared to what I used to climb back in Sri Lanka, this was just a pleasant hike with a little bit of climbing, just enough to get at least a bit of exercise.

Remarkable Sacrifice

Once at the dāna venue, generous and enthusiastic supporters waited in a queue, all of them kneeling, with pots or trays in their hands. When the monks approached them, they lifted whatever they were holding, in an act of offering so that monks could take a portion of the food and place it into their alms bowls. I could not help but suffer together with our supporters' hurting knees and aching arms and wished them an abundance of merit for this remarkable sacrifice.

Suitable Facilities

When I passed Saṅgha Pond on the way back to my kuṭi, I could see the former violoncellist crossing the pond back and forth in the confident style of an experienced swimmer. Monks too, need exercise.

The octagonal Sīmā Hall standing in the centre of another small pond is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful *sīmās* in the present world. And also a very good and inspiring place to meditate in.

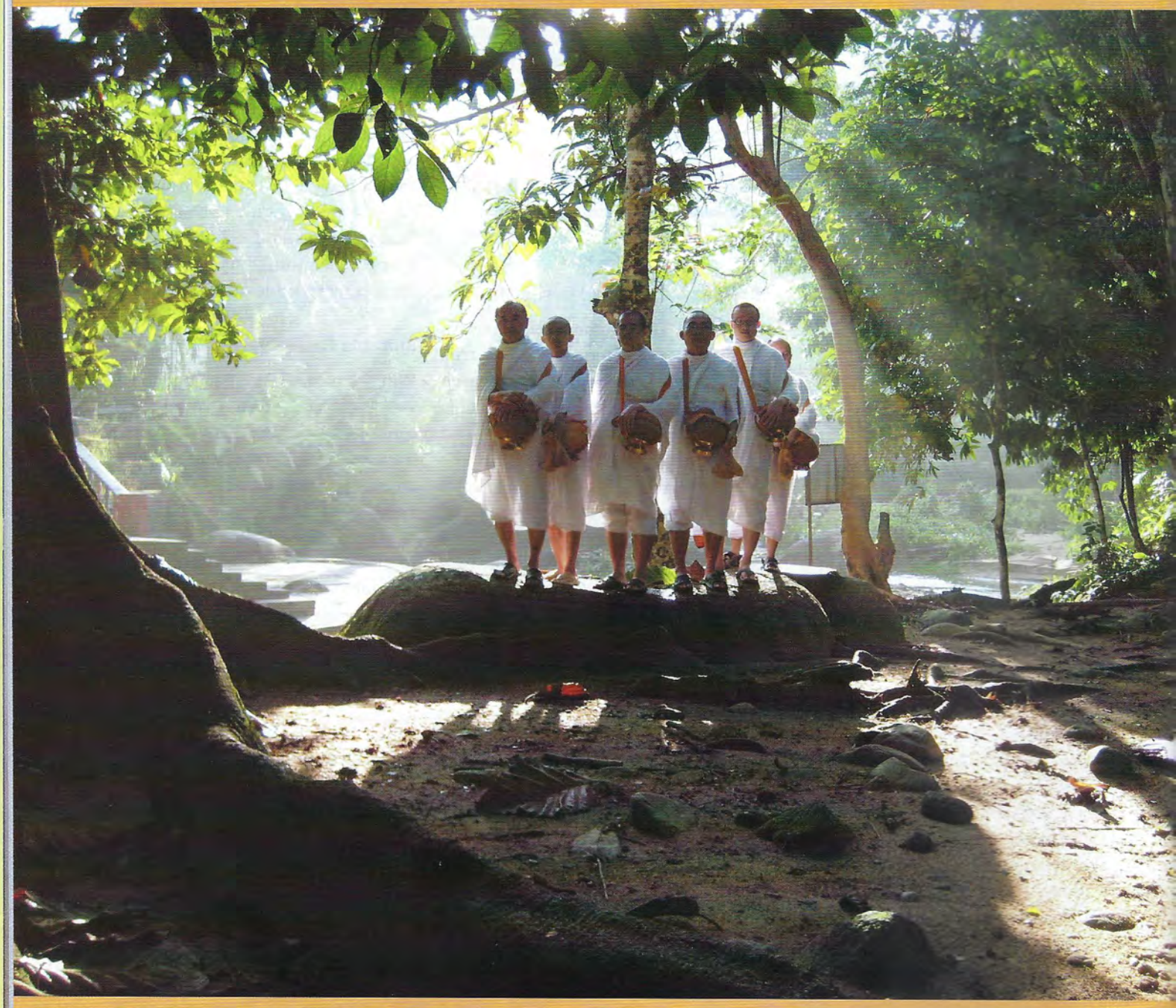
Dhamma Discussion on the Move

The only time available for Dhamma discussions with Ven Aggacitta was during our walk for the daily dāna. Our discussion on various aspects of the Buddhist path based on his vast critical knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures and meditation methods was enriching and led me to greater open-mindedness.

Excellent for Practice and Study

On the twelfth night I left the monastery to catch an overnight bus back to Singapore. Based on my own experience I can now recommend Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary as a place very well-equipped for both intensive meditation practice and scriptural study.

My Greatest Choice Ever





SUMITTA TAN learns a very simple yet elusive truth: true happiness is found in contentment, unclouded by craving.



Let us be frank with ourselves. Have we ever asked why we exist in this world? We study hard to get a good job, to get a good pay, to get a happy family, to get proper food and shelter, to get this, to get that. Yet we know the gratification of these gains cannot last long. We think happiness is just a step ahead and we always tell ourselves, "if we could get this, get that, we would be happy". Unfortunately, we are just chasing the happiness away! So how can we find the happiness we always go after?

Joining IMP2008 has been the greatest choice I have ever made. Apart from experiencing the life of a monk of the forest tradition, I have learnt many other essential lessons from this programme. Let me first introduce my fellow brothers. It must be past *kamma* that has brought us all together here!

- Maggapoṇa (Inclined to the Path) @ Wilson Lim Tien Huat, 29
- Pabuddha (Awakened) @ Lim Seng Leong, 58
- Sakatthesī (Seeker of One's Own Purpose) @ Tan Sin Seng, 45
- SammāSaṅkappa (Right Thought) @ Ng Poh Tee, 26
- Sumitta (Good Friend) @ Kevin Tan Shyh Ann, 20
- Vajira (Diamond) @ Ong Chin Lai, 35

Upon Arrival

There were mixed feelings playing around in my mind during the journey up the hill to SBS. I was feeling excited about this programme and yet a little anxious about it. By the time I reached the top of the hill, the feelings had subsided and I was awestruck by the wonderful natural environment. Never had I been in an environment like this—a sanctuary indeed. The buildings all blend into nature. It was beyond my expectations!

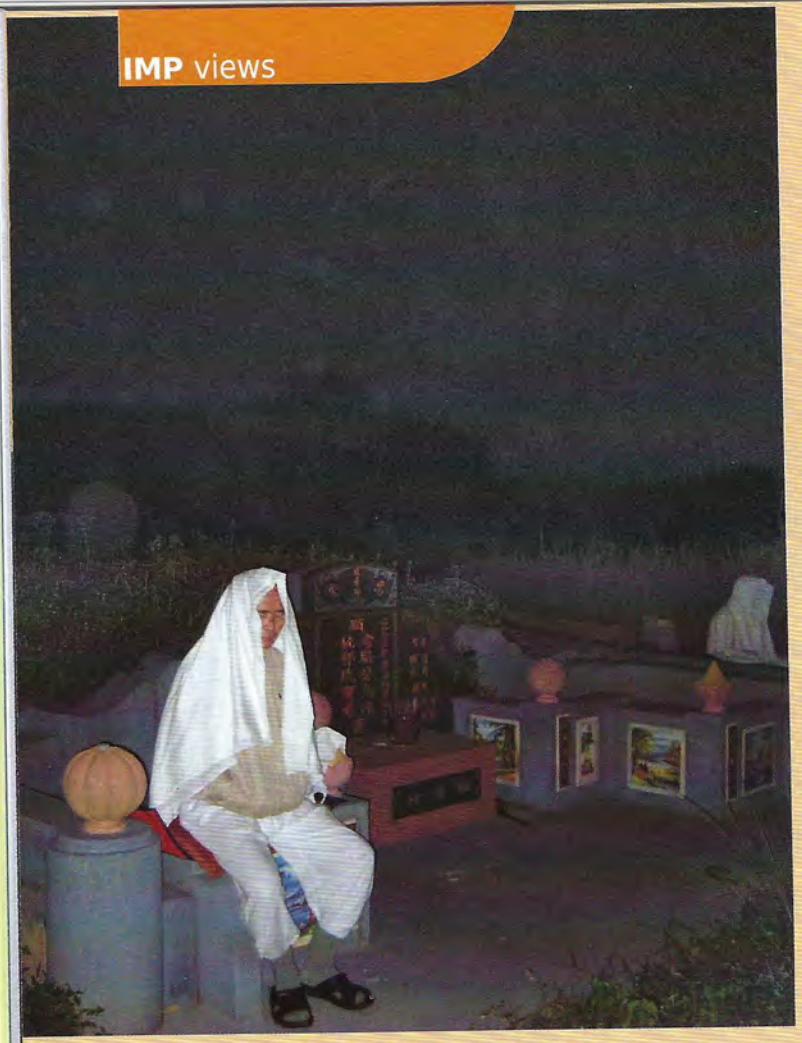
Bhante Kumāra welcomed us all and briefed us on the programme for the next two weeks. Our possessions (mobile phone, wallet, IC, watch) were all 'confiscated' and we would not be able to use them throughout the programme. Alms bowls, *aṁsas*[1] and robes were given out and we were taught how to wear them the proper way. Of course, all of us had problems wearing our robes at the beginning. But as days passed, wearing the robes was not a problem any more. Bhante Aggacitta, Bhante Balacitta and Postulant Meghiya were often there to help with it.

For the Sake of a Meal

During those two weeks we hiked down the hill and up again to collect food from the lay devotees during *piṇḍacāra*. The only problem was the jungle route we took. Obviously most of us were fully aware of our bare feet, especially the bite of leeches!

After taking the eight precepts on the first day, we were only allowed to have our meals after 'dawnrise' and just

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



before noon. Though there was no dinner for us, I didn't feel hungry at all when dinnertime came. Bhante Aggacitta taught me this wonderful skill of eating meditation. I admit that I'm a fast eater and always had digestion problems. With this meditation, I learnt how to eat properly and watch every moment of the eating process inside my mouth. For the first time in my life, I could feel bliss by just observing the eating process.

Meditation

An objective of joining this programme was also to improve my meditation skills. I would say it has been successful. We were taught how to practise the four Guardian Meditations (*Buddhānussati*[2], *mettā*, *asubha*[3] and *maraṇassati*[4]) and *vipassanā* meditation. An interesting aspect of the Guardian Meditations is the combination of *mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation and contemplation of body parts. Bhante Aggacitta taught us to be appreciative of our body systems and organs so that we can radiate mettā to them. Normally we take our physiological systems for granted and led by our desires, we mistreat them. We eat unsuitable food, overstress the body with too much work, get emotional, etc. In this meditation, we thank each body organ for functioning efficiently despite our inconsideration. Finally we radiate mettā to the body and mind so that they can continue to function smoothly and effectively.

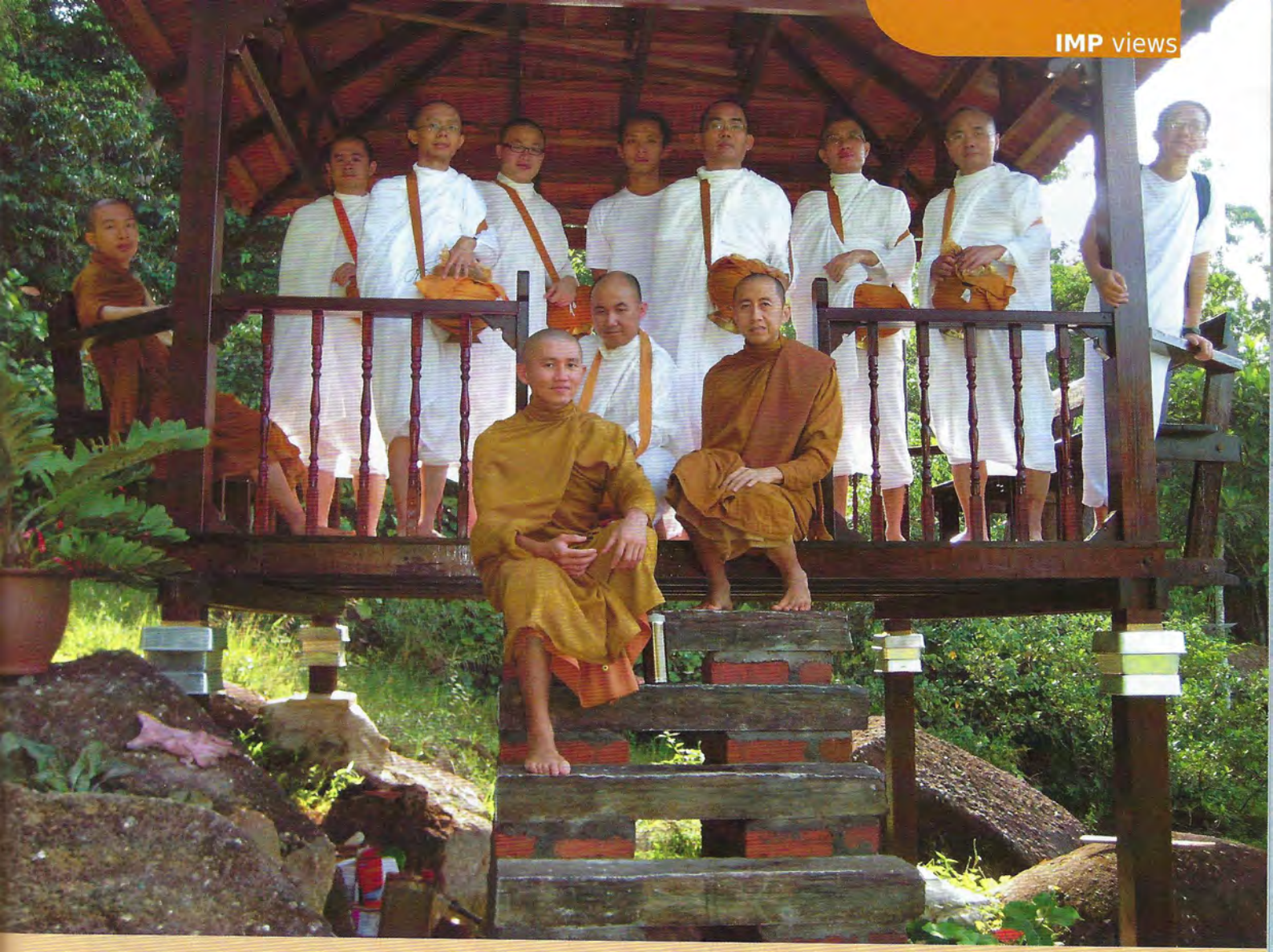
2 Repeated recollection of the Buddha's virtues.
3 Unattractiveness, loathsomeness (of the body as an antidote to lust).
4 Remembering death.

One of the 'highlights' of our sitting meditation sessions was meditating in the Chinese cemetery! I experienced fear during that one hour session but managed to calm myself down.

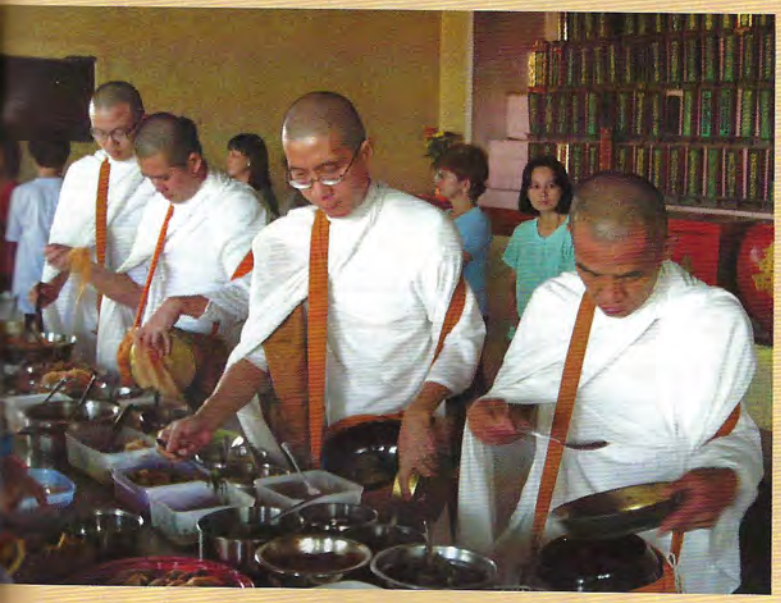
As Bhante Kumāra mentioned, vipassanā meditation is not just bare awareness but an intelligent awareness. Besides being just aware of the six sense doors, we must also see our mental and physical reactions to them. How do we react to what we are aware of? Then we can see the true nature of the mind.

Mindfulness is to be applied in every aspect of our life, and not confined to certain situations. Throughout the programme, I tried to be mindful all the time—walking, eating, drinking, sleeping, or talking (this is the hardest one!). When we are mindful, we tend to be less careless in our actions.





One of the 'highlights' of our sitting meditation sessions was meditating in the Chinese cemetery! I experienced fear during that one hour session but managed to calm myself down. Some of my fellow IMPians reported they heard someone singing during that session. Creepy! During the sharing session the next day, Pabuddha told us he thought Bhante Aggacitta had purposely played the song just to test us! Ha, ha! He was glad that all the *bhantes* were meditating there with us. Otherwise he would not have dared to meditate alone there. Bhante Aggacitta then remarked, "Ya, if there's any problem, they can come and find me, right?" All of us laughed our heads off!

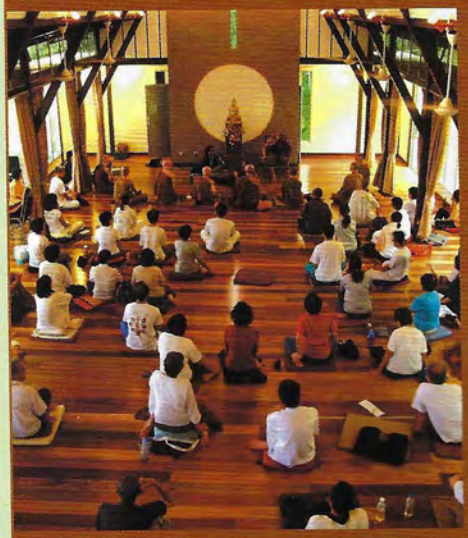


Happiness without Entertainment

We surprised ourselves that we could stay here without the usual forms of entertainment, meals after noon, or the need for a comfortable bed to sleep on. We could not crave for these here. We had to live on what we were given. Yet, we were still happy. At first it was a torture for me not being able to use my mobile phone, but later I felt it was a torture to have to use my mobile phone again! Having less craving is always good. Happiness is always inside every one of us, and it is the craving (*taṇhā*) that clouds the happiness. So, how can we remove this cloud?

It is only through contentment (*appicchatā*) that we can find the real happiness in us. I would like to thank all the bhantes who taught me this simple ***truth***.







SBS Retreat Centre

While SBS is primarily a Theravāda monk training centre, it has a secondary objective: to provide a retreat centre for the promotion of the spiritual, mental and physical health of its supporting community. Now that this retreat centre has been set up, we welcome suitable groups to make use of it for conducting activities in line with its objectives.

Sitting at the edge of a forest, set amidst lush green hills and fully equipped with modern facilities, SBS is a picturesque and peaceful haven for healthful activities in the form of retreats, workshops, forums, camps, seminars, etc. We provide the following facilities and services:

- a multi-purpose hall
- accommodation
- 4WD transport
- meals
- other utilities.

For further information and reservations, please contact the SBS Main Office:

t: 05-8084429* / 017-5182011 • f: 05-8411198*

e: office@sasanarakkha.org / sbsmail@pd.jaring.my

* These numbers may change after September 2008

SBS Events Calendar (July – Dec 2008)

Kathina Day	26 Oct
Children's Dhamma Camp (CDC) conducted by Mitra Chong	21 – 23 Nov
Dynamic Meditation Retreat conducted by Ajahn Suthep Chinawaro	25 Nov – 5 Dec
Meditation Retreat conducted by Patrick Kearney	10 – 24 Dec
Closer-to-Reality Conference (C2RC) at Thean Hou Temple, Kuala Lumpur—details on pp30, 31	27 – 29 Dec

For the retreats and CDC, contact SBS Programme Head, Ang Poh Heang:
t: 012-5222101 • e: apheang@gmail.com

For Kathina, contact SBS Main Office. (see above)

Updates from the Desk of the Retreat Centre











Many have used our Retreat Centre since its inception in October 2006 and have come away with feelings of happiness, gratitude and a sense of wanting to come back again. Some have also expressed shortcomings in our services such as insufficient hooks for clothing in bathrooms, ants in the sleeping quarters and meditation hall, not enough clothes-lines for drying clothes, etc. On our part we do take note of these shortcomings and try our very best to solve them so that participants can have a stress-free meditation retreat.

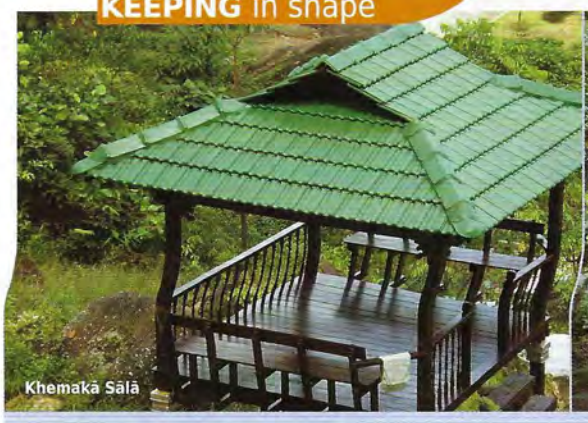
However there are some problems which we do have difficulty solving, especially that of ants. They are abundant in a jungle area and we, being Buddhists, cannot just use insecticide to wipe them out. So we tried neem leaf extract to mop the floors of buildings but to no avail. Maybe someone can give us a better solution to keep the ants at bay without killing them? One thing which participants can help us with is not to have food or drinks in the living quarters as these attract the ants. When in the hall confine all drinks to the refreshment area at the back. Gecko excrement and dead insects are also delicacies for the ants. So if the participants could regularly sweep—if not mop—the floor, then this would be another step towards cleanliness. These measures may not totally stop the ants from coming but at least they will help minimise their visits.

A piece of good news for ladies is that our Female Gārava Lodge is ready. It can accommodate about 35 people comfortably, more if you don't mind being a little cramped. There are toilets and bathrooms on the ground floor. Fittings in the building have been installed with the comfort of female guests in mind but do tell us if you find anything lacking. The first occupants were the ladies from Firefly Mission, Singapore. Here we wish to apologise to them for the smell of paint they had to endure as the painting was finished just a day before they checked in. Also the mosquito netting had yet to be installed. This was done the week after they left.

As for the men, apart from the farmhouse they have been using a number of mini-*kuṭis* that are not occupied by monks, postulants or helpers. However, plans are afoot to increase accommodation for both men and women in distinctly separate areas. (see next page)

Suggestions from guests:

1. The stairs in the living quarters are dark brown. At night each step is indistinguishable. The last step should be painted with a white stripe to minimise the risk of someone falling. A "be mindful of steps" sign should be put up.
2. During thunderstorms raindrops come into the rooms. To prevent this, put up blinds at the veranda.
3. Place torches at strategic locations for emergency use.
4. Some Mahāyāna devotees may not understand why non-vegetarian food is served. Maybe some explanation is needed for them.
5. A short briefing on the history of SBS should be given for first-time visitors to gain better support from them.


Khemakā Sālā


Washroom block in Dhamma Grove



Plaque at FGL

New Shapes from Old Forms

Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary has something for everybody in its latest phase of physical development; so assures **Navakammika**. Whether you are male or female, yogi or just a devotee, monks and even would-be nuns, you will find something to delight you.

A pilgrim from out of Taiping once remarked, "I never tire of coming to SBS—it's never the same for there are always fresh developments." Well, we are not disappointing you this time with respect to our physical development, although we do hope that one fine day you will be able to say the same of the freshness in our ***spiritual*** development. It is towards this end that our new building works, under Phase 5 Development, have been carefully planned—to facilitate and enhance spiritual development for everyone.

Female Gārava Lodge (FGL)

2008 brings to fulfilment a desideratum that we all acknowledge: the completion of decent accommodation for our female devotees, supporters and guests. Originally named Female Guest Lodge, or FGL in short, the dormitory was 95% completed in time to house some 16 yogis from Singapore during a meditation retreat jointly organised by Firefly Mission and SBS in the last week of April. It is now named Female Gārava Lodge (see photo of plaque for the significance of the name) in view of the possibility that it may also eventually accommodate ***resident*** nuns, instead of just female guests. In the pipeline are plans to convert Puññakkhetta Farmhouse into another women's dormitory so that the women yogis can use Gārava Sabhā (Hall of Respect) in FGL for group meditation.

Spring Valley Short Cut

An abandoned old project taking new shape is the short cut from Main Office Building (MOB) car park down through Spring Valley to the last bend of Jalan Sīmā, near Spillway Floodgate. This project, originally conceived to be a low-cost one using discarded car and lorry tyres, was interrupted midway by the construction of the stairway through Bhāvanā Grove and Dhamma Grove last year. While earthworks were being carried out to construct the car park in front of FGL, the excavated soil was conveniently transported to the edge of MOB car park and dumped over the slope. This enabled us to shape a gradual path along the steep slope to connect with the short cut of rubber-tyre steps. Eventually the opportunity arose for us to replace the low-cost steps with proper, wider concrete steps connected to three new bridges made of disused reinforced concrete piles.

Meanwhile, SBS Management Committee Chairman Ng Kian Chong decided to sponsor a timber gazebo designed and built by our creative in-house artisan, Lim Ewe Seng. As Chairman Ng had originally envisaged while planning the low-cost project, the gazebo—called Khemakā Sālā (Haven Pavilion)—is now located along the Spring Valley short-cut steps to serve as a mid-way rest station for hikers.

Open & Service Decks

Other old forms that took new shapes are the deck facing the open-air Buddha Shrine and Sīmā Hall. After years of exposure to the elements, some of the timber deck boards were decaying. Considering the need for future recurrent maintenance, we decided that the most feasible option was to replace the timber deck with a reinforced concrete slab and to tile the surface. This was completed on 7 May. Not all the boards were completely decayed though. We managed to salvage enough to supplement structural timber needed for the construction of Khemakā Sālā, as well as to clad the service deck around Sīmā Hall, a new extension completed at the end of May. The latter will surely gladden the housekeeping team and make their task safer and more convenient. Now not only does Sīmā Hall have a new 'buoyant' look, but its capacity has also increased. Moreover it evokes a tantalising lure for one to sit in meditation at the deck, suspended over the pond.

New Infrastructure

We have not forgotten the needs of the residents of the mini-*kuṭis* in Bhāvanā Grove and Dhamma Grove, nor the yogis and users of Dhamma Grove. For their convenience, a new washroom block has been built there. Footpaths and steps leading to these mini-kuṭis, as well as along the *piṇḍacāra* path crossing our border, have also been upgraded with concrete. From the car park of Abbot's Office (AO), a row of garden lamps and concrete slabs now link to a nearby washroom block, making life more convenient for the lodgers of the mini-kuṭis there—but perhaps a disappointment for the more adventurous who will miss the night foray to the washroom along the originally unlit jungle trek where hungry leeches and slithery snakes may lurk.

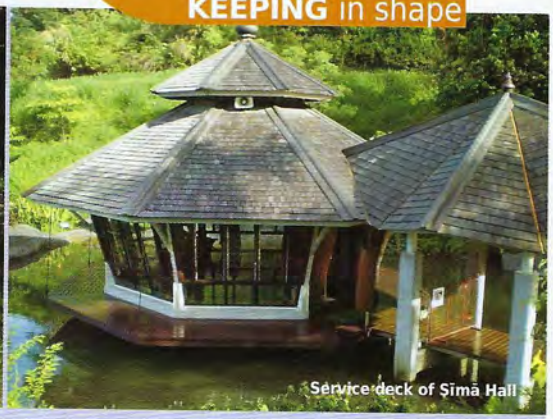
MOB Upgrades

MOB has also been upgraded: additional kitchen sinks outside Dining Hall to cater to the increasing users of the Retreat




Spring Valley short cut


Tiled Open Deck


Service deck of Sīmā Hall

Centre; mosaic tiling at the entrance of the main staircase block for cleanliness and easier maintenance; and an exhaust fan at each gable end to ventilate the multi-purpose hall on warm humid days.

Damage Control

Erosion control measures, which are our perennial concern, had to be applied in two areas. Soil nailing was done on the slope behind AO, where a spate of continuous heavy rain caused a minor landslide in early January; and on a steeper slope by Jalan Sīmā near Rock Valley Corner, where a landslide occurred last year.

At the end of June, another downpour caused landslides in three areas:

1. at the bank of Sungai Saṅgha near the gateway to Burmese Park
2. near Cempaka Corner, Jalan Sīmā
3. on the slope between Jalan Sīmā and the piṇḍacāra path.

Our workers are presently engaged in rectifying (1) while waiting for instructions from Dr Soo on how to handle the other two.

Bhāvanā Grove Sālā (BGS)

Now that FGL is up for the women, what about the men? Well, they've got Puññakkhetta Farmhouse, 12 mini-kuṭis and Saṅgha Classroom haven't they? That's true, but Puññakkhetta Farmhouse has a capacity of only nine men, and only five mini-kuṭis are in the vicinity of the Retreat Centre while the rest and Saṅgha Classroom are down in the valley within the monastic zone. In consideration of this as well as the welfare of yogis meditating in Bhāvanā Grove, we are embarking on a new project to construct a pavillion measuring 24′ 9″ X 26′ where the yogis can take shelter during a sudden shower and the men can also be accommodated when necessary. Moreover, we have plans to convert AO into a male dormitory while the abbot will relocate his office to the monastic zone. An added benefit of this arrangement is that the abbot will be able to spend more time with the monastics.

Aspiration and Acknowledgement

This time around we really hope that all construction works can be completed before 18 July, the date of entering the rains residence (*vassāvāsa*) retreat for the monks so that they can be given more space and time for their own personal development.

All these new shapes could not have materialised without the benevolent expertise of our Building Development Team, the dedication of our site staff and the obliging and cooperative efforts of Ir Chan Ban Kim of Syarikat Kamashari Sdn Bhd and his workers, ably led by Site Supervisor Jeffrey. To them and to the many others who have assisted in cash or in kind, we express our heartfelt gratitude: *sādhu, sādhu, sādhu!* May your benevolence stand you in good stead materially and spiritually for a long, long time.

Building Development Team for Phase 5 Development

Project Director	Ven Aggacitta
Development Manager 1	Barry Ong Kah Ting
Project Manager	Lim Tai Eng
Architect	Jade Saw (for FGL)
Structural Engineer	Ally Lui (for FGL); Tan Buck Soon (for BGS)
Geotechnical Engineer	Dr Soo Kian Sin
Quantity Surveyor	Kee Swee Aun
Site Supervisor	Tan Thian Swee (Sept - Dec 2007)
Artisan	Lim Ewe Seng (atap huts, gazebo and BGS)

FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR JANUARY - JUNE 2008

	Receipts (RM)	Payments (RM)
General Fund Note[1]	184,016.25	89,320.03
Building & Maintenance Fund Note[2]	21,051.30	18,941.95
Female Guest Lodge	4,400.00	261,140.95
Food & Dāna Fund	21,016.30	15,390.00
Publication Fund	11,796.00	15,195.00
Organic Farm (net)	1,000.00	
Retreat Centre Fund	31,214.30	12,798.71
Total	**274,494.15**	**412,786.64**
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE PERIOD	(138,292.49)	

Note[1] **General fund (Payments)**

Salary, EPF & Socso	57,515.50
Upkeep of Motor Vehicle	9,897.10
Others	21,907.43
Total	89,320.03

Note[2] **Building & Maintenance Fund (Payments)**

Upkeep of Land & Building	16,599.75
Bhāvanā Grove Sālā	2,342.20
Total	**18,941.95**

CONFERENCE

CLOSER 2 REALITY

An attempt to connect real life experiences with Buddhist scriptural understanding

Understanding Death & Beyond

Saturday, 27 December – Monday, 29 December 2008
Thean Hou Temple, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Organised by Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary





Synopsis of Keynote Address by Ven Aggacitta Bhikkhu

The issue of whether there is an intermediate state between physical death and a subsequent rebirth has plagued Buddhist thinkers ever since the early centuries after the Buddha passed away. In the past, this dispute was mainly based on the authority of dogmas enshrined in locally available scriptures. However, with the advent of information technology and improved means of communication, holistic approaches to learning that embrace multidisciplinary research have made it possible to scrutinise this long-standing issue from a wider and more objective perspective. Ven Aggacitta Bhikkhu, ordained in the Theravāda tradition but still a Truth-seeker at heart, will explain how C2RC 2008 is planned along such lines so as to break through sectarian prejudices and get closer to the reality of death and beyond.

Programme Outline

Keynote Address **Ven Aggacitta Bhikkhu**

PART 1: Phenomenon of Existence Beyond the Gross Physical Body

(hosted by Dr Chan Kah Yein)

Session 1: Direct Experiences

Out-of-Body Experience & Near-Death Experience **Ms Wendy Loh Lai Si**

Session 2: Memories of Past Existences

(a) Past Life Experience through Regression Hypnosis **Dr Selina Chew**

(b) Past Life Experience through Children's Spontaneous Recall **Dr Phang Cheng Kar**

Session 3: Reports of Observers

(a) Psychics' Descriptions of Related Paranormal Phenomena **Master Law Thim Fook**

(b) Related Paranormal Phenomena Perceivable through Scientific Means **Ven Kumāra Bhikkhu**

Session 4: Forum on Phenomenon of Existence Beyond the Gross Physical Body

PART 2: Buddhist Interpretations of Phenomena Covered in Part 1

(hosted by Mr Yong Song Kong)

Session 1: Buddhist Perspectives 1

(a) Perspective of Orthodox Theravāda **Mr Rob Moult**

(b) Perspective of Early Buddhism (Nikāya-Āgama) **Ven Sujāto Bhikkhu**

Session 2: Buddhist Perspectives 2

(a) Perspective of Tibetan Bardo Teachings **Mr Sherab Wong**

(b) Perspective of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism **Dr Fa Qing**

Session 3: Buddhist Perspectives 3

Modern Scholars' Perspective of Buddhist Texts & Interpretations Cited Above **Dr Max Deeg**

Session 4: Forum on Buddhist Interpretations of Phenomena Covered in Part 1

Summary & Conclusion **Ven Aggacitta Bhikkhu**

All presentation sessions will be followed by a one-hour discussion.
We shall also screen relevant videos in between.

Conference Fee

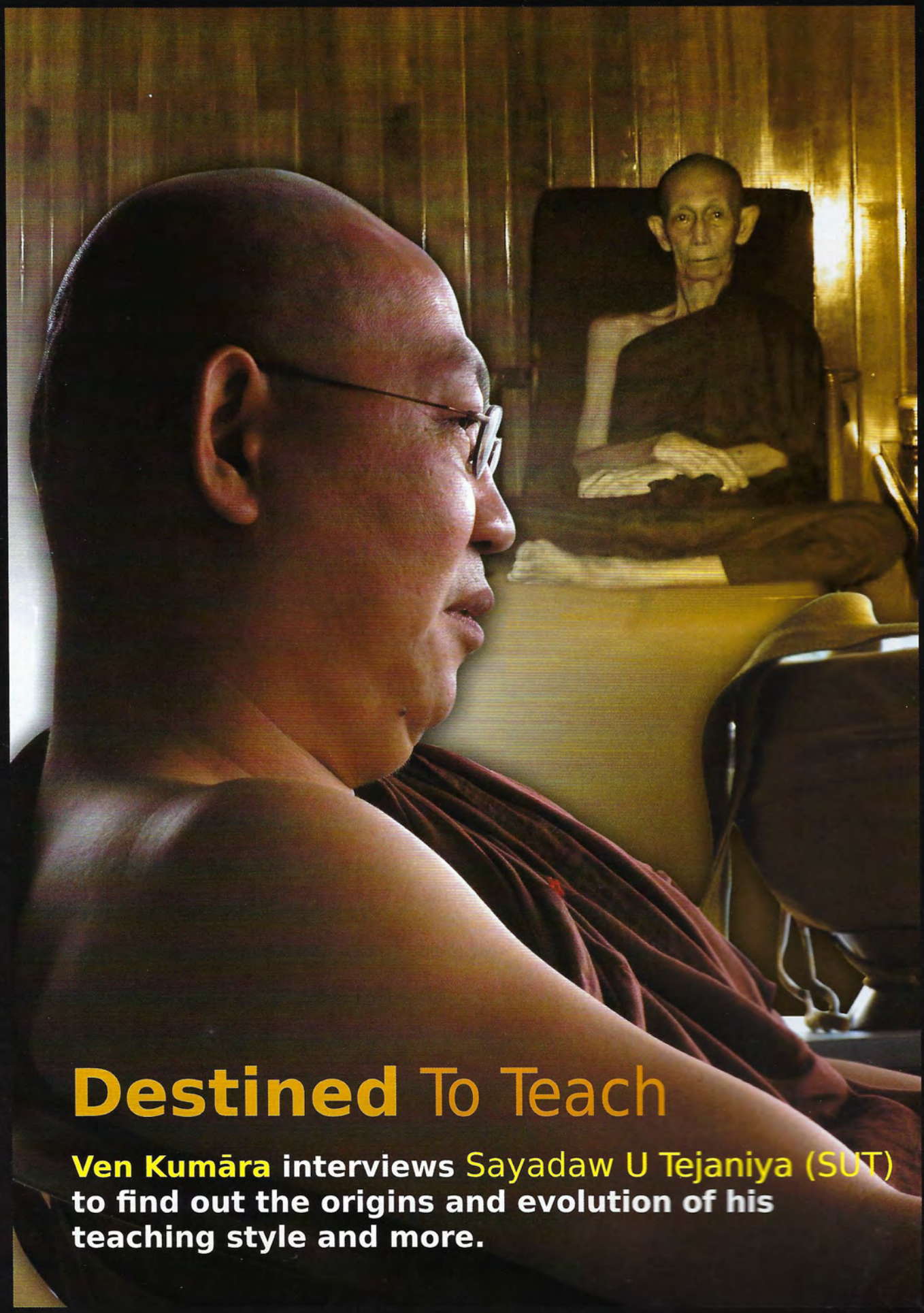
Category	By 15 Sept 2008	From 16 Sept 2008
Public	RM250	RM300
Students (max 100 seats on first-come-first-serve basis)	RM150	RM200; please register by 30 Nov 2008
Monastics (max 50 seats)	FOC; but please register by 30 Nov 2008	

ENQUIRIES: How Eng Keong 012-3852-886, c2rc.how@gmail.com

FURTHER DETAILS: http://www.c2rc.org

REGISTRATION

- Closing date: 15 December 2008
- Forms are obtainable from our website and main distributors of *Sāsanārakkha Newszine*
- On-line registration is also possible through our website.



Destined To Teach

Ven Kumāra interviews Sayadaw U Tejaniya (SUT) to find out the origins and evolution of his teaching style and more.

Sayadaw would always only ask me, "How are you practising?" He would never ask, "What happened?"

HIS STORY

Ven Kumāra Bhikkhu: Sayadaw, can you tell us a bit about your story on how you came into meditation, particularly how you came to meet the late Shwe Oo Min (SOM) Sayadaw?

Sayadaw U Tejaniya (SUT): It started with my father. When SOM Sayadaw was still teaching at the (main) Mahāsī Centre (in Yangon), my father became a temporary *bhikkhu* there. At that time SOM Sayadaw, who was then just known as Ven U Kosalla, was teaching the temporary monks. Later when SOM Sayadaw left Mahāsī Centre and set up his own place, my father followed him there and helped out. He would bring the family there every now and then. The children would become temporary *sāmaṇeras* (novice Buddhist monks). That's how I first began going there.

When I first became a sāmaṇera and began to learn meditation from Sayadaw, I particularly found meditation very, very interesting. So I stayed the longest. My brothers stayed for only one week. I stayed for three months even though it was my first retreat as a sāmaṇera.

And it was three months just for meditation?

For meditation. I liked this sāmaṇera life.

How old were you then?

Twelve or thirteen years old maybe.

You continued to practise with him later on after that?

Very often during the summer holidays I went to stay at the monastery, as a sāmaṇera. I started to become intimate with meditation. I liked it a lot. When Sayadaw noticed that I was so interested, he explained a lot of things to me. I asked many questions. *[Laughs]*

Were there many students other than you at that time?

Yes, we all practised together but I was the most curious. I asked a lot of questions.

Where was this place?

North Okkalapa. The old centre.

How was it like practising with your teacher?

Wah... my teacher was very open. He never pushed me to meditate. He only explained and talked in ways that would make the child interested. So the child had his own interest in practising, and he would be very eager to try things out.

He would never say, "Do this. Do that." He would talk in ways that would make the child want to do it. He would talk about other people: how they did this and that; how or what it was like; when you practise like this, what happens; and if you practise like that, these good things will happen. I would start to think, "Oh, it's like this and like that," and was willing to practise. He gave me information about the Dhamma—what and how it is like. He explained and then I would think. At that time, I started to think deeply about the Dhamma.

And that has influenced the way you teach now?

Yes! I like that. So I want to do it that way and I'm teaching in the same style. Sayadaw would always only ask me, "How are you practising?" He would never ask, "What happened?" The yogi would always talk about what happened. This is very important. I feel that there is a difference with other teachers. Based on my experience, many teachers ask, "What happened?" He never asked that way.

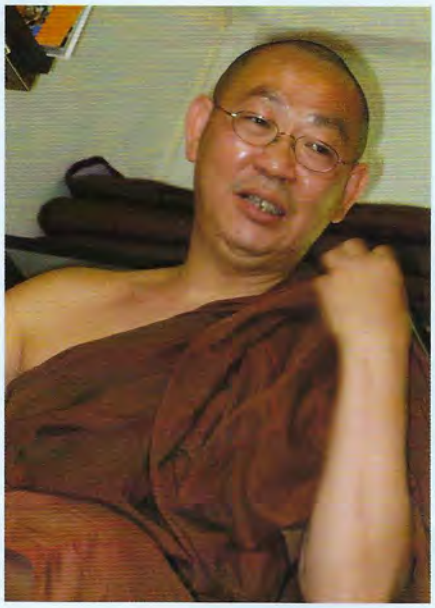
So, from a very young age, what I heard was "How are you practising?" rather than "What happened?" He would only talk about the way to practise. He would say, "Why don't you try it this way or that way? Why don't you think of it this way?"

So he was very different.

Very different. Very different. Every

I got very interested whenever I knew something that I didn't know before.





time I said, "I know", he would encourage me with a "Ah, very good! Very good!" I would feel very happy. He tried to encourage everyone to value 'knowing'. So every time you said, "I know (something)", even though it was something bad, he would rejoice, saying, "Be happy that you know." Many times he told me, "If you know something, be happy. Whatever. Good or bad, no problem. If you know it, be happy."

So, as a young child, I tried to know things. The more things I 'knew', the happier I got. *[Laughs]* Whenever I told him, he'd say, "Okay, good. Continue, continue..." *[Laughs]* At that time, I started to practise because of the desire to 'know'. I got very interested whenever I knew something that I didn't know before.

Sounds like he had a lot of time for you.

At that time he had a lot of time because he stopped teaching. When other people, like monks, came to practise at the monastery, he didn't teach them how to meditate. After he left Mahāsī Centre, he basically stopped teaching. He sort of let people practise on their own. They could come and stay in his monastery and practise. They just had to behave well. If they misbehaved or they were not in harmony with the community, then he would say, "Go." (Translator asks: What about the children?) The children he taught. He would teach them the basics. At that time they were still doing the rising and falling (method) and stuff like that.

Wait. Let me get this straight. There were monks who came to practise at North Okkalapa, but they didn't get instructions?

No, my teacher wouldn't give them instructions.

He made an exception for the children but not for the grown up monks...

He didn't teach grown up monks. He started teaching children.

I see. That's interesting.

When the families came there would be a whole lot of children. That's how Sayadaw started a Dhamma class, which he called the Maṅgala Class.

Do you know why he taught only children and not adults?

At that time most people, usually monks who came to stay at the monastery, already knew some kind of practice. So Sayadaw assumed that they knew how to practise. And he also didn't want to teach any more at that time. If they came and asked him questions he would give answers, but he wouldn't have regular teaching sessions.

My teacher was like a drum. It's only when you beat the drum you hear the sound. He would never be the first to say something. It depended on you. He never started with his idea. He would look at you; then, depending on you, he would talk.

So I'm influenced by that idea. If I have to start by saying something, I'm a bit at a loss. I don't know where to start, because I don't know the situation. Sometimes, when a new person comes and I don't know him, I never start to talk. If he starts to talk, I listen. Then I know something. I also think whether I can talk about it or not. If it's okay, I talk. If it's not okay, then I stop there. I just keep quiet. Better. *[Laughs]*

I discussed this with Bhante Chekinda, a monk in Burma who is quite famous now. He gives excellent Dhamma talks. I thought it was a weakness of mine that I couldn't just start a conversation. At that time, I already recognised that it was actually my teacher's influence. But Bhante Chekinda said that's not a weakness but a kind of technique.

How did you start to teach? How did that happen?

Even when I was a young yogi, I was able to explain what happened, how I felt and how I was actually doing the practice in a very detailed way. I was able to do that because I was very interested in meditation. At that time, Sayadaw always listened. So, from a very young age, I learnt to be able to speak clearly about my experiences.

When I was at home and practising very seriously, I began to have Dhamma discussions with my family. The whole family—10 brothers and sisters—would get together every Sunday at our mother's house. They just brought food and ate. At that time, I looked at that situation and realised that a better way to spend time was to meditate. Everybody knew how to meditate, but they just came to talk and eat. I thought Sundays spent on meditation was more worthwhile. So I suggested 15 – 20 minutes of sitting meditation to start these Sunday gatherings with. So they would sit and after that I'd ask, "How do you feel?" and "How do you feel about your life?" Slowly we started discussing life—whether it was according to Dhamma or not.

At that point when I began to suggest that we used the Sundays for meditation and discussion, I had already changed drastically. And everybody knew I was the black sheep of the family. *[SUT repeats the figure of speech "black sheep" in English, and laughs.]* But I had changed practically from black to white. So everybody was watching me. They were really interested to know what was happening. Whenever I spoke, everybody listened, because now they had a renewed interest and respect for what was happening. They didn't deliberately try to learn (from me) though. But they had begun to listen to me more, because I didn't speak very much at all any more. I spoke only when necessary, but my words were sometimes very effective. They were meaningful and usually very true. *[Laughs]*

So, it (teaching) started from there. Whenever I met my teacher I would tell him my situation in great detail and how I was practising. So Sayadaw knew everything about my practice and my ability to speak clearly. Then by the time I decided to become a bhikkhu, Sayadaw knew about it. I became a bhikkhu in April 1996.

(Asking the translator) His age then?

(Translator: He was 36 years old.) After my first vassa, Sayadaw was quite confident that I really meant what I had said; that I wanted to become a bhikkhu for good. Then Sayadaw began asking me to teach. I didn't have any plans to teach. In the beginning I said I would go to another forest to meditate alone. He said, "What for? This place is safer. Don't go anywhere." He discouraged me from going to the forest. Then he started to give me work. *[Translator laughs]*

To teach?

To teach. I always had conversations with Sayadaw. I was very close to him. Even when I was in retreats I had discussions with the yogis. I would ask them, "Is your meditation good or not, okay or not?" If they told me, I tried to advise, "Like this and like this; like this is better and like this is better." Then I would go back to tell my teacher everything. He listened and listened; then he knew that I could talk, I could teach.

[Big smile] I want to talk about my teacher. Whenever I talk about Sayadaw, no matter what it is about, I always feel happy. I never feel sad.

I can see that he's been a great influence in your life.

Yes, yes. Sayadaw understood me very well; even more than my own father because he was very wise.

So, in a way, he was your father.

Yes. Dhamma father.

How long have you been teaching now?

Eleven years. From 1996 after vassa to 2008.

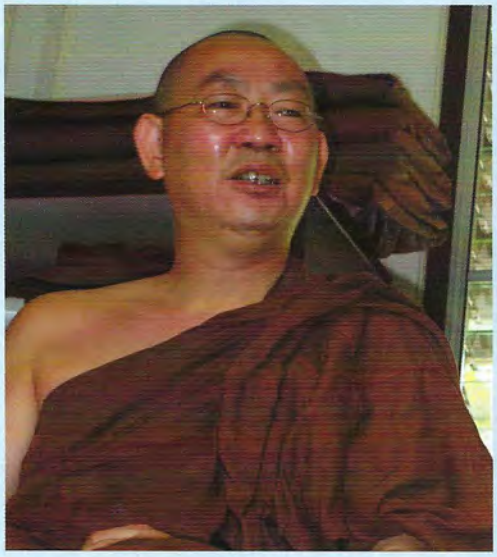
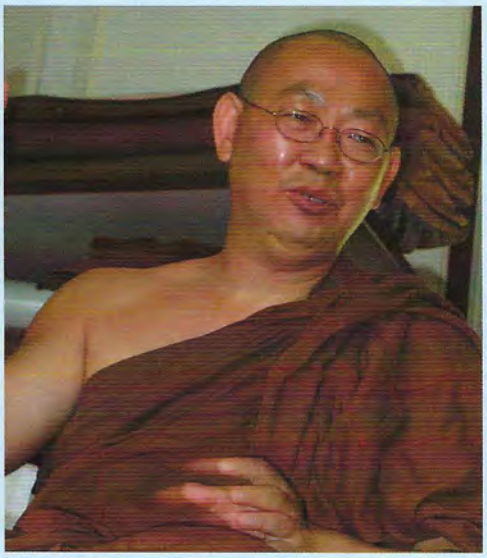
After my first vassa, I taught one Korean monk at SOM, but that was kind of ad hoc. I didn't speak much English, but that was the first person Sayadaw sent to me.

At that time, Sayadaw would go away each December to a place called Bam Way Gon near Moktama in Mon State. It's a forest monastery up on a little hill. That year, he asked all his old students, all his old devotees, and all the monks he knew to go there. He had makeshift shelters—costing about 5,000 – 6,000 kyats[1] each built very quickly so that he could house everyone. That was how he planned my first teaching retreat.

But he didn't say he wanted me to teach, though. He said, "At 4 o'clock, come here." So I went there. Then many devotees and monks also came. I didn't know at that time that he had asked the devotees and monks to go there as well. (I thought) they just practised on their own. He asked me to go there every evening at 4 o'clock. Sayadaw sat on his chair while I sat on the floor beside him. Then he said, "Ask. Ask them: 'Are you practising? How are you practising?' "

I was very young—only one vassa—but because Sayadaw had so many more vassas than them, they had to speak to me out of respect for him. *[Laughs]* Then he would say to me, "Tell him. Tell him how to do it." Then I talked. *[Laughs]*

[1]That's about RM50 at that time.


So, SOM Sayadaw asked you to tell them what to do?

Yes. Then when we returned to our centre (having been away for three months), he started to make some changes. He told the usual monk in charge of meditation, "It's okay, Ashin-phayah[2]. You don't need to do it any more. U Tejaniya is going to do it. *[Translator laughs]* So it started from there.

Just now you mentioned one Korean monk.

He was practising in Paṇḍitārāma (Hse Main Gon Forest Centre). Now, my teacher and Paṇḍitārāma Sayadaw were very close. Every time my teacher passed by Bago (near Hse Main Gon), he would go to meet him. When the Korean monk saw my teacher, he was very drawn to him. Then, without telling anyone, he came quietly to SOM. He was the first foreign yogi there. Then many Koreans followed.

I see. No wonder there are so many Koreans there, even right from the start.

That's how the Koreans started to come. As for the Vietnamese, there was one nun who came in April 1997. Then she told the Vietnamese, including the American Vietnamese monk, Ven Khippapañño[3]. (Translator: She persuaded him to come when he was in Burma for Mahāsī Sayadaw's death anniversary festival.) And then it all started from there.

DEFINING TERMS

People who speak about meditation may use the same terms but understand them differently. So let us define some terms. As I understand, when you use the word "meditation", you refer to the Pāli word *bhāvanā*. Is that correct?

Yes.

Can you please give us your definition of "meditation" or *bhāvanā*?

Bhāvanā means cultivation, cultivation of all wholesome mental qualities. In Pāli, we say, *bhāvanāyeva manokammaṁ*. Bhāvanā is a mind job.

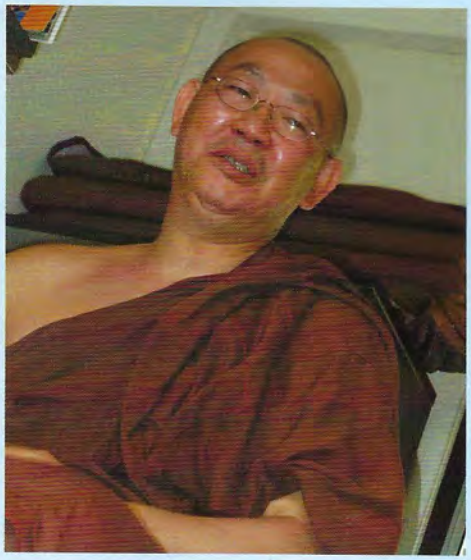
How do you understand *samādhi* then?

Stability, steadiness, stillness. Stabilised stillness. It's more about stability and clarity. There are two ways we can get samādhi. One way is, when we focus on something, the mind stops thinking—so it has stability and clarity. On the other hand, when the mind has wisdom (i.e. experiential understanding); right thinking (i.e. it can think logically or reasonably); or right information (i.e. it has some general knowledge that enables it to be stable)—then in any of these cases, because the mind understands (things) in the right way, it does not react to what is happening with aversion or attachment; therefore the mind has stability and clarity. These are the two ways to get samādhi.

One more thing I'd like to point out is that there can actually be wrong concentration, which has nothing to do with *samatha* or *vipassanā*, because both of these have right concentration. Wrong concentration happens to a lot of yogis. They use too much energy to focus because of greed, because they are trying to get something; so they develop this heavy concentration. That can be dangerous. Because it's wrong concentration, of course it's dangerous. The motivation behind that kind of concentration is greed actually. They want something so badly they use a lot of energy to focus, thinking that's how they'll get it, and sometimes that energy builds

2 (Myanmar) respectful form of address for monks.
3 A very highly respected, very senior Vietnamese bhikkhu who practised meditation in the Mahāsī Centre, Yangon in the early 80s.





up to a level that they themselves cannot control. That's because there is a combination of the power of focusing and the power of the defilements. So it is really very out of control. Double trouble.

That's why you have this strong emphasis on having the right attitude...

Yes.

... which is your English translation of *yoniso manasikāra*.[4] Briefly, what do you mean by this?

If we have right information—as a form of wisdom—so that we are able to think in the right way, we would have yoniso manasikāra. And that would be right thought.

So yoniso manasikāra is right thought based on the right information. Is that correct?

Yes, but if that person already has some innate wisdom, it would also bring about right thought.

My teacher talked a lot about yoniso manasikāra or right attitude. A lot. That was his main message—that you must not practise with *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (aversion) or *moha* (delusion). Every day he came to remind (the yogis about) this because people have a lot of lobha.

Yes, I agree.... I was one of them.

[Translator laughs]

Well, I am still a little bit like that but I'm trying not to do that.

[SUT laughs]

Can you explain the difference between *yoniso manasikāra* and *sampajañña*?[5]

There are four sampajaññas. The first two—understanding suitability and benefit—are directly related to the actual practice itself, e.g. how to properly carry out the practice. You understand what is suitable, what is beneficial, and you practise such. The other two sampajaññas—*gocara* and *asammoha*—are actually insights. They are insights that develop when you practise in the right way.

Because yoniso manasikāra is applicable to right practice, it helps the first two sampajaññas: having right thoughts, you think about what is right so that you know what is suitable and beneficial for your practice. You reflect on what is right and wrong.

So, Sayadaw, you are saying that the first two aspects of *sampajañña* are based on *yoniso manasikāra*?

You could say so.

Or are they the same?

It's like this. In the beginning you take what you heard from your teacher and you think about it. You think about what it means, how to use it and so forth. When you reflect on this and clearly understand, that is yoniso manasikāra. You have done some thinking about it and how to use it in the right way, and then you start to observe. So you've got this right view now because you have thought about how to do it, and using this right view you are now observing. As you observe, the mind actually begins to understand what is suitable and what is beneficial. Because there will still be mistakes and things that are done right, you learn lessons about how this is suitable or not suitable, how this is beneficial or not beneficial. So that is when yoniso manasikāra becomes sampajañña.

I see. Can you explain your understanding of the other two aspects of sampajañña?

4 This has been variously translated by others as "wise consideration" (Bodhi), "appropriate attention" (Ṭhānissaro), etc.
5 Thorough awareness (Interviewer's personal choice of translation).

The meaning of gocara is literally "grazing place". In gocara sampajañña, the grazing place of wisdom has become reality (*paramattha*)—or rather, more of reality. So there's understanding of *nāma-rūpa*[6] (mind-matter) at all times and more understanding of the 'reality aspect' of experience. The conceptual part of experience doesn't disappear. It's not ignored. It's still known. You don't have to ignore a concept to understand reality. But despite the concept being there, wisdom understands and has more of its attention on the 'reality aspect' of the experience.

Asammoha occurs when there is understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. There's the understanding of these three characteristics all the time. Basically wisdom understands these at a deeper level.

About these two sampajaññas—the third and fourth—because we talk about them, we separate them. But in fact they are the same—they occur simultaneously.

People often translate *sati* as "mindfulness". What do you think of that?

When I talk to yogis I notice that they understand "mindfulness" in a different way. They understand it to mean exerting energy, the combined functioning of the five spiritual powers (*bala*). But sati as one of the five balas is actually only one part of what the yogi calls "mindfulness".

I would rather prefer to define "mindfulness" as "the mind full of awareness". In English, they use "mindlessness" to mean "awareness-less". That's why I think mindfulness is "awarenessful". So, "the mind full of awareness" is mindfulness. I made this up. Everybody likes it. *[Translator laughs]* It's not because I know English but because this is how it feels in my mind.

Also (some) yogis have this misconception: When they talk about "strong mindfulness", they think it's when they use a lot of energy to focus, to pay attention.

When I talk about sharp mindfulness or awareness—both of them mean the same thing to me—I mean the mind has the ability to know many things at the same time. Then only is awareness really strong.

So, how do you understand the word *sati*?

Not forgetting. Not forgetting the right object, what is really there, what is real. And not forgetting wholesomeness (*kusala*).

How then do you understand the term *satisampajañña* as found in Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta?

The sampajañña part is wisdom. Even if it's not 'understood' or 'experienced' wisdom, but just 'derived' or 'heard' wisdom, it understands that everything is nature, that there is not a person or some being there, that it's actually cause and effect, conditions at work, so that right view is present with sati.

In practical terms, it means that you are aware, and while aware you also use the information from the teacher to bear on the way you are being aware. This means you have to base your awareness on right view and not be blindly aware; not just focussing. That's satisampajañña.

INSTRUCTIONS

In the last interview we had, which was published in Sāsanārakkha Newszine July 2004, you said, "Year by year, my instructions change a little. I'm not rigid. When I see a weak point, I change the instruction, so that it becomes more helpful to the yogi." Can you tell us the changes you made in recent years, and what prompted them?

In the beginning, I used to tell yogis to be aware. And yogis *are* aware. They try very hard to be aware. I have always known that my own awareness had a large measure of wisdom in it. When my teacher talked to me about awareness, or told me to be aware, I understood he meant "with wisdom". But as I talk to yogis more and more, I begin to see that they're applying a lot of awareness but are not growing in wisdom because their own wisdom is very weak. Also, despite the amount of awareness they develop, most of them do not recognise whether or not the wisdom is there.

So seeing this weakness, I began to talk more about wisdom than sati. Another thing is, people are strongly inclined to forcefully put effort into their awareness. But because I watch my own awareness a lot, I begin to notice that without deliberately putting in effort I can simply remind myself to be aware.

My instructions have changed from year to year ever since. Before that, I used to give instructions on how to practise, the mechanics of practice. But it has moved now to almost hardly any instructions about the mechanics of the practice. There's a little, but before that, I give a full explanation on the theory of practice or the ideas behind the practice, telling them what it's about, giving them all the information they need, so that they can practise the right way.

You've heard my instructions. Are they the same as the last time?

Definitely not. I remember the idea of asking questions when I went to SOM in the year 2000. But talking about wisdom and understanding

6 According to the suttas, this refers to the cognitive and physical aspects of individual existence, i.e. feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention and form (*vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa, manasikāra, rūpa*). Here however SUT is using the term according to the common Theravādin understanding, i.e. mind and matter.

is something I have been recently hearing more of.

(Translator: But I think most people didn't catch it at that time although he talked about asking questions. He emphasises it more now.)

In my 27 points on right attitude there are so many questions.

Retreats under your guidance have a very simple schedule. The only fixed times are for meals and discussions with you. The meditators can talk and even take an afternoon nap. This is very uncharacteristic of what most people understand as a meditation retreat. What prompted you to make this change?

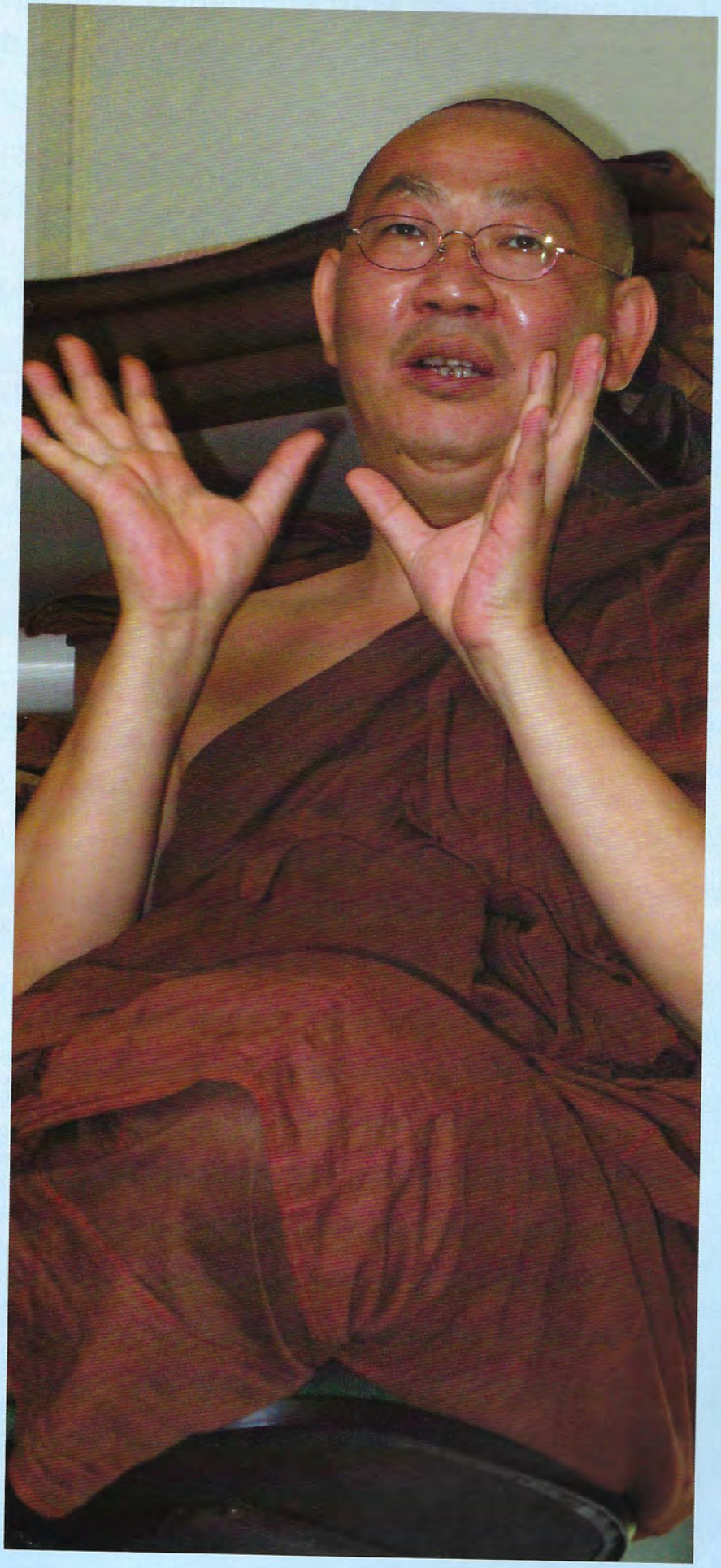
I want yogis to think for themselves. I'm ***telling*** them to think for themselves. Because if you are being aware, thinking must be part of it (i.e. the awareness). You must think for yourself.

If somebody is talking in a retreat and he talks non-stop, for sure there's no awareness. You can tell. If someone is being aware, he's going to think about whether talking is suitable.

There are people who may need to sleep at a particular time. They know they need to. But when there is a schedule that doesn't allow them to do so, that can mess things up.

Every yogi is bound by his own particular situation. The teacher does not and cannot know each of them individually: their situation in life, their needs, their bodies. They need to know for themselves. The main thing is I really value human potential. I'm not looking down on them. I'm giving them the space to use their wisdom. Later I came to know that they were not using their own intelligence. And because of that I deliberately encouraged them to do so.

That would work well with people who are actually interested to meditate, to improve themselves,



If you meditate and start cultivating as much good qualities that you possibly can, and these actually grow, then depression will be gone.

to cultivate (wisdom). But what about those who just want to come for a holiday retreat?

It's all on an individual basis. For those who don't have much internal motivation, I work them of course. That's what they deserve. But that's not suitable for those who are already motivated. To fit everybody into one formula, a single mould, I would say, is not very wise.

Maybe a bit cruel too.

Yes, maybe it can be cruel, because there is no understanding and allowance for individual differences. They all have good qualities. Why force those who can already practise by themselves?

I agree. *[Translator laughs]*

It's better to have an overview of the whole situation and then adjust accordingly, rather than squeeze everybody into the same box without knowing anything of the circumstances. If anyone feels that he cannot fit into the way I am teaching, he can bring it up to me individually, and I will help him to adjust. The Buddha was never fixed on one style of teaching. He was always very flexible, tailoring his teaching to suit each individual. Everybody is different.

I doubt if he had a schedule (for his disciples) either.

Yes. *[Translator and SUT laugh]*

WORLDLY PROBLEMS, SPIRITUAL SOLUTIONS

I understand that you had a serious depression before and meditation was the way out for you.

The ***only*** way out.

What's your advice to people who have depression?

The first thing that I explain to someone who is depressed is what depression is. It is actually a state where the good qualities of the mind have become weak but the bad qualities have become stronger.

It is said that stress leads to depression. When the body is tired, the mind is tired, so one becomes easily angry. Then this anger grows until depression sets in.

For me, it is then very clear that depression is a reduction in the good qualities of the mind, while meditation is a cultivation of its good qualities. That is so clear. If you meditate and start cultivating as much good qualities that you possibly can, and these actually grow, then depression will be gone.

When I was depressed I didn't ever resort to antidepressants. The depression was very, very strong. I started with knowledge. I didn't start with samādhi. That is why I say, if you have the knowledge and you use it, samādhi will develop.

At that time did your brothers who were doctors disagree with your way of not taking any antidepressant?

No, no. (Translator: I think at that time it was not popular yet.) They didn't even know what to do for me. That's why they just sat and watched me. I had to work it out by myself. What do you think Sayadaw did? He just encouraged me to keep going. He could not even give me any other advice.

So you were practically on your own at that time.

Yes.

In your case you had the mental strength.

Because I wanted to be free. I wanted to have relief. I couldn't stand it any more.

So I suppose a person who is depressed must himself want to be free.

Everybody who is depressed wants to be free, to be relieved. It's a very unpleasant feeling. *[Laughs]* But most want to be free through anger. They don't use their wisdom. I already understood what was happening to me. I also knew what I had to do. And because of that, I began working at it. But I knew all that because I had practised before. So all my past practice was not in vain.

But for a person who has no past practice before, that would be a bit difficult.

Yes. If they had no knowledge, it's very difficult.

So for those who are intelligent, I make a special effort to explain to them because they are able to actually get it and be free.

But it's very difficult for the less intelligent. In such cases, they could use samatha. When samādhi develops, the depression can be alleviated. But only for a while. When they stop, the depression comes back. *[Laughs]* This is because the depression has a lot more power than the samādhi. It is only as effective as its established strength. When they stop meditating, the depression comes back.

I've some experience talking to a person who is depressed. There is this man who was a manager of a medium sized company. So, he should be quite intelligent. He has been taking pharmaceutical drugs for quite some time. I am not too sure if that has anything to do

with it, but when I try to talk to him, it just seems like it doesn't get through to him.

He probably doesn't want to use this way. My brother is like this. He is intelligent and he also understands how to practise but he doesn't want to do it. There is another kind of person who doesn't want to do something just because somebody else tells him to do so. *[Laughs]* Very funny idea.

Then it's very difficult to help them.

Yes. If they don't want to accept help, it is difficult.

Some people want to spend more time in meditation by attending retreats, but they face resistance or even objections from their family members. What do you think they can do?

Practise at home. It's win-win. Just tell them how to practise. That's the best.

There is a little farmers' village called Kalaw in Shan State. A lady there had always wanted to go for retreats, but she and her family were very poor. They lived from hand to mouth. They had to work every day, so her husband could not allow her to go for a retreat. She would always blame her husband and their poverty for this.

When I was there they would come and pay respects to me in the evenings after they had finished work. As we were discussing the Dhamma, I explained that she could actually practise at home. She was amazed because she had never heard that it was possible to do that. She began to earnestly practise at home. And then she really changed so much that her husband was inspired to practise even harder than her! Previously, if he heard the word "Dhamma" or "meditation", he would just take off because it gave him so much trouble through his wife's continual complaints. *[Laughter]*

Can meditation improve relationships?

(Translator: Yes!)

I know it can, but how?

Because when you understand your own mind and its defilements, then you can understand and forgive other people. One person came to meditate. He said, "Jesus said, 'Forgive and forget,' but he didn't say how to practise it. Now I understand." By practising satipaṭṭhāna we understand how to forgive and forget.

In the modern world, many people are living with a lot of stress, which is related to anxiety, anger, etc. How can having the right attitude help them to live with less stress?

You have to tell them a lot about right ideas, because when they can think in the right way, it is much faster in relieving stress than to watch (stressful thoughts caused by originally wrong attitudes).

BOOKS, WEBSITE AND FUTURE PLANS

Sayadaw, you have already published a book i.e. *Don't Look Down on the Defilements*. And a pocket version was recently published. I understand a new book is on the way. Can you tell us the title and what it is about?

Awareness Alone is Not Enough. (Translator: It has already been published.)

Can you briefly say what it is about?

The whole point of that book, *Awareness Alone is Not Enough*, is to explain wisdom. It's in a question-and-answer format. (Translator: Most of the book.) It's about the importance of discussion and how it can help us understand more and get more information, more data.

I hear that a website on your teachings will be set up. Can you tell us something about that?

I have agreed to set up the website now because so many people keep asking to get them printed. So everybody can access and read the books and listen to the discussions with yogis and some instructions too.

Any idea when this will be available?

(Translator: Maybe another two months.) Also, so that people can get more information. I realise that it's important for them—instead of me running around the world, and it takes so much time. The sooner they can get as much information as possible, the better for them.

It might attract more yogis to your centre too.

It wouldn't be easy to go to Burma at all now.

Oh, I see. Okay. Do you have any other special plans for the future?

For now, I'm still young; so I will try to speak as much as I can. I want to continue helping people so long as I am able to. Conducting retreats is nothing more than a gesture of helping out.

Many thanks to Sayadaw U Tejaniya's very capable translator, Ma Thet, for her presence, time and effort during the interview; to Yap Sew Hong for painstakingly and mindfully transcribing the recorded interview; and to Bhante Aggacitta for going through the draft, listening intently to the recording, and making changes for the sake of clarity, brevity and accuracy of translation.



Barrage of Baggage



Nancy Zan easily resolved the problem of her lost backpack, but found the baggage within her a different matter altogether.

With my two t-shirts, travel toothbrush, and a pair of borrowed slippers, I began my twelve-day retreat at SBS on 13 June. I had arrived by flight from New York and along the way, Cathay Pacific bestowed upon me the first taste of letting go of worldly possessions; they lost my luggage. So with a plastic bag of belongings and not much else, I allowed myself to take full refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and the teachings of Sayadaw U Tejaniya.

There would be no schedule, and 'noble' talk would be allowed. All this would give us the opportunity to practise from the moment we wake to the moment we sleep.

On the first night of instruction I sat in the Multi-Purpose Hall with the 59 other participants comprising monks, yogis and staff. I was happy to see Sayadaw smiling at the front of the hall. I had first sat under Sayadaw seven years ago in Burma. His instruction had changed, giving more importance and emphasis to certain points, and I found the new ways he explained the practice resonated with me. As I sat in the hall, I tried to maintain the effortless, bare awareness, that U Tejaniya said we should have while practising. He explained that the mind should be aware without focusing or exerting too much effort—just being aware of any object that comes into contact with the sense doors, without picking or choosing. He emphasised the two ways of practice; *samatha* and *vipassanā*. Focusing on one object at the object level, such as the breath or rising and falling would give way to calmness and increased *samādhi*. Giving emphasis to the mind, to watching the mind, thoughts, and its reactions would give rise to wisdom. We were to take the latter road and practise vipassanā.

U Tejaniya explained that all objects, whether sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or thoughts and feelings should be observed without bias, and with the right attitude. The right attitude is one that knows objects as objects, without attaching the idea of 'I' or a sense of self. The right attitude would watch an object and want to observe it to see its true nature, without aversion or craving towards that sensation, thought, or feeling. This is more difficult to achieve than it seemed when explained.

We were to discard the notion that meditation is a practice that can only occur in the sitting posture with our eyes closed. We were told that it is a practice that can be done in all four postures; while sitting, standing, lying down, and walking; not to mention while eating, washing dishes, or in the bathroom.

Sitting on our cushions, we tried to absorb it all. There would be no 'formal' schedule, and talking was allowed but we were to do so with awareness. All this would give us the opportunity to practise from the moment we wake to the moment we sleep.

It was energising to hear Sayadaw talk, and I was eager to restart my practice afresh. It had been about a year and a half since my last retreat, and my mind was feeling the turmoil of living the life of a twenty-something in New York. I tried to be mindful in daily life, but the periods of awareness did not last long and it was difficult to watch with the right view when my sense of self was so strong and constantly reinforced. It was as if my existence was dedicated to doing what I pleased and living up my youth. I wanted to be surrounded by people, to go out every night, and be able to experience all that New York City had to offer. At the same time, I felt as if this lifestyle was not sustainable and I was constantly riding a roller-coaster of emotions. Cathay Pacific had managed to rid me of my backpack, but I had brought along a whole other set of baggage that I would later find only watching and observing could assuage.

One morning I spoke with Sayadaw and told him about a particular feeling that kept coming up, related to my boyfriend back in New York that I left on uncertain terms. I told him about my fears and what was on my mind. He advised me to "just watch the feelings without becoming involved." I was to watch the feelings without getting involved in the story, and to watch them objectively, as if they were not 'I'. They would visit me over and over again but each time I would try to watch them for what they were. It helped to hear him say to all the yogis at one point, "What you are feeling is not new. Everyone experiences the same feelings." Hearing that made my emotions seem less personal.

The same emotion of dread, depression, and uncertainty would continue to follow me during the course, coming up at any opportunity when my mind was not aware. A thought would come first and then with it the feeling, and thought after thought would follow, each one worse than the one before. I started to just watch my feelings intently, seeing how subtle they could become, and at other times, overwhelmingly gross. During the course my only intention was to watch and to observe it for what it was, to see its true nature.

It would make a perfect story to be able to say that the end of the course meant the end of the emotions, but naturally things don't work that way. So even after we had all said our goodbyes and I left Sayadaw and the lush greenery and peace of SBS, the emotions continued to visit me. And I see it as a great learning experience. If the feelings did not come, I would not be able to watch, and so I would not be able to learn. I feel that each moment that allows me to see them for what they are helps me to understand that this is just the process of life, and as a result it affects me less and less. And so, I try to keep my awareness and continue to watch.



Looking Through the Haze Finding Our Way

Let us tune in to and watch with **Laura Zan** as she switches on an all-time favourite movie—The Mind.



It was almost 9pm. I had been sitting comfortably in the recliner for a good 20 minutes, content to stare through the gauzy curtains at the city skyline across the river and the stream of lights rushing along the highway below. Alternating between closing my eyes and gazing out the window, I just sat, waiting for something. All was quiet except for the occasional rumbling of the train coming out of the tunnel and onto street level twelve storeys below. The sounds of the city were muted and shut out in this dead of winter. As well, there was no work the next day and school wouldn't start again for another week.

It has been some time since going on a long retreat, and the schedule of school and work just didn't permit a long stay away in the foreseeable future. During this time, I had a chance to reflect on the meaning of "outside practice". Most meditation teachers stress the daily life practice as a place and time to learn, and I begin to see why. In a retreat centre are schedules, teachers, peers and an environment all aimed at making one thing happen: meditation. The work beyond retreat centres, i.e. in our day-to-day life, reminds me of a 'struggle for supremacy', a daily contest for domination, whilst we read, watch television, converse with others, hold meetings at work, run for the train, and return home. A fight between *paññā* (wisdom) and *avijjā* (ignorance/delusion) moment to moment, each comes with its own army of friends and helpers to do its bidding. To the winner go the spoils, replete with emotions, thoughts, feelings and resultant mental anguish, peace or insight. In many cases (and I speak only for myself here), I believe the second, avijjā, is hard at work while the former, wisdom, is hardly working. The mind tends to believe the images, sounds, and storylines without thought as to where they are all coming from or going. When the practice falters, what do we fall for?

It was reality TV. Each thought flickered in and out—snippets of more notable events over the past few days rushed past with associated feelings and emotions. There was ebb and flow, mental reactions to events and subtle sensations that naturally arose and passed away together. After some time, there was discomfort in the neck from having slid down a little too much, an intention to move, an ever so slight movement, and a settling back. Certain images returned, or rather appeared and disappeared. Lately there'd been a problem in the kitchen with refugee bugs seeking solace from other apartments' chemical warfare. There was a slight tension from the images, noticing, and relaxing again. After a few minutes other matters took centre stage and the kitchen was but a memory.

What is the secret behind practising in daily life, I've asked of meditation teachers. How do I do it outside when there's ***so much to do (especially other things) and so little time to do it? Is the feeling of urgency enough to propel me toward choiceless awareness?*** Reminding myself to be mindful did not seem to be enough. I've used many a sticky note with this pithy line, but alas, as many reminders go—it becomes a part of the background noise, to be seen momentarily but forgotten just as quickly. Using awareness alone has seen many mental bruises, falls and picking up the pieces as wisdom doesn't come in quite quickly enough to staunch the flow of *kilesas* (defilements). I wanted an exact answer on how to proceed from the meditation centre to outside, or at least a point in the right direction. Each teacher gave me a different answer or nod along the way, for which I am grateful. Yet I was hungry for more. Could I apply my graduate studies in adult learning theories to *vipassanā* meditation? Reflecting on this and practising through two semesters of work, I believe I have come to the tip of the iceberg or at least at these crossroads for now: ***we must truly take the time to find out what works for each of us.*** While this may sound like a wishy-washy answer to a serious question, it isn't.

The answer in part, lies in a patient, lifelong search in each of us for a balance of continued momentum in retreat and daily life, of managing our responsibilities, yet knowing the importance of cultivating wisdom on the Noble Eightfold Path and going for it. It comes from discovering our habits, pet peeves, and things that make us tick so we know the best times to just 'be'. It's from seeing all the wholesome and unwholesome that is our life. It is also the act of looking forward to the learning instead of blindly telling ourselves to be aware each time we forget. When we want to look at situations as they are happening, like a really interesting science experiment—perhaps we may discover some beautiful working of the mind in the midst of a mundane experience. It is knowing what our triggers are this time around so we do not fall into the same trap once again the next time. When I started reflecting on these things, the Dhamma seemed to blossom.

This on-demand theatre provided protagonists and antagonists in stories and conversations, each becoming more the hero or villain with each replay. There were tingling feelings in seeing events that seemed so real just hours ago. It was like watching a favourite DVD, where I could lazily just rewind and relive all the emotions, feelings and sensations. As I just sat there over those few minutes, the mind watching the mind, a realisation arose—what an illusion! 'I' am reacting to concepts created by conditions. And it continued just so until it was time to sleep.

For me, having quiet time to just sit on the sofa and stare out the window has been immensely helpful. Many times it is living in a city surrounded by teeming hordes of people, yet having the space to contemplate on a train during rush hour. It is also about having practising friends and family, a train ride, a call or an email away and creating systems of reminders for each other. We experimented with conference calls every two or three weeks to report on difficulties and realisations in our practice outside. I felt uplifted by our bi-weekly discussions and looked forward to the next one. By holding each other accountable, we have become each others' Dhamma community. Finally, every so often, I'd turn on chants and recordings of Dhamma interviews I'd heard so often in person, but still could find new meaning in each digital session. Each provided a mental oasis in a Dhamma-parched city until it became a natural part of daily living.

We have always assessed and made decisions on the roles we'd play, the work we'd like to do and the careers to follow. I asked myself whether the same could be done with the Dhamma practice. Can we, by investing in training wheels in meditation retreats, and intentionally creating continued connection to *kalyāṇamitta*, teachers, Dhamma discourses and constant reminders, stay in close contact with the teachings of the Buddha? I believe the answer is "yes". We must each take a self-administered assessment test of sorts and intelligently seek out what works well for us. It is about fashioning an environment (physical and especially mental) that is conducive to developing wisdom. It is self-directed adult learning at its best—and we have the rest of our lives to figure out our own solutions. Perhaps, ultimately it is about developing enough wisdom so that we are no longer affected by the environment.

It is now spring. Picking up where I'd started writing mid-semester, I can add more points on keeping the Dhamma close to the heart—putting thoughts on paper. These two to three pages alone have been a reflection of finding guideposts to my own practice. It was also a wonderful reminder to the beauty of the Dhamma as thoughts, feelings and sensations flickered while I alternatively typed, read and reread every line, and idly stared through the gauzy curtains at the city skyline across the river and the cars rushing along the highway below.



Dhamma Tour East

VEN KUMĀRA spent the month of March bringing the Dhamma to devotees in East Malaysia through workshops, discussions and talks. The accounts below bear witness to the warm welcome he received and the appreciation of the Dhamma he imparted.

A memorable month

*by **Alan Oh** on sutta discussions and a workshop at Āloka House*, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (1 – 14 March)*

March 2008 was a memorable month for us here, with Ven Kumāra Bhikkhu conducting a series of discussions on the *suttas* and a workshop. Those who attended them were greatly inspired. Ven Kumāra was adept at handling all the discussions, allowing all who attended to share their life experiences and relating them to the suttas. After all, Dhamma is life and the Buddha preached from direct knowledge through his experience.

This method of allowing dynamic discussions increased and maintained the interest of the participants as compared to monotonous one-way communication from the teacher. Velāma Sutta was the most interesting sutta in the discussion. The Buddha had listed good deeds according to a scale and had declared that mental cultivation is the best deed of them all.

We wish to record our appreciation and thanks to Ven Kumāra and SBS for their support in spreading the Dhamma in Sabah. We hope to have Ven Kumāra here again to encourage Dhamma learning in Sabah.

Now let us hear from some of the participants:

"The two weeks of sutta study conducted by Ven Kumāra was very refreshing and educational. His interactive style of teaching kept everyone engaged and yearning for more. I hope he will find the time to come back to us." - Stuart Chin

"It was full of knowledge and very eye-opening. Many questions answered led to a deeper appreciation of the Dhamma." - Jia Shin

"I found the sutta study session interactive." - Jayclyn

"We are now more aware of the Dhamma as preached by the Buddha. Now we need to practice!" - Alan Oh

*Āloka House at Sabah was set up as a spiritual development centre under the auspices of the Āloka Foundation. For more information about the activities of Āloka House, Sabah please visit www.alokasabah.blogspot.com.

He communicated the teachings of the Buddha to us at our level of understanding and through what we experience in our daily lives. Thus the Dhamma has become easily identifiable and relevant to us.

Identifiable and relevant Dhamma

*by **Anthony Yeo** on workshops, Dhamma talks and discussions at Miri Inner Peace Club, Sarawak (21 – 23 March)*

Bhante Kumāra's visit has provided the necessary impetus for us to strive harder in our efforts to learn more about and practise the Dhamma. In Siew Bee's words, "...inspires and motivates... as well as increases my faith in the Triple Gem". This is because of Bhante's ability to put us at ease with his easy demeanour, enabling the listeners to be more open and ready to express their thoughts and feelings about the Dhamma without fear of censure. He communicated the teachings of the Buddha to us at our level of understanding and through what we experience in our daily lives. Thus the Dhamma has become easily identifiable and relevant to us.

Generally, the workshops on "Letting Go" and "Mindfulness in Daily Life" were well received by participants who found the need to think through the issues at hand. This made learning more effective. The general view was that Bhante is a very good listener with keen observation and was able to guide the discussions along with his counselling skills. Liberal doses of humour have made these sessions fun and interesting.

Bhante also conducted a Q&A session in the Sunday class while he was here. The children were enthused by the change from the usual class format. Most of the discussions were centred on unseen beings and rebirth.

We also learnt other things from Bhante like chiropractic therapy, and the dangers of microwave radiation from telecommunication towers and mobile phones.

Siew Bee says that Bhante "is the type of quality Dhamma teacher we need in the spread of the Dhamma—knowledgeable, easily accessible, easy to talk to, with a keen sense of humour, yet compassionate and understanding". I couldn't have phrased it better. The general consensus is that we would like to have more of such sessions with Bhante in the near future, maybe even a Dhamma Camp.

Happy and pleased

*by **Yip Fai Cheng** on Dhamma talks and discussions at Sarikei Buddhist Society, Sarawak (25 – 26 March)*

Ven Kumāra came to Sarikei Siddhartha Gautama Buddhist Association for the first time and delivered a series of Dhamma talks. Sarikei Buddhist Society is the only society in central Sarawak that practises Theravāda Buddhism. The society emphasises the practice of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, meditation and the chanting of Maṅgala Sutta.

On the first day, Ven Kumāra talked about the law of *kamma*. In the discourse, Ven Kumāra discussed what kamma is and explained how kamma causes some to be born rich and intelligent, but others poor and unhealthy. He explained that some good deeds one performs in the present life may only take effect in future lives. Similarly, the pleasure one enjoys in the present life may be the results of the deeds one has performed in past lives.

On the following day, devotees asked questions, such as belief in mediums, life after death, scattering ashes of the departed in the sea etc. All questions were answered satisfactorily by Ven Kumāra. The talks ended with everyone feeling happy and pleased.

Why does one meditate?

by a participant on a discussion on "Mindfulness in Daily Life" at Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association, Kuching, Sarawak (27 March)

Why does one meditate? What benefits does one get by practising mindfulness meditation? How does one apply the skill of mindfulness in one's daily life? Ven Kumāra posed these questions to those present. Personally, I think these are questions worth pondering over.

Fear of death, disappointment with children, unhappy over blame and criticism—these were some of the issues brought up during group discussion sessions. Although Bhante skilfully led the participants into analysing the 'why' and suggesting the 'how' (to overcome), I personally felt the role of mindfulness meditation in helping one to deal with such issues affecting one's daily life had not been clearly defined.

Note from Ven Kumāra: I may have failed to clarify then that the discussion was not on the role of formal mindfulness meditation in dealing with life's problems. Rather, it was on the practice of mindfulness in daily life itself. It might have been better if I had put more effort in persuading the audience to regard mindfulness meditation as part of daily life itself, rather then something to be practised only in a specially allocated setting separate from daily life. Though a time set aside for silent meditation is no doubt beneficial, it is even better for our spiritual cultivation if we make our whole life an active practice of meditation.





Unlike all other talks

by ***Teo Chin Chiang*** *on a discussion in Mandarin on "Mindfulness in Daily Life" at Kuching Bhagavan Buddhist Society, Kuching, Sarawak (28 March)*

We find that the approach used by Bhante in delivering the talk was well received by most, if not all, attendees. It was very interactive, unlike all other talks that I had attended before in which I was just a listener without any input or contribution.

Forgiving and accepting ourselves

by ***Wyman Hung Tze Mau*** *on a general discussion after dāna at Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association, Kuching, Sarawak (30 March)*

Some 20 Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) students joined in this session. I remember well the topic of accepting ourselves as we are which Bhante brought up to address a question from the audience. Bhante explained the skilful way of forgiving ourselves to reduce remorse over past bad deeds.

This is a good start to help those who face depression in life. But forgiving oneself is only the beginning; there must be an effort to look at what one has done, to see what was unwholesome in order to start changing. All these are defilements in life that we need to face and solve. Just like what the Buddha had taught, the path of seeking the Dhamma is a gradual path. This literally means that we need right understanding, effort and thoughts to overcome the problems that we face in life. Just forgiving ourselves each and every time we make mistakes is not enough. We must learn from every mistake made and resolve not to be so unmindful again the next time.

by ***Gambhīradhamma*** *on the same as above*

To us students from UNIMAS, this was a good opportunity to clear some doubts. Pen and paper were distributed for writing down our inquiries as some were shy to ask questions in public.

Questions intended for Bhante ranged from the very basic FAQs to questions on meditation. One story related by Bhante is still very vivid in my mind. There was a lady who felt pains and aches in her body who had to seek alternative treatment as doctors could find no cause for her condition. After talking to Bhante, it turned out that she had done things that she could not forgive herself for. She was so full of guilt that it was arduous even to utter "I forgive myself." However, with gentle and tactful persuasion by Bhante, she slowly and softly uttered the sentence a few times and instantly felt a sense of relief.

We learnt here that the sorrow and guilt inside this lady was so strong that it was mentally causing her physical distress. Furthermore, we realised that we should try to forgive ourselves and our wrongdoings, then do our best not to repeat the same mistakes. By forgiving ourselves too, we are taking the first step in forgiving others. After all, nobody is perfect.

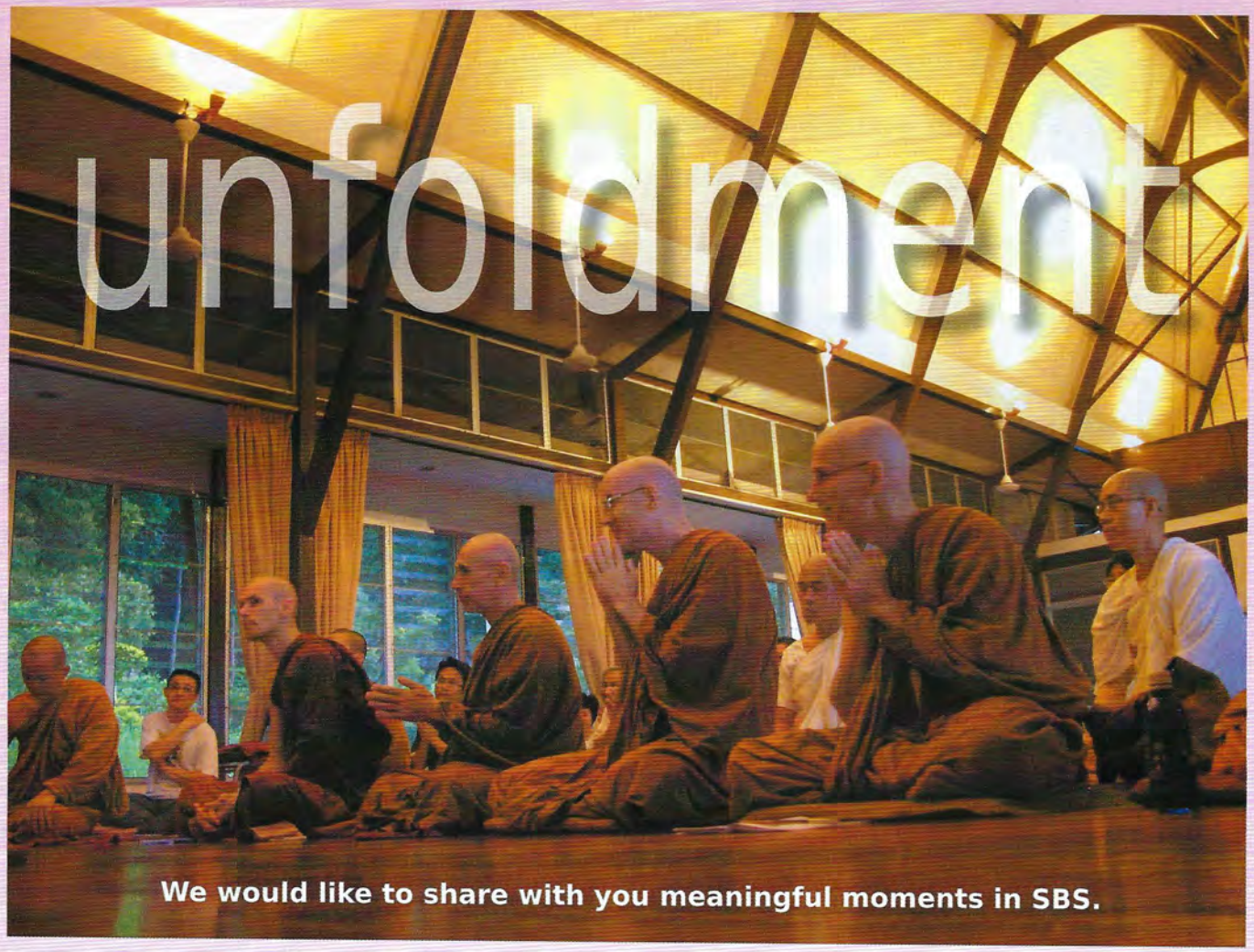
Note from Ven Kumāra: Learning from our mistakes is certainly necessary for spiritual cultivation. However, resolving not to repeat them has not been an effective way for me. In my experience, resolutions have no staying power. Even in the short while that it may seem to work, the effect is superficial.

Why is that so? Here's how I understand it.

When I resolved not to do something again, I did not fully understand why I did that something in the first place. I felt bad and just wanted it to not happen again. So, it was motivated by aversion, however subtle it may be. Can we use mental defilements do the job of self-improvement? In my experience, no. (If we don't know better, we unwittingly allow mental defilements do a good job of improving themselves though!)

On the other hand, when I willingly forgive myself thus relieving myself of anger, the mind becomes freer. With that, I am then able to investigate issues more comfortably, see them more clearly, and derive understanding from them. It is the understanding of why I acted in a particular way that allows me to understand how not to repeat the pattern. (That may be the missing key in so many failed new year resolutions, which can contribute to feelings of futility, guilt and inadequacy.) The deeper the understanding, the more effective it gets. That happens only when I am not holding on to guilty feelings about them, when I genuinely forgive myself. Anything less than that means that I am still angry with myself, and anger always gets in the way of understanding and spiritual cultivation.

I thank the two writers above for bringing up this important point.



REGULAR ACTIVITIES

- The monastics go for *piṇḍacāra* in the markets around Taiping on Sunday mornings.
- Sunday mornings: Ven Kumāra has a Q&A session with National Service trainees at Taiping Buddhist Society (27 April – 1 June).
- Ven Kumāra shares Dhamma during TIMS Youth gatherings twice a month (Jan – Feb) and at Taiping Buddhist Society once a month (April – June).
- Ven Balacitta goes to Taiping Prison fortnightly for Dhamma propagation.
- Thursday evenings: Ven Aggacitta gives a Pāli tutorial for the monastics (beginning 13 March).
- Dhamma talk after *dāna* on Saturdays. (see p6 for details)
- Evening meditation class for the public on Saturdays guided by Ven Aggacitta and occasionally, Ven Kumāra.

JANUARY

Wed 2 Ajahn Suthep (19 *vassas*), together with Phra Supachai (5 vassas) and Asoka Group, is here from Kuala Lumpur to conduct a one-day workshop on Dynamic Meditation. (see next page)

Fri 4 U Sīla (14 vassas) from Myanmar and Ven Dr Sopāka (11 vassas) from Taiwan come for a visit. The latter is interested in SBS's management system and the practice of Chinese Theravāda monks in Malaysia.



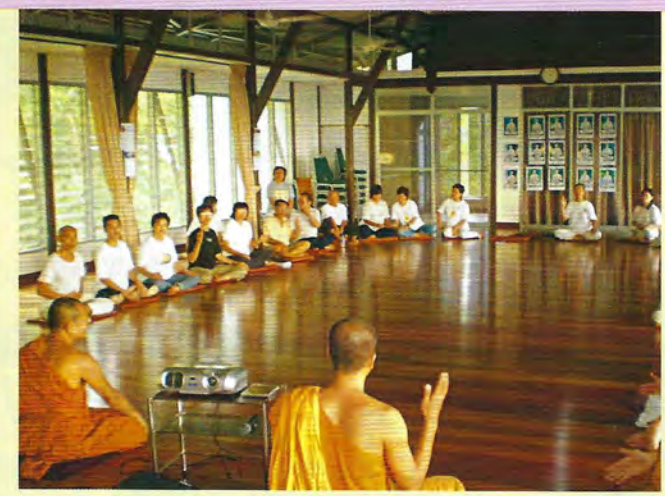
Sat 5 A Past Life Regression workshop starts this morning in Saddhamma Sabhā Multi-Purpose Hall. About 35 people attend the workshop together with some SBS monastics. (see p52)

Mon 7 For Uposatha, the monastics listen to Bhikkhu Bodhi's lecture on KaraṇīyaMettā Sutta.

Sun 20 Venerable Ajahn Tiradhammo (33 vassas) and Venerable Mettiko (4 vassas) visit. Ajahn Tiradhammo has been the abbot of Bodhinyanarama, New Zealand since 2000, while Ven Mettiko is a Pāli scholar who spent eight years translating Majjhima Nikāya into German when he was still a layman. In the evening Ajahn Tiradhammo gives a Dhamma talk, sharing his experience, followed by a Q&A session in Saddhamma Sabhā Multi-Purpose Hall.



Ven Kumāra leaves for Petaling Jaya (PJ) to oversee the publication of *Sāsanārakkha Newszine* #9.



Dynamic Meditation

Cindy Lim and **Asoka Group** bring Ajahn Suthep to conduct a one-day Dynamic Meditation workshop. Learn more about it from her.

For many, walking meditation conjures up images of long walkways and yogis pacing in silence with eyes downcast. Not so with Ajahn Suthep Chinawaro, the last disciple of Luangpor Teean of the Thai forest tradition. For a daylong programme of dynamic meditation on 2 January 2008, yogis at SBS incorporated rhythmic body movements to stimulate and develop mindfulness and awareness (*sati*), under the guidance of Ajahn and his assistant, Phra Supachai—both forest monks from Chiangmai. This was the second time the Asoka Group had organised a dynamic meditation retreat. The first was a 12-day dynamic meditation Retreat from 20 – 31 December 2007 at Mahā Karuṇā Buddhist Centre, Subang 2.

Meaning

The programme began with a short explanation of the meaning of "dynamic meditation", which is also known as "sati meditation". dynamic meditation was first introduced by Luangpor Teean Jittasubho (1911 – 1988) of Thailand. Sati meditation is characterised as 'dynamic' in contrast to the more conventional techniques of 'static' meditation. Sati meditation incorporates rhythmic body movements as a way to stimulate and develop mindfulness/awareness. With the dynamic meditation on body movement, the awareness becomes active and clear, and as a natural consequence it encounters the process of thinking and sees thoughts clearly.

Lotus Walking Meditation

Ajahn demonstrated the 7-step lotus walking meditation which is based on the legend of Siddhattha Gotama, the Buddha-to-be, taking 7 steps immediately after his birth. According to the legend, at each step, a lotus flower appeared. Taking his inspiration from this, Ajahn created a specially-made walking mat with seven lotus flowers painted on it. The meditator walks in a 7-step pattern, placing each step on a lotus flower. After the 7th step he clicks the left and right heels together while turning around. This action is meant to help break the chain of thoughts.

Harmonising Body and Mind

This practice is regarded as a way to harmonise the body and mind. This harmony is the first step to 'seeing' thought and is the foundation of the path towards enlightenment. This type of meditation involves keeping the eyes open, thus enabling meditators to be exposed to external objects through the six sense doors without aversion arising. As the meditator practises, 'a little buddha' of pure awareness arises in the mind.

Thought is the source of both human activity and human suffering, according to Ajahn. It is caused by greed, anger, and delusion—the three defilements of a human being. Ajahn explained that anyone could experience a cessation of suffering here and now. For example, when a person touches your shoulder, you immediately break the chain of thoughts by bringing the awareness back to the body and at that moment you are actually experiencing cessation of suffering. Thoughts are natural phenomena arising and passing away. He advised participants not to fight with thoughts. Instead, he urged them to see, know and understand the thoughts, and let them go. Ajahn said that fighting with thoughts creates the concept of 'I' or 'Self' and stopping them only reinforces it.

Off-retreat Practice

Furthermore, meditation practice should not be limited to a temple or a retreat. The real practice of Buddha Dhamma is in our daily living when our six sense doors are subject to the distraction of various external objects (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental objects). Ajahn advised us to look inwards within ourselves and always check our mental

state to see how we feel. If one can keep the normality of mind through awareness of body movement practice, the thoughts cannot go further. If we really watch our minds, then we can really see that all conditions are unsatisfactory, impermanent and non-self. dynamic meditation becomes a tool suitable for modern people to better handle their daily lives. As an example, Ajahn related a story of a tourist who came to Wat Thaton, Chiangmai to practise dynamic meditation with him for three hours. One year later, the tourist wrote back to Ajahn to say that the dynamic meditation had transformed his life.



Meditators should enjoy their meditation, says Ajahn Suthep. He would like people who come for his meditation retreat to practise with a relaxed and happy mind free from apprehension. Concentration increases with this state of mind.

Flexibility in Retreats

In his Dhamma talk, Ajahn said he noticed that many meditation retreats are quite rigid with rules and regulations. "Meditators should enjoy their meditation," said Ajahn Suthep. He would like people who come for his meditation retreat to practise with a relaxed and happy mind free from apprehension. Concentration increases with this state of mind. A meditator must not have any expectation from his or her practice. If there is still an expectation, there is an 'I' or 'Self'. The true Buddha nature will arise only when there is no 'I' or 'Self'.

Most people come to a retreat with a 'monkey' mind. Ajahn uses soothing music to calm their minds. He has noticed that many meditators can practise well with music on while practising body movements. Meditators can use hand movements and 7-step lotus walking meditation as their 'toys' to play with and enjoy. When the mind becomes serene, the meditator will naturally go to an isolated place to practise.

For those of us who already practise some form of *samatha* or *vipassanā*, there is no need to drop our past practice. Ajahn advises us to combine our past knowledge with dynamic meditation practice. He urges us to check our practice to see whether it helps us end suffering. If not, one has to investigate the practice more seriously.

In the afternoon Phra Supachai taught the participants qigong for an hour to help the body relax and loosen the muscles. The exercise was quite fun with music on.

Feedback

The final session ended with a feedback dialogue. A few participants said they could feel strong sensations in the body. One of the participants could see his thought stop when he clicked his heels during the walking meditation. Ajahn was very happy to receive such encouraging feedback in a one-day retreat.

Cultivate Self-awareness

Luangpor Teean guaranteed that within three years at the most, those who practise continuously and correctly as he had taught, can see, know and understand the Truth as the Buddha did. The method is to cultivate self-awareness—being aware of movements of the body and mind. *Ñāṇa/paññā* (insight/wisdom) will then arise and suffering comes to an end.

According to Luangpor Teean, this method is the most direct and the easiest. It is to watch the mind at the moment it thinks, to know the deception in the actual moment, and to resolve it there. It isn't knowing the thought and evaluating it. Doing so is delusion (anger and greed as well). When there is no delusion at that moment there are *sati, samādhi* and *paññā*. So this article is not concerned with words; rather it encourages you to practise and achieve the fruits yourself.





Past Life Regression Workshop in SBS

Past life regression claims that you can actually have glimpses of past lives. Read two accounts from participants of this workshop—a firm believer and a Doubting Thomas.



Phang Siew Sia firmly believes she had glimpses of her past lives and shares with you her experiences in this workshop.

A Renewed Interest

I was excited when given a chance to join the Past Life Regression (PLR) workshop in Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary conducted by Dr Selina Chew. I had attended a past life regression session before in Kuala Lumpur and since then, have developed an interest in PLR to learn about discordant patterns that impeded my growth and development. I really looked forward to being there.

I was born into a family where guardian angels, deities, ghosts, death, and life after death are part of our daily conversations. I used to wonder about the purpose of my rebirth into this life.

I started recalling some fragments of my past lives after a meditation retreat at the end of year 2006. It prompted me to find out more about this topic and I later learned that there are techniques of regression to access a specific time and place in past lives. I was really interested to know more.

On the morning of 5 January, 2008, 32 participants gathered at SBS Multi-Purpose Hall for the two-day workshop. From the first day, I learnt that all the participants were there for different purposes—to overcome phobias, to uncover past links with their loved ones, to seek solutions to recurring ailments, to find reasons for the attraction to certain countries or interests, and also to retrieve their talents and abilities.

Preliminaries

Instead of jumping straight into regression, the participants began with warm-up sessions. We learnt how the muscles coordinate with the central nervous system, the body's bio-computer. In order to have better integration of our brain and body, we did some 'switching on' activities. We learnt more about our personal learning preferences whether visual, auditory or kinaesthetic.

During the two-day workshop, we were guided to access three different lifetimes: the happiest, a spiritual and the immediate past life. We practised visualisation using our senses and this helped us to retrieve past life images more effectively.

Dr Selina Chew guided us through a few techniques to immerse in hypnosis to let the mind fully relax and allow past memories to emerge. Under hypnosis, our conscious mind is always aware of what we are experiencing. It can comment, criticise and censor. For some people, scenes from a past life are played out as in a movie. This is why we are still able to respond to instructions most of the time while hypnotised and be actively involved in the memories of a past life. The hypnotised mind puts past life memories into context while retaining an awareness of the present.

Lessons from the Past

During the group regression, I managed to see images of two different past lives vividly. From those past lives I finally understood the attachment to one of my close friends. She was my mother and my wife respectively in those two lifetimes. Another image I can still remember is me as a happy little girl riding a bicycle on a misty morning surrounded by beautiful tulips. From the images, we looked very different. How do I know those people I saw are related to my current life? By just looking at their eyes, facial expressions, the way their mouths moved when they spoke, etc. I can intuitively identify them with persons in my present life.

What I really learnt from this regression was that we will meet our loved ones again and again to understand the full spectrum of lessons in life—lessons about love, compassion, charity, non-violence, inner peace, patience, detachment, impermanence, etc. It would be hard to learn all these positive qualities in one life. I am convinced that each of us is just a mass of *kammic* energy that keeps 'coming back' to continue learning until each is wise enough and the *kamma* is exhausted.

During our sharing session, some said they managed to see the past links between loved ones; others saw the reasons for recurring ailments which doctors could not diagnose. Some of them finally understood the reasons for their attraction towards certain places, cuisine, sports, etc. Some had doubts about the nature of their experiences. If one is happier, able to cope better with everyday problems and gains a better understanding of oneself after undergoing PLR, does it matter if what one experiences is real or imaginary?

Acceptance of the Present

Regardless of how much the past has influenced one, or what merits or demerits one has accumulated to be born into this present life, living in the present moment is more important. Keep an open mind to accept past lives as just memories, like any other childhood memories. We might look very different. We might have lived in different places. But they are just memories from which we draw lessons to enhance present lives. Non-attachment is now more ingrained in me than ever.

The most precious gift from this workshop is not the recall of scenes or memories. Rather it is the lessons to help us be more accepting of certain situations in our present life. It has given me a close glimpse into the law of kamma and the Four Noble Truths, reinforcing my faith in the Buddha's teachings. It has also expedited an urgency to practise meditation and gain liberation.



Although a convincing picture has been painted above, the fact is that a large majority of participants did not have any significant experience. **Lim Chong Ren**, a young but by no means impressionable teenager, at least had some images suggestive of a past life.

The Indecisive Ninja

In this workshop, Dr Selina guided us into a state of mind where we were supposed to be able to 'see' our past lives. However, there was also a tendency for us to fall asleep in the process. And sadly, I was one of those who drifted off to slumberland. Luckily for me, I managed to see images that may provide clues to a past life during the second regression. Was I a composer, an inventor or a great conqueror? Nope, I was just a humble *ninja* that became a monk but 'disrobed' after falling in love. Ninja? Cool! But a ninja that became a monk? No comments. And worst of all, 'disrobing' because of love? Definitely not cool! Then again, I like things Japanese, so could the images have been triggered by my subconscious mind?

I must say my possible past life was a disappointment. But who's complaining? I still have another life to be made interesting! Anyhow, PLR has really taught me to keep my mind open. You must never decide something is true or false before experiencing it. In this case, even after experiencing it, I have not decided.

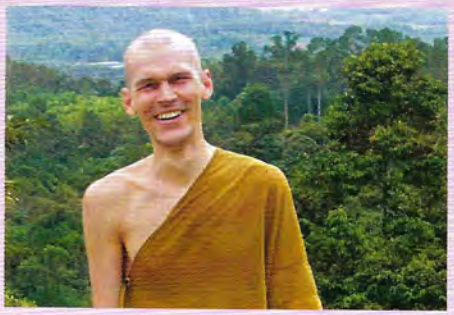
Mon 21 Ajahn Tiradhammo and Ven Mettiko leave SBS at 1pm after piṇḍacāra and a dip in Sg Tupai with Ven Ṭhitavijjo and Ven Balacitta.

Meanwhile in PJ, from today till the 25th, Ven Kumāra holds Dhamma discussions with devotees after lunch dāna.

Tue 22 As it is Uposatha, a spirited Dhamma discussion based on the Pāli *suttas* and personal experience is held on the nature of *sati* and *saññā* (perception) and their roles in memory.

Sat 26 Ven Kumāra has a Dhamma discussion in the evening at Buddhist Wisdom Centre, PJ, with some participants of the recent Dhamma Speakers Course.

Sun 27 Ven Kumāra comes back from PJ with Ven Suriya (Czech) who has just been ordained as a *bhikkhu* in Myanmar.



Wed 30 Two Thai monks from Wat Phothiyaram, Assam Kumbang—Phra Mahā Chira Phong (21 vassas) and Phra Picaya Phol Katasalo (18 vassas)—come for a visit.

For this 8th day Uposatha, the Dhamma discussion is a continuation of the previous topic—the nature of sati and saññā and their roles in memory.

Thu 31 A member of our site staff discovers another spring above and beyond Bhāvanā Grove. It seems promising because the water sample collected during a heavy thunderstorm is still quite clear. With the increased usage of water for Retreat Centre activities, this is just what we need.

FEBRUARY

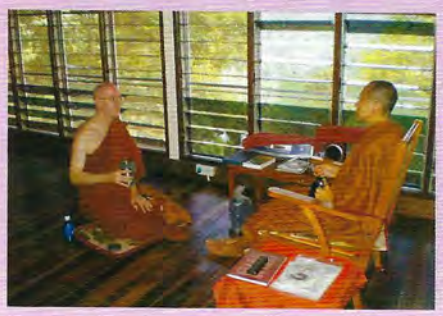
Fri 1 U Indaka from Samnak Sambodhi, Kepong comes for a day's visit.

Sāsanārakkha Newszine #9 arrives from PJ, in time to convey Chinese New Year greetings to our readers.

Sun 3 Daw Ñāṇagavesinī, a Pa Auk nun, comes for a visit.

Tue 5 Ven Ānandajoti (12 vassas), an English monk ordained in the Sri Lankan tradition, calls on Ven Aggacitta and has

a lively discussion with him on several topics. The venerable is a scholar and the webmaster of www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net.



Wed 6 Today's Uposatha Dhamma discussion is on forms of respect found in the Pāli Canon and the Commentaries.

Thu 7 A group of Taipingites working in PJ comes up looking for "a monk who lived in Myanmar for many years, renowned as a very accurate fortune teller and stays near Bukit Larut (Maxwell Hill)". Ven Aggacitta explains that he does not tell fortunes, but only teaches Dhamma and meditation. After guiding them in a short session of *mettā* meditation, he recommends that they continue learning and practising the Dhamma at Triple Gem Centre, Taman Mayang Jaya, where they are currently staying.

Fri 8 Fourteen Myanmar workers come as volunteers. They help to clear sand from the upper overflow dam across the brook. Later Ven Aggacitta gives a short Dhamma talk to them in Burmese, stressing mindfulness in daily life, particularly applied to continually watching the mind and checking mental states.

Sun 10 The monastics have an informal get-together over herbal drinks in the afternoon, and discuss some personal issues related to monastic conduct and etiquette. The abbot gives them some advice and reminds them not to neglect physical exercise, as it will affect their health and practice.

Wed 14 As it is Uposatha, a Dhamma discussion is held among the monastics on Vitthāra Sutta (AN 4:232) regarding bright and dark *kamma*, with sutta references pertaining to the question: "Does an arahant create kamma?"

Sat 16 The committee members of Bodi Langka Ram Temple (BLRT), Taiping, approach our abbot for advice on how to source for a suitable resident monk.

Sun 17 Ven Varadhammo drops by SBS and borrows Peter Harvey's *The Selfless Mind* because he wants to write an article refuting the 'wrong view' on intermediate existence after death.

Thu 21 The monastics listen to an MP3 recording of Sayadaw U Tejaniya's instructions given at Forest Refuge Meditation Retreat (May 2007) instead of having a live Uposatha Dhamma talk.

Ven Aggacitta addresses SBS regular volunteers during a Chap Goh Meh (15th night of the Chinese New Year) potluck dinner. He explains that the gathering is to foster fellowship among them so that they can work together well for the betterment of SBS. His talk is based on *saraṇīyadhammā* (things to be remembered).



Sat 23 Our new general administrator, Khantibala Yew, reports for work ahead of schedule on a voluntary basis. DM2, AM1 and AM2 brief him on his duties.

Sun 24 Meghiya Ng Honn Cheong, an IMPian9, checks in as a postulant.

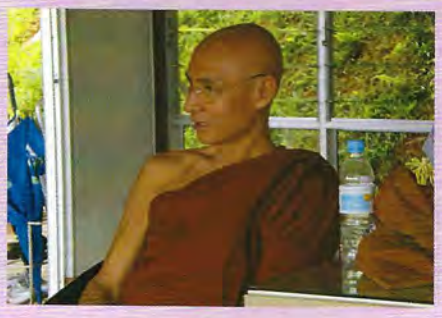


Tue 26 Ven Aggacitta goes to BLRT to meet Ven Ānandajoti and discuss the prospect of his staying there as a resident monk. Both of them pay a courtesy visit to Phra Khru Suwan of Wat Phothiyaram next door.

Wed 27 The Uposatha Dhamma discussion is brought forward as Ven Kumāra is going to East Malaysia on Friday for a Dhamma tour. The discussion is on the contents of the MP3 recording which the monastics had listened to the previous Uposatha Day.

Thu 28 Ven Kumāra leaves for Mettānanda Vihāra, Penang at 5.30pm en route to Sabah for his East Malaysia Dhamma tour.

Fri 29 Sayadaw U Rājinda comes from KL with our PJ representative, How Eng Keong, who discusses with Ven Aggacitta details of Closer-to-Reality Conference (C2RC) scheduled for 27 – 29 December, 2008 in KL.



Meanwhile at Āloka House in Kota Kinabalu (KK), Ven Kumāra holds a sutta discussion. This will be an activity held almost everyday from today till 13 March. The Suttas discussed are the Ānaṇya (AN 4:62), Velāma (AN 9:20), Pattakamma (AN 4:61), Ariyapariyesanā (MN 26), Kālāma (AN 3:65), Lokadhamma (AN 8:6) and Vitthāra (AN 4:232).

MARCH

Sat 1 Ven Balacitta gives a Dhamma talk, "How to relate to the Saṅgha in a proper way", in BLRT upon the invitation of its committee.

Sun 2 SBS monastics go to BLRT to welcome Ven Ānandajoti who intends to reside there for a month.

At Āloka House, Ven Kumāra delivers his first ever Hakka Dhamma talk. Despite being of full Hakka parentage, he has a struggle, particularly with terminology. Fortunately he is ably assisted by Fannie Chang.

Thu 6 For a change, Ven Kumāra goes to a market in KK for alms food and receives much.

Ven Ānandajoti joins SBS Saṅgha for the Uposatha Dhamma talk and discussion. The topic of discussion is "*Sampajañña* (Thorough Awareness) in Daily Life". Ven Aggacitta reads out Claire Stanley's "Mindfulness for Educators" as a conclusion.

Fri 7 Ven Maṅgala calls from Singapore to inform us that Ven Pa Auk Sayadaw U Āciṇṇa has accepted an invitation by Taiping Insight Meditation Society (TIMS) to conduct a meditation retreat in SBS next year from mid-March to mid-June.

Over in Sabah, Ven Kumāra joins the monks in Santavana, Tuaran (near KK) for Uposatha.

Sun 9 SBS Consultant Architect Jade Saw comes with her sister Kim for a

long overdue site visit. She is quite happy with the quality of the construction of Female Gārava Lodge (FGL).

At the 19th AGM of TIMS, a new general committee for 2008 – 2010 is elected. Subsequently, the executive members of SBS Management Committee (SBSMC) 5 for 2008 – 2010 are appointed by the new general committee. (see p63)

Ven Kumāra is inspired to conduct an unscheduled workshop, "Letting Go", at Āloka House. The well-attended session attempts to guide participants to understand their negative thoughts and emotions—such as guilt, fear, persistent anger, emotional hurt, and grief—and to release them through inward investigation, honesty towards oneself, positive affirmations and observation of feelings. Many participants report that it has been very helpful for them.



Thu 13 Ven Aggacitta starts a weekly tutorial on *A New Course for Reading Pāli* by Gair & Karunatilleke for the monks and a few devotees.

Fri 14 Ven Ānandajoti comes to join SBS Saṅgha for Uposatha Dhamma discussion on "Non-duality and Theravāda practice".

Ven Kumāra takes a break from his East Malaysia Dhamma tour for a weeklong personal retreat in Santavana, Tuaran.

Sat 15 Ven Sambodhi, a Czech monk (eight vassas) ordained in Pa Auk Forest Monastery, Myanmar, comes for a personal retreat till 26 March. He has been residing in Sri Lanka for the past six years and is on his way to Bodhinyana Monastery, Serpentine, Australia. (see p21)

Sun 16 A group of over 10 Burmese volunteers help to transport building materials for a gazebo donated by SBSMC Chairman Ng Kian Chong. It is to be built in Spring Valley as a rest station for visitors taking a shortcut from Sīmā Hall to Main Office Building car park.

The monastics have a group therapy session over herbal drinks from 5.30 – 7.00pm to try to resolve some personal issues related to monastic conduct, personality clashes and attitude problems.

Tue 18 Ven Aggacitta extends a standing invitation to Ven Ānandajoti who is now residing in BLRT, Taiping, to join SBS monastics for Uposatha Dhamma discussions and Sunday piṇḍacāra in the markets around Taiping. The latter politely declines, stating that his hands are already full, but will try to attend our fortnightly Pātimokkha recitations.

Wed 19 Work begins on the construction of a washroom block in Dhamma Grove, behind the open-air 'amphitheatre'.

Thu 20 Ven Ñāṇaramita (28 vassas), a German monk, and Ven Ānandajoti come for a visit.

On the evening before he leaves Santavana, Ven Kumāra has a long discussion on a variety of topics with the monastics there.

Fri 21 For Uposatha, Ven Sambodhi recites Pātimokkha and Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk based on Kodhana Sutta (AN 7:60)—The Angry Person.

Ven Kumāra leaves Sabah for Miri, Sarawak. In the evening he delivers a talk, "What we can do about our past bad kamma", at Miri Inner Peace Club (MIPC).

Sat 22 Ven Kumāra has an interesting Dhamma discussion with lay Buddhists at MIPC in the afternoon, and in the evening he conducts a Letting Go workshop, which offers some guidance to attendees on how to free themselves of negative states related to unpleasant past experiences.

Sun 23 Ven Kumāra conducts a discussion on "Mindfulness in Daily Life" at MIPC.

Mon 24 Ven Kumāra leaves Miri for Sibu en route to Sarikei to share the Dhamma in Mandarin at Sarikei Siddhartha Gautama Buddhist Association (SSGBA).

Tue 25 At SSGBA, Ven Kumāra conducts a discussion on kamma, based on Vitthāra Sutta (AN 4:232).

Wed 26 Realising that Buddhists in Sarikei have very limited knowledge of the Dhamma, Ven Kumāra conducts a Q&A session in which attendees seek answers to personal issues.

Thu 27 Ven Kumāra leaves Sarikei for Kuching. In the evening, he conducts a discussion on "Mindfulness in Daily Life" at Buddha Dhamma Fellowship Association (BDFA).

Fri 28 Ven Vivekananda comes to stay for a few days on his way from Kuala Lumpur to Penang.

In the evening, Ven Kumāra conducts a discussion in Mandarin on "Mindfulness in Daily Life" at Kuching Bhagavan Buddhist Society (KBBS).

Sat 29 In the afternoon at Kuching Buddhist Society (KBS), Ven Kumāra demonstrates, using Ānaṇya Sutta (AN 4:62), how a sutta discussion can be conducted. In the evening he again conducts another Letting Go workshop. This is not as successful as earlier ones, probably because there are too many participants.

Sun 30 On this final day of his monthlong Dhamma tour of East Malaysia, Ven Kumāra has a Dhamma discussion with a large group of students from UNIMAS after his meal at BDFA. In the evening, he gives a talk on "What we can do about our past bad kamma". He leaves for SBS tomorrow.

The Uposatha Dhamma discussion postponed from yesterday is held. The topic is on Dr Jill Taylor's dramatic presentation of her experience of 'Nirvana' during a left-brain stroke.

Mon 31 Evening chanting is held at the newly tiled deck in front of the open-air Buddha shrine, which has been decorated so that some night shots can be taken for our Wesak Celebration poster. Tonight's weather is exceptionally good after a spate of daily evening rain.

APRIL

Tue 1 Ven Suriya leaves for Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Penang, after piṇḍacāra to attend to his chronic health problems in a more suitable environment.

Sun 6 The Uposatha Dhamma talk and discussion postponed from yesterday to accommodate a meditation class for the public is on the topic, "Must one experience or perceive Nibbāna to become a *sotāpanna*[1]?"

Sat 12 Twelve members from Klang & Coast Buddhist Association (KCBA) Youth Circle arrive for a weekend meditation retreat under the guidance of Ven Kumāra. (see next page)

A group of Buddhists from Bagan Serai come to visit and request for construc-

[1]stream-enterer; one who has attained the first stage of enlightenment and is destined to attain Nibbāna within seven lifetimes.





A Learning Experience

Fresh perspectives on meditation are opened up to **Yeow Boon Ping** and friends from Klang & Coast Buddhist Association when they come for a retreat.

First Impressions

In April 2008, 12 members of Klang & Coast Buddhist Association (KCBA) Youth Circle organised a retreat at Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS), Taiping. For most of us this was our first visit to SBS. For some this was also their first time joining this kind of short meditation retreat and they were quite excited.

"I have heard a lot of praises about this place but have had no chance to see it until now," said Fong San.

We headed towards SBS in KCBA's Toyota HIACE. The closer we got, the more cheerful and relaxed we became, especially when we saw a lot of green trees and beautiful natural scenery, which we cannot find in the city where we live.

Right on schedule, we reached SBS at noon. SBS is a forest monastery that has calming and green surroundings, a place very suitable for meditation practice. A volunteer kindly showed us around.

"I was immediately attracted to the green scenery. I could smell the fragrance of durian flowers. I saw a flock of birds flying freely in the sky. Although it was very hot, it was a good time to take photos," said Fong Wei.

Fresh Approaches to Meditation

After the tour, we started our first meditation session with Bhante Kumāra. We were very grateful for his guidance in this retreat, which was conducted in Mandarin. After some self-introductions, we had a short conversation on meditation.

Bhante is very kind. When he saw that we were too tired for meditation, he told us to take a rest first. After 20 minutes of resting, we had a guided sitting meditation session followed by some sharing. He interviewed us one at a time to give us tailored guidance on how to meditate. Many participants reported having learnt something new for themselves.

"I've participated in some meditation classes in the past, but I find that with Bhante's guidance, I've gained a better fundamental knowledge of sitting meditation practice," said Shin Yin.

"I have learnt to be more relaxed during meditation. I also learnt that besides developing concentration on the breath, I can also experience the flow of impermanence within ourselves: our feelings and thoughts that arise in our mind during the meditation," said Fong San.

"Everyone was given an opportunity to express his or her experience. Bhante listened to everyone with loving-kindness," said Fong Wei.

"Observe the wandering mind but do not comment on it; this is the new method I've learnt in this retreat," said Boon Ping.

"I learnt to stop following unwholesome mental states. I was taught to come back to my body and look for any sign of tension. Relaxing the body releases anxiety in the mind," said Ching Hooi.

"Walking meditation was wonderful; I could feel it deeply. I felt very gentle and peaceful at that time," said Tiong Ling.

Lessons in Letting Go

At night, we had a special Letting Go session conducted by Bhante. We were divided into small groups for sharing among group members, matters that we were afraid to confront. All of us benefited a lot from the session. We were touched; we smiled and even cried during the sharing session.

"I've learnt how to let go and when there is no disturbance and tension, my mind becomes lighter," said Fong San.

"This was a journey of learning to let go. I've learnt to let go of the ruler who resides in my mind. I've learnt to let go of diffidence, seeing that it merely arises and passes away. If we can't let go of what we're attached to, just ask ourselves: What would happen if I let go, and what if not? Then we may be able to know the root cause of attachment," said Ching Hooi.

On my part, I realise that we couldn't let go because we didn't want to let go being afraid of the consequences of letting go.

"I still remember Bhante's words: 'Every incident that happened in the past was not *you*, it was just the *incident* in the past. Every obstacle in our life provides us the opportunity to learn.' I broke down and cried... and the knots in my heart finally loosened," said Tiong Ling.

"From the group sharing, I've learnt to be more caring towards my friends especially when they express their feelings, complaints and dissatisfaction over incidents that they cling onto. I've learnt to know more about myself," said Wai Yin.

Leaving with the Dhamma

After morning meditation the next day, we had the opportunity to meet with the abbot of SBS, Ven Aggacitta, before we left. We left SBS after taking a group photo in front of Main Office. All of us felt very happy with the retreat.

This trip has given me a different perspective of the value of Dhamma.

"From this retreat, I have learnt to be mindful every single moment, be watchful and aware of what is happening. And that I'm practising now in my daily life," said Fong San.

"Energy has been building up in my mind since before going home; I strongly believe that one day I will come back to this real home," said Fong Wei.

"I will be coming back to SBS next time for another meditation retreat," said Wai Yin.

See you again, Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary! We'll be back.

tion drawings of the mini-*kuṭis* because they intend to build similar units in an oil-palm estate there.

Sun 13 KCBA youths pay respects to Ven Aggacitta before leaving. The Abbot reminds them to watch their minds whenever possible and not to forget to practise formal meditation to calm and focus their minds.

The monastics have a discussion over herbal tea on various issues in SBS.

Thu 17 About 30 Burmese come to make offerings of foodstuff and robes to the monastics on the occasion of their New Year celebration.

Sat 19 Ven Kumāra conducts a preliminary workshop on OpenOffice.org (OOo) for those whose service to SBS involves computer word processing. Three monks, one nun and nine lay people attend.

Sun 20 About 60 Burmese come to offer dāna. Ven Aggacitta gives a short Dhamma talk in Burmese based on Saṅgaha Sutta (AN 4:32) and Bala Sutta (AN 9:5). It is about the four bases of benevolence (*saṅgahavatthu*), i.e. giving, kind speech, helpful acts and camaraderie.

Mon 21 The Uposatha Dhamma talk, postponed from yesterday, is on "According to the Pāli suttas, do *sekhas* (trainees, i.e. enlightened ones who are not yet *arahants*) experience Nibbāna?" and "Where do the 16 insight-knowledges come from?"

Fri 25 Female Gārava Lodge (previously known as Female Guest Lodge) is finally ready for use. A large group of volunteers come to clean up the place in preparation for a weeklong meditation retreat organised by Firefly Mission Singapore and SBS, starting tomorrow.

Sat 26 Thirty-three people from Singapore arrive at 9am for the meditation retreat. Ven Aggacitta gives them an introductory talk from 2.15 – 3.15pm.

MAY

Fri 2 Ven Aggacitta gives the final Dhamma talk to yogis of the Firefly Mission Retreat. He reminds them of the importance of integrating Dhamma practice into all aspects of one's daily life.

Sun 4 Today is Uposatha. Ven Dhammananda recites Pātimokkha at daybreak, in conjunction with his 51st birthday.

SBS Management Committee 5 (2008-2010) holds its inaugural meeting.



Mon 5 The Uposatha Dhamma talk by Ven Aggacitta, postponed from yesterday, is on Sāmagāma Sutta (MN 104), elaborating on the Roots of Disputes.

Wed 7 News of the cyclone disaster in Myanmar deeply overwhelms all. SBS monks pass a resolution to let SBS Saṅgha Dāyaka (Supporter) Fund sponsor emergency aid worth RM37,000 for the victims, to be channelled through Tzu Chi and Sayadaw U Rājinda's relief fund.

Thu 8 Collection from devotees for a relief fund for the Myanmar cyclone victims is initiated after piṇḍacāra at Cantonese Cemetery Pavilion.

Sat 10 Ajahn Javana, Ven Ghosananda and Ven Paññāsāmī come for a visit.

Sun 11 Postulant Mokkhesī leaves SBS because of personal reasons.

Mon 12 Uposatha Dhamma discussion is held at Sīmā Hall. The topic is "Do Eckhart Tolle's teachings contradict the Buddha's teachings?"

Sat 17 IMP 2008 begins in the afternoon with six participants and will end on 31 May. (see p22)

Sun 18 Wesak Eve celebrations begin at 7.30pm with the lighting of candles along the roads and pathways from the main entrance gate right up to the Open Shrine. A record of more than 1,000 people turn up. (see p59)



Mon 19 Today is Wesak Day. After piṇḍacāra, Ven Kumāra gives a Dhamma talk on Wesak. He says Wesak celebrates the birth, enlightenment and final passing away of the Buddha. The scriptures record three often quoted utterances by the Buddha on each of the three occasions. Immediately after his birth, the Buddha said that it would be his last birth and there would not be another existence for him. After his enlightenment, he said that his mind had attained the Unconditioned, the destruction of craving. Just before he passed away, he reminded the monks that conditioned things are subject to change and urged them to heedfully fulfil their training, so that they may be free from *saṁsāra*.

Ven Aggacitta then explains three meanings to the chant of "Arahaṁ Sammāsambuddho" and leads the group chanting.

Thu 22 A thunderstorm in the evening wipes out our interphone system and the wireless telephone transmitter for 05-8084429.

In the evening, Ven Kumāra goes to Semanggol National Service Camp to talk on *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* to the trainees. He concludes with a guided session to give them a practical understanding of the four states.

Sat 24 SBS purchases a new mobile phone (017-5182011) to temporarily replace the damaged line 05-8084429.

Two old IMPians join the IMPian retreat, which begins today.

Sun 25 A big group of volunteers give Main Office Building a spring-cleaning.

Thu 29 At night, the monastics and IMPians go to Hokkien Cemetery for meditation.

Fri 30 Teenager Dhamma Camp (TDC) conducted by D2Y starts today. (see p60)

Sat 31 In the evening, Teenager Dhamma Camp participants 'grill' Ven Kumāra with lots of questions. While the participants are allowed to ask all sorts of questions, they are particularly inquisitive about Ven Kumāra's life before he became a monk and about supernatural beings.

JUNE

Sun 1 As requested by TDC participants the evening before, Ven Kumāra gives them a meditation lesson, which includes walking and sitting practice.

Mon 2 TDC ends today. Ven Aggacitta meets them briefly before the closing at 2.30pm.

Fun and Frustration

You not only learn Dhamma in SBS. You learn that the computer can work for you; but first you must know how to make it work.

by **ELESHOR**



The Cyber Monks

I was told that a visitor to Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary, upon seeing a monk working on his laptop remarked, "Hey, look at that—a monk using a computer!" Well, those may not have been his exact words, but it seems he sure was taken aback—that a monk is actually computer literate.

Well, not only are there computer literate monks in SBS, some are 'whiz-kids' in this aspect of information technology, at least in comparison to the rest of us (well, the majority of us) who attended two OpenOffice.org (OOo) workshops conducted in SBS with Bhante Kumāra as teacher and Bhante Aggacitta as teacher aide. The preliminary workshop was held on 19 – 20 April and a second one on 7 – 8 June to teach and fine-tune the skills of SBS personnel involved in the preparation and processing of SBS documents using the OOo writer. These included volunteers in the publication, public relations and administration departments, and office staff.

Our skills left much to be desired, often causing the two *bhantes* lots of unnecessary work and exasperation having to undo in order to redo. A comment by a student in the class sums it all up: "I used to treat my computer like a typewriter. This course really opened my eyes to see that there is so much I can do with a computer."

Much Ado about OOo

You see, when the bhantes receive documents for processing or editing they have to undo all this 'typewriter style' formatting before they can replace with 'computer style' formatting and this was not a simple operation of "Find and replace all". Oft repeated words by the two teachers go something like this:

> "There should be no empty paragraphs in your documents."
>
> "To indent paragraphs do not go 'space... space... space' or 'tab... tab... tab...'; make use of formatting and styles."
>
> "Make use of the 'page break' command. Do not just go 'enter... enter... enter' to get to the next page."

It was the first time some of us had heard the terms "empty paragraphs", "formatting and styles", "page break", and many other such computer jargon.

Styles at Your Command

The first workshop dealt with the basics of word processing based on the commands of the menu bar. Mind you, they were really basic commands. The second workshop dealt with the more sophisticated functions of styles and formatting. Actually all this had been taught in a similar workshop held a couple of years ago using Microsoft Word. For those who had attended that workshop, it should have been a simple matter of just locating similar commands in an OOo document. However students being students, it was a case of "actually been taught these same skills in a similar workshop conducted by Bhante Kumāra a few years ago but did not apply what was learnt. So now we are back as retention class students." Aptly summed up by one of the students! *[**Editor's note:** Bhante Kumāra is thinking of a remedial class specially for those who need more coaching.]*

Then again, wisdom has arisen as reflected in another observation, "I am most grateful to the bhantes for their patience in teaching us. I think that I still need a lot of practice, otherwise whatever I have learnt will be forgotten." Wise words indeed from another student, an experienced teacher himself.

All in all, there were lots of laughs peppered with frustration. The following series of flashbacks will give you an idea.

Student insights:

Student: Wow! This is magic. Just one touch on a key and the whole document is transformed. Why didn't you teach us this before?

Student: My document has no ruler. Where has it gone?

Student: Wait, wait, wait! I'm not following you. I'm still struggling with the previous function and you've gone on to the next!

Teacher-student exchanges:

Student: Hey, why does my laptop say "battery weak"? I've already plugged it in.

Teacher: This other end of the wire has to be plugged into your laptop!

Teacher: If Bhante Aggacitta can become competent in this having been in Burma for so many years and started using computers only later in his life, so can all of you.

Student: That's just it. We didn't go to Burma!





Lights and More Lights

Ng Kim Tee found Wesak Eve lights that dazzled in various forms—candles, 'kong ming' lanterns and a dazzling display of fireworks.

I sat on a grassy slope on the hillock where the open air Buddha shrine is situated, overlooking the festivities and a panoramic view of Taiping town and its surrounding areas. I kept voicing my regret that I had not brought along my mum, aunts, cousin and my close friends. I did not know that there was such a place in Taiping—calm, peaceful, with a serene setting, offering a panoramic view of Taiping. I had arrived by 4WD at the focal point of the Wesak Eve lamp lighting ceremony. A few weeks before, I had half-heartedly agreed to an invitation by a couple of my friends, staunch SBS supporters, that I would join in the ceremony, if I was in town. Of late I had been quite laid-back and was not keen to commit myself.

Ride Up

For me, the ride uphill was a challenge. Being the faint-hearted type, I did not want to ride in the back of any of the pick-ups that were ferrying devotees up the hill but waited till most others had already gone up. Then the next 4WD came along and seeing my apprehension, a lady in the front passenger seat alighted, climbed onto the back of the 4WD and told me to take the front seat. I was touched by her selfless action. The ride up to SBS reminded me of the ride up to Maxwell Hills when we were young.

Abuzz with Activity

Once up, I met other familiar faces and a few of us helped to lay the food on the tables. Food, all donated by devotees, was aplenty and varied. There was also a stall selling T-shirts at only RM14 each, which is rather cheap. There were counters to receive donations from devotees. I bought myself an orange T-shirt and immediately changed into it as the one I was wearing was hot and uncomfortable. I was then taken on a 'specially tailored' guided tour of SBS. This was an unplanned for but much appreciated perk for agreeing to write an article on the evening's festivities!

It was almost 6.45pm when we finished our mini tour and were back at the celebration area. By then large crowds had gathered and the atmosphere was carnival-like. Small groups of people were comfortably scattered all over the whole area. I found myself a grassy patch, sat down to savour my *bee hoon*, *pulut* rice and *nyonya* cakes and to voice my regret at having brought only myself up here. I had a good view of the ongoing festivities. I really appreciated the efforts of the people who had donated or cooked the food, and those who had brought it all the way up. There were ongoing announcements in English and Hokkien on the programme for the night.

Candle Lighting

When dusk began to fall, we walked up to the open deck area where the lighting ceremony would begin. The view from the open deck area was really breathtaking—beautiful night lights lit up Taiping town. At 8pm sharp, the abbot, Ven Aggacitta was ushered on to the open deck together with the other monks and postulants. The ceremony commenced with salutations to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha led by Bhante, after which he set off the first fireworks display. Then he lit up the first candles. This was the 'go' signal for devotees, young and old to light up candles placed on the grassy slopes and roadsides. It was a really lovely sight—one by one 4,000 candles sparkled into life all over the area!

'Kong Ming' Lanterns

Then the 'kong ming' lanterns were lit—huge yellow and red paper lanterns that soared up into the night sky, powered by hot air from a burning torch within the lantern. When the first lantern was let off, it headed for a nearby tree and threatened to lodge itself in the branches! Some children screamed in dismay but seconds later it flew up and everyone was so thrilled they broke out in loud applause! There were more 'kong ming' lanterns to be let off. The devotees had fun helping to light and guide the lanterns before letting them drift gracefully upwards. It was a great feeling to see the children enjoying themselves and having so much fun!

Meditation

After this I had the choice of meditation in Multi-Purpose Hall or a movie on the life of the Buddha. The movie was shown on a big white screen near Female Gārava Lodge. I decided to go for the meditation session. Thought I needed something for a change; to have some peace and calmness within me. When I reached the hall, it was almost filled up but I managed to get a place next to the windows. Bhante started by delivering a comprehensive talk on the chant of "Arahaṁ Sammāsambuddho", I was pleasantly surprised that he could deliver the talk in three languages, namely English, Hokkien and Burmese. At about 9pm the voices of other devotees chatting downstairs and the sounds of the 4WD engines running could be heard, fetching devotees down to Hor Eeah Shrine. After the talk, Bhante guided us on *mettā* meditation. We finished at about 10pm.

Fitting Finale

As we left the hall, loud sounds of fireworks could be heard and we quickly rushed down to have a look. It was such a fabulous fireworks display—a fitting finale to the night's programme!

By the time I reached home it was past 11pm. I was glad I made the trip up to SBS and really enjoyed myself this Wesak Eve. It was a good change, away from my mundane routine of everyday life! Hope to be able to render my service and assistance whenever possible.

Tue 3 As it is Uposatha today, Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk on the historical background of Buddha's quest for enlightenment to the monastics and postulants.

Fri 6 Telephone line 05-8084429 is back in service.

Sat 7 Ven Kumāra conducts another two-day workshop on OpenOffice.org for 12 participants with the assistance of Ven Aggacitta.

Mon 9 An Australian monk, Ven Nissaraṇo (10 vassas), comes from Sri Lanka to attend a meditation retreat that will begin next week. He first met Ven Aggacitta when the latter visited Bodhinyana Monastery, Serpentine, Australia in 2000.

Wed 11 Today's Uposatha Dhamma discussion is based on Byron Katie's "The Work" (www.thework.com).

Fri 13 Sayalay Dhammaratī from Vietnam comes for a visit.

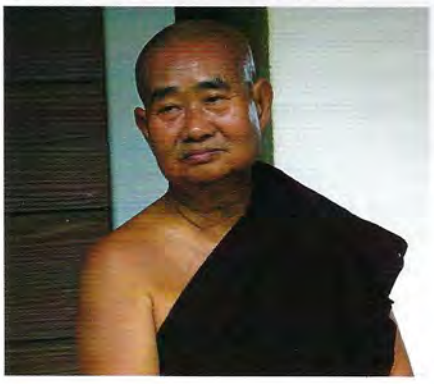
Sat 14 Sayadaw U Tejaniya (SUT) of Shwe Oo Min Dhamma Sukha Forest Centre in Yangon, Myanmar, arrives to conduct a meditation retreat from 15 – 26 June.

Sun 15 Ven Ānandajoti and Ven Suriya check in for the retreat.

SUT starts off the retreat with an introductory talk on meditation, emphasising the importance of having a good basic understanding about meditation and of having the right attitude towards meditation. (see p42)

The reinforced concrete structure of Bhāvanā Grove Sālā is completed, thanks to our obliging contractor Syarikat Kamashari. Now the construction of the timber structure will commence.

Mon 16 Pa Auk Sayadaw U Āciṇṇa comes with 14 monks for a day visit. Also included in the entourage are members of Pa Auk Management Committee, President of Singapore Pa Auk Branch Centre and other lay people. They are pretty impressed by the location and development of The Sanctuary.





Teenager Dhamma Camp



Lek Li Xiang and **Chew Kia Sheng** helped out as facilitators in a camp in SBS and bring to you their observations. This is followed by comments from some of the teens themselves.

Good Intention for Fun

On 30 May 2008, a Teenager Dhamma Camp conducted by the Dhammaduta Youth (D2Y) Group was held at Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary. The objective of this camp was to impart Dhamma to the teenagers in a fun and relevant manner. The camp lasted four days and a total of 48 energetic boys and girls attended the camp run by nine facilitators led by Bro Mun Yee and Bro Mui Han. Among the facilitators, five are members of the D2Y group.

Beyond 'Talk and Chalk'

This camp was certainly a good experience for both the young participants and facilitators. For the youngsters, the camp enabled them to retreat from the hustle and bustle of town life, never-ending video games, addiction to computers and internet surfing, day and night online chatting and other worldly entertainment and negative elements. They also had a chance to learn the Buddha's teachings while enjoying the peaceful, serene and clean environment of The Sanctuary. Besides that, they were also able to meet new people and make new friends. There were also lessons for the facilitators to learn, such as crisis management. Some of the activities had to be changed to suit the interests and abilities of the teenagers who were not ready for a camp that involved lectures, talks and movies.

Often there was a tug-of-war between games and talks, with the former emerging the victor. During talks, the participants were literally lifeless but when it came to games, they 'woke up' in an instant. Even the movie was too 'heavy' for them. Many fell asleep after some minutes into the movie. Such activities like talks and movies did not go down well with the participants as not all of them attended the camp with the interest to learn the Dhamma, but to play and relax after their examinations. I guess this goes to show that to teach teenagers who do not like lengthy talks, we cannot just depend

on 'talk and chalk'. We have to design games that contain Dhamma lessons to be learnt instead.

The question and answer session with Ven Kumāra was certainly an interesting one. Participants were allowed to ask all sorts of questions. They seemed to be much interested in and curious about the life of Ven Kumāra and the existence of ghosts or spiritual beings. After about an hour of Q&A, the participants gained better insights into the teachings of the Buddha and its application in daily life.

Sum Up to Round Up

On the last day of the camp Bro Mui Han and Bro Mun Yee rounded up the camp with an overview of its objectives. The first was about the changing world. The world is constantly changing and we have to keep up with the pace by changing our attitude and mindset. This is true as we have to keep learning new things especially those related to technology like computers so that we can be on par with global standards and be able to tackle change efficiently and effectively.

The second objective was about improving communication skills. This is indeed important as it enables one to open up and connect to not only one's immediate community and environment, but also with the world. Here the need to learn the English language is important.

Thirdly, the camp aimed to inculcate gratitude for the many gifts that we have in our lives. Gratitude would then lead to respect. For example, we should be grateful to the people who made food available to us, from the farmer to the cook. By having that gratitude in mind, we respect them for their efforts.

Cultivating a healthy attitude towards money was another objective. We learnt that money is important and should be looked at from the perspective of how much we spend and not how much we earn. Many think and dream about becoming rich. While we may earn a lot of money, we would be left with almost nothing at the end of the day if we do not save.

The next objective was the nurturing of an "it could be worse" attitude. By that, Bro Mui Han meant that we should not despair when faced with a bad situation, as it could have been worse. Hence, we should think positively and never give up.

Last but not least, he emphasised that if we work together, nothing is impossible. Indeed, I could see that by working together, the teenagers made their drama performance a success.

In spite of initial hiccups, and the fact that some activities could not go on according to plan, it was definitely still a success.

Speak Up and Be Wise

Some teens speak up:

- I came to learn anything that would help me in life and I learnt how to interact and cooperate with others.
- I read a few articles in the SBS newszine about the youth camps and thought they were fun, so I came to experience one for myself.
- We enjoyed the banana dance and the talentime.

Some lessons learnt:

- the importance of respect for others
- to have more confidence to speak in English
- to appreciate what I have
- to be more patient and to acquire more confidence.



Wed 18 Upon the request of Pa Auk Sayadaw, Ven Aggacitta attends a bhikkhu ordination ceremony in Sitavana Monastery, Penang, for seven men: five Malaysians, a Taiwanese and an American. All the new bhikkhus will be spending the vassa in the retreat centre of Kuching Bhagavan Buddhist Society, under the tutelage of Ven Maṅgala.



Sat 21 There are a lot of new faces for the Saturday night meditation session including a family of about 30 who come back to Taiping for a funeral service. While Ven Aggacitta teaches them at the Buddha Shrine Open Deck, a group of more experienced yogis meet with SUT in Abbot's Office.

Wed 25 On the final day of the meditation retreat, SUT leads a group sitting meditation, which flows into a Dhamma talk and discussion.

Thu 26 In the evening, the monastics have an animated discussion with SUT on the theoretical aspects of meditation. The discussion centres on distinguishing ideas that are found in the Pāli Canon from those that are later developed in the commentaries. Sayadaw and his interpreter, Ma Thet, are both motivated to study the suttas.

Fri 27 Ven Aggacitta presents, as Dhammadāna, a set of Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations of the Majjhima Nikāya (*Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*) and Saṁyutta Nikāya (*Connected Discourses of the Buddha*) to Ma Thet, so that she will be able to read the introductions and some of the suttas and explain them to SUT.

Mon 30 Heavy rain for about two hours causes landslides at three steep slopes here. (see p29)



Glossary of Non-English Words

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

Ajahn (Thai) teacher.

Arahant [or **Arahaṁ**] worthy one; a person who has eradicated all mental defilements.

Bhante venerable sir—often used when addressing a *bhikkhu*.

Bhāvanā spiritual cultivation.

Bhikkhu *Theravāda* Buddhist monk.

Buddha awakened one—usually referring to a **sammāsambuddha**, a fully self-awakened one, one who discovers the *Dhamma* for himself, teaches the way for its realisation, and establishes a *Saṅgha*.

Buddhasāsana see Sāsana.

Dāna act of giving; offering.

Deva deity.

Dhamma [**Dharma** in Sanskrit] Universal Truth; teaching; phenomena.

DhammaVinaya Doctrine and Discipline, a term used by the *Buddha* to denote his teachings as a whole or the 'religion' he founded.

Hokkien a Chinese dialect widely spoken in Malaysia and Singapore.

Jalan (Malay) road.

Jhāna type of attainment in meditation; concentration.

Kalyāṇamitra (Sanskrit) spiritually beautiful friend.

Kamma [**Karma** in Sanskrit] intentional, moral action.

Kathina lit. 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.

Karuṇā compassion.

Kuṭi hut or small house.

Luangpor (Thai) venerable father—often used to address a very senior monk.

Mahāyāna Great Vehicle—one of the two main traditions of Buddhism, the other being *Theravāda*.

Mettā loving-kindness.

Muditā empathic joy.

Ñāṇa knowledge.

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

Nikāya collection, usually referring to one of the five collections of *Theravāda Pāli suttas*.

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

Paññā wisdom.

Phra (Thai) venerable—used as a prefix to the name of a *bhikkhu*.

Piṇḍacāra going for alms (a Buddhist monastic practice).

Sādhu well done, excellent.

Samādhi mental steadiness.

Samatha calm, stillness—often referring to a meditation practice meant for attaining such a result.

Saṁsāra wondering through births and deaths.

Saṅgha community of Buddhist monks or nuns.

Sāsana instruction; teaching; when capitalised, it usually means *Buddhasāsana*, the *Buddha*'s teachings or dispensation.

Sāsanārakkha guardian of the *Sāsana*.

Sati not forgetting; bearing in mind (but popularly translated as "mindfulness").

Sayadaw (Myanmar) venerable teacher.

Sayalay (Myanmar) little teacher—often used to address a Buddhist nun of Myanmar tradition.

Sīla moral virtue.

Sīmā monastic territory; often used nowadays to refer to the physical structure built within it.

Sutta [**Sutra** in Sanskrit] discourse attributed to the *Buddha* or his contemporary disciples.

Theravāda Doctrine of the Elders—one of the two main traditions of Buddhism (the other being *Mahāyāna*) claiming to have the earliest, most authentic extant record of Gotama *Buddha*'s teachings.

Theravādin advocate or follower of *Theravāda*.

Upekkhā equanimity.

Uposatha Sabbath; day of spiritual and customary observance for the *Saṅgha* and the Buddhist laity respectively.

Vassa rainy season residence; year standing, i.e. monk age.

Vipassanā clear intuitive insight arising from the observation of physical and mental phenomena as they really are; a meditation practice meant for attaining such a result.

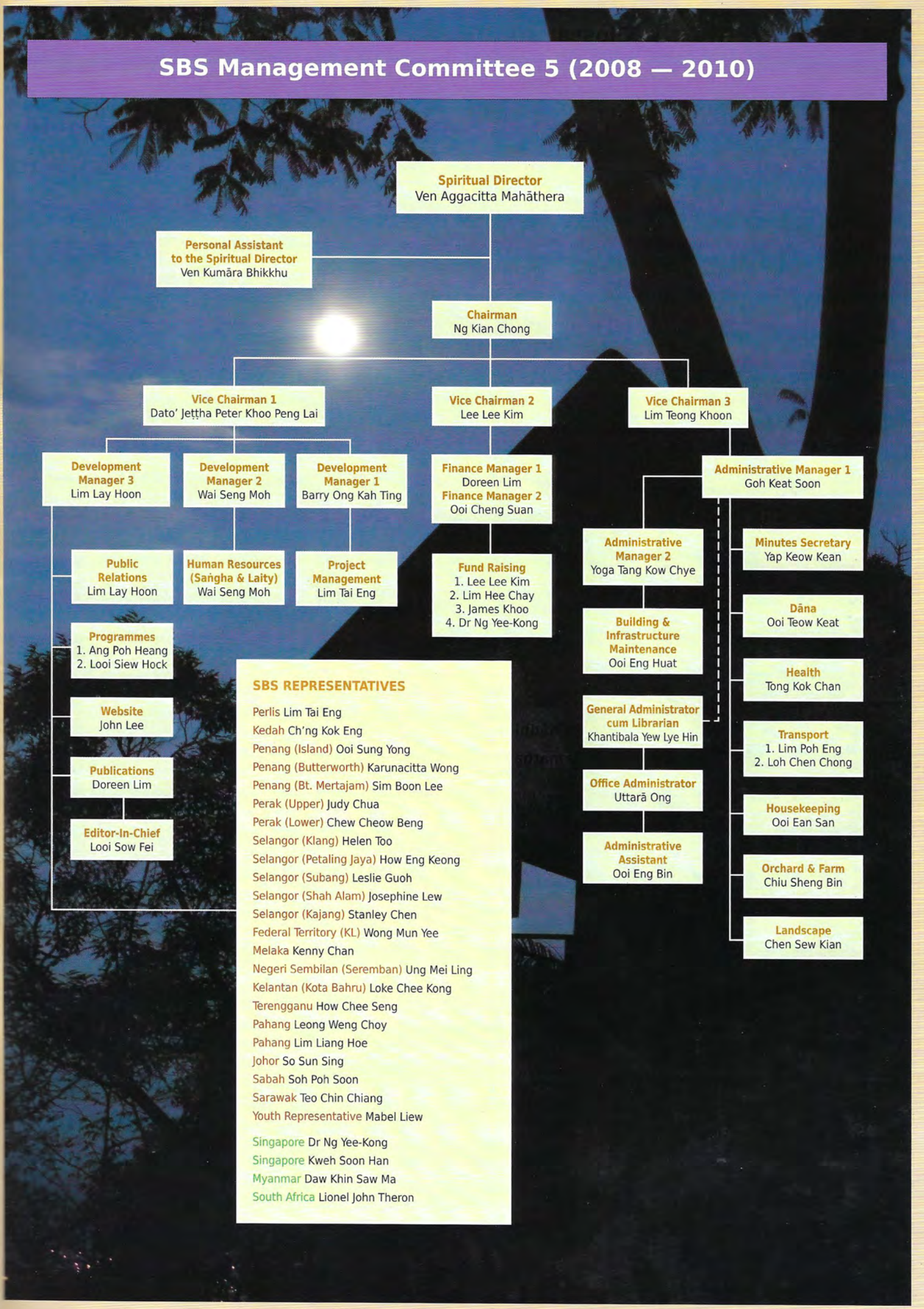
Wat (Thai) monastery.

Wesak corrupted form of Vesākha, a month in the Indian lunar calendar that usually overlaps the Gregorian May; the full moon day of that month, on which Buddhists celebrate Gotama *Buddha*'s birthday.

Scriptural Referencing

DN Dīgha Nikāya (according to sutta number)
MN Majjhima Nikāya (according to sutta number)
SN Saṁyutta Nikāya (reference numbering follows that of *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi)
AN Aṅguttara Nikāya (reference numbering follows that of Pāli Text Society's *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*)

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CLOSER 2 REALITY

An attempt to connect real life experiences with Buddhist scriptural understanding

Understanding Death & Beyond

Saturday, 27 December – Monday, 29 December 2008
Thean Hou Temple, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Who should attend:

- **Buddhists knowledgeable about the subject and relevant scriptural texts**
- **Buddhists involved in Dhamma propagation**
- **Open-minded people with a spirit of enquiry**



Concept: Our beliefs on what happens after death will condition how we respond to our own death, shape the form and spirit of our funeral rites, and counsel the dying. The closer our beliefs are to reality, the better we are able to handle death. So instead of limiting our understanding to a certain set of dogmatic views, it would be more advantageous to us to investigate the phenomenon objectively by comparing real-life experiences with those described or implied in religious doctrines.

This conference will initiate such investigations and hopefully bring us closer to a more accurate understanding of death and beyond—an inevitable reality that awaits all of us and our loved ones at the end of our human lives.

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See pages 30 & 31 for more details

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