



THE FOREST HERMITAGE ISSUE NO. 2 OF 2003 / 2546 NEWSLETTER

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

HONOUR TO THE BLESSED ONE, THE EXALTED ONE, THE FULLY-ENLIGHTENED ONE

I came back from Thailand the other day to what I can only describe as a Laurel and Hardy scenario. It had all begun a couple of days before my expected arrival when in a flurry of activity to clear up and clean up before the return of my critical eye a certain young monk cleaning the toilet in my bathroom lost the head of the toilet brush round the U bend! In the ensuing forty-eight hours of mayhem a hacksaw blade disposed of any stubborn nuts and bolts and then without turning the water off the whole contraption was lifted out and down to the garage and after a bit of fishing the toilet brush head was retrieved. With time rapidly running out, checking their rising panic, they had then to get it all back together and in working order. Well it was a good effort but they didn't quite make it and now Mick, our friendly builder, has taken over. But as you hear over and over again in Thailand, and what a splendid phrase it is because nothing's ever quite that important, 'Never mind!' Although I have to say it'll be a test of everybody's equanimity if we ever see that monk with a toilet brush in his hand again!

I had been away to attend the annual gathering at Wat Pah Pong on the anniversary of Venerable Ajahn Chah's death. In view of the Wood Cottage purchase and the huge expense that that is putting us to I didn't expect to go this year but then some generous people decided that I should and at almost the last minute the last

DIARY:

MAGHA PUJA Sunday, Feb 16th from 10 a.m.



ANGULIMALA WORKSHOP March 8th

(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)

with Sir David Ramsbotham who will speak on
'What Price Imprisonment?'



MEDITATION and a DHAMMA TALK

Mondays & Fridays at 8 pm

ticket available materialised and off I went. And I'm so glad I did. This past year has been a demanding one and it was so good to have the break and go back for those few days to the origins of my monastic life and pay tribute to the teacher who did so much to touch and transform the lives of so many. It is now eleven years since he died and more than twenty since he was active and able to teach but as the years go by, far from diminishing, the crowds that flock to Wat Pah Pong for January 16th get bigger and bigger.

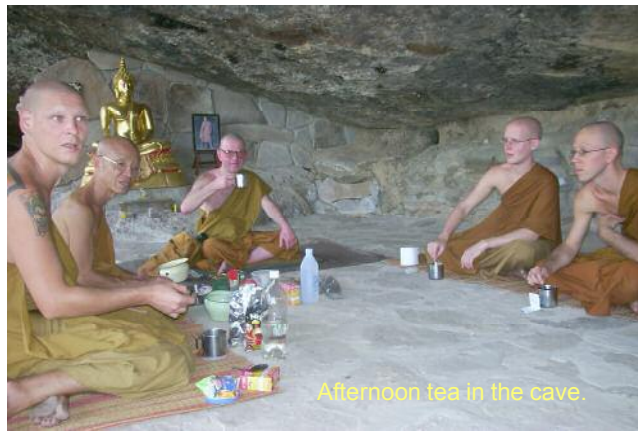
Many times in my life I've aspired to keeping a diary but seldom succeeded for more than a day or two, however, since I've been writing up the pilgrimage to India last year entirely from memory I have sometimes found myself wishing I'd taken the trouble of an evening to make a few notes. So this year when I went to Thailand I decided to give it a try. The result wasn't exactly riveting but I've edited and spruced them up as best I could and I offer them here to give you some idea of how I spent those few days away.

14/01/03 Paul ran me to Heathrow. At the check-in I was met by an off-duty Thai Airways flight attendant whose father had seen the articles in Komchadleuk and wanted to help the Wood Cottage Appeal. In London for a few days between flights, she had rung the Forest Hermitage the day before to ask how to send his donation and hearing that I was just about to leave for Thailand determined to meet me and help me get checked in safely which she did. Then, thankfully, when I boarded the plane the staff upgraded me and I had a very comfortable flight.

15/01/03 TG 911 touched down at Don Meuang in the early morning just before 6 a.m. When I emerged I was met by Suay and Ros whom I had last seen as students at Warwick University and who'd come along to greet me, and Jim and Nui who were to drive me to Ubon. We had a good run with an excellent meal on the way that included durian (a highly smelly but very delicious fruit) and arrived in the late afternoon to a very friendly reception at Wat Pah Nanachat. In the evening, after freshening up, I went over to Wat Pah Pong. I met up with a few old friends first and then went into the sala to show my face and sat through part of a desana until I was too tired to stay longer, then back to Wat Pah Nanachat and some sleep.

16/01/03 First the early morning pindabaht (almsround) along a well-known route through Boongwai village that I've walked on and off for more than twenty-five years and then the meal. At

about one o'clock we went over to Wat Pah Pong for the afternoon. There was meditation for an hour or so, a desana and then the circumambulation of Luangpor Chah's Chedi. A huge flock of monks and crowds of lay people all in white - a moving and impressive spectacle, although not without the usual confusion at the end about where to go when we at the front caught up with those at the back. Later I met Howard and Prem visiting from Nottingham.



Afternoon tea in the cave.

They took me back to Wat Pah Nanachat for a shower and then back again to Wat Pah Pong for another couple of hours and then back again to Wat Pah Nanachat to rest.

17/01/03 This morning at Wat Pah Nanachat, in the interval after pindabaht and before the meal, we monks gathered for Patimokkha. At about midday Jim and Nui arrived to take me out. We went to Ajahn Tongjun's wat at Amnat Charoen for the afternoon. Back at Wat Pah Nanachat in the evening as it was an Observance Day I climbed into the sermon seat and spoke to the lay people about life and Buddhism in England and English prisons.

18/01/03 This I'd decided would be a day of rest but after the meal I agreed to talk to a group of visiting Americans, Insight practitioners led by Bob Beattie from Portland in Oregon. Late afternoon faithful old Por Soam came to see me and chuckled about some of the recent things going on around the wat. In the evening, I spoke at some length informally with a small group of young monks and a novice, mostly about my prison work.

19/01/03 This morning Peter and Tipawan came to see me and take me out. I wanted to go to see Ajahn Dang. We left at about 10.30 and took nearly two hours to get there. When we arrived, we found that Ajahn Dang was out. So we went back to Peter and Tipawan's home in Ampur Det Udom for the afternoon. Later we called at Ajahn Anek's wat nearby for a little while.

20/01/03 This turned out to be a marvellous day. After the meal, Peter and Tipawan with another woman friend of theirs came for us and together with me and a young American monk and a Thai to whom we were giving a lift, we set out for Poojongom. After dropping the Thai monk off in Piboon and missing a turning, we eventually arrived at this remote branch of Wat Pah Nanachat at around one o'clock. With Ajahn Uttamo who once spent a few months at the Forest Hermitage and another monk who was living

there with him, we then set off on a fairly major hike that took the whole afternoon. After a long hot gradual climb, we stopped for afternoon tea in a cave and then went on to admire extraordinary rock formations and wonderful views of the River Mekong and Laos on the other side. It was naturally very hot and arriving back at the sala at around six it was quite a relief to have a cool bath.

Another cuppa and a chat followed. The drive back to Wat Pah Nanachat was uneventful and we arrived at around nine-thirty. The day ended with me expelling ants that had taken over my kuti's

kettle before a last late night cuppa.

21/01/03 My old rubber sandals went missing this morning while I was in Boongwai village on pindabaht. I hope someone's enjoying them. After the meal, I slowly got ready and then took a last walk around the wat. Peter and Tipawan came for me and we went to the airport. I was fussed by the ground staff and had an easy flight. Yome Soiy with her nephew met me at Bangkok and took me to Dhammaram where I was to stay.

Later Khun Tipvadee came to see me.

22/01/03 This morning I went off early with Jim and Nui to eat at the home of Khun Katekaew and her husband, both judges. Durian again. Khun Kate and another young woman friend of hers who was there that morning had both been at Warwick University. They and family and friends offered 13,000 baht towards Wood Cottage. Then we went to Chonburi to visit Phra Maha Sompoch and afterwards have a look at the sea. In the evening, Sathienpong Wannapok and his wife came to see me. They brought another very generous donation and Sathienpong offered to write something in his newspaper Kowsote to help with Wood Cottage.

23/01/03 There were two young monks staying at Dhammaram with me, one American and the other Dutch. Before I went off to eat at Khun Piset's we had a good chat that touched on, amongst other things, the proper observance of One Eater's Practice. At Piset's it was a small affair with just his brother and a friend there but durian again and more help with Wood Cottage. Khun Laem from Komchadleuk newspaper came along, interviewed and photographed me. Afterwards I went to an old massage man for a bit of painful loosening up. Then back to Dhammaram in time for a visit from Soiy and Ros with her father. After that, it was time to pack. Jim and Nui came for me and off we went to the airport where Jim marched up to the First Class check-in counter and scored me an immediate upgrade to Business class. Passing through the X-Ray bag search an eagle-eyed young woman spotted instantly a tiny penknife that I'd been given and forgotten was in my bag. I gave it up and at Heathrow, when we'd landed and I'd found my luggage, there at the Thai desk it was waiting for me. Such service!

So that was Thailand, probably for another year. Already it seems like history and now Wood Cottage, which we're due to take

over on March 14th, plans for a Multi Faith Prison Chaplaincy, prison visits, people and various kilesas are competing for attention.

Next newsletter I'll give you the last episode of our pilgrimage to India. This time last year we were getting ready to set off and for Magha Puja we were there at the Bamboo Grove. The very place where the Buddha met with 1,250 arahants, all of whom

he'd ordained and on the Full Moon of Magha recited the Ovada Patimokkha, including, 'To abstain from all evil, cultivate the good and purify your mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas.'

LIPOSATIJA OBSERVANCE DAYS

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February	1	9	16	24
March	2	10	17	25
April	1	9	16	24

THIS IS THE NEWSLETTER OF VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO OF THE FOREST HERMITAGE AND ANGULIMALA, THE BUDDHIST PRISON CHAPLAINCY ORGANISATION

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