



THE FOREST HERMITAGE Issue No. 3 of 2003 / 2546 NEWSLETTER

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

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

This picture above was taken last year at the end of our pilgrimage to the Buddhist Holy Places of India. It was late afternoon and seated amongst the ruins of Jetavana with grouped around me the monks you can see in the photo and other members of our band of pilgrims I was reading aloud the Angulimala Sutta. This tells how on a certain occasion the Buddha left Jetavana and walked to a nearby forest in which lived the notorious serial killer, Angulimala. Miraculously surviving Angulimala's attempt to kill him the Buddha persuaded Angulimala to give up his murderous ways and return with him to Jetavana to live the life of a monk. Later when King Pasenadi called to pay his respects having set out with a cavalry of five hundred to apprehend Angulimala he found to his amazement that this horrible criminal who previously had shown no restraint was transformed and sitting, subdued and calm, with other monks in the Buddha's presence. Fortunately the King had the wisdom to leave Angulimala alone but before he departed he praised the Buddha for taming the untamed and bringing peace to the unpeaceful and marvelled that where he, King of Kosala, had tried in vain to tame Angulimala with both force and weapons, the Buddha had succeeded with neither force nor weapons.

I lead with this story now because in these troubled times those comments of King Pasenadi's about taming the untamed and bringing peace to the unpeaceful are particularly relevant. It's a common opinion that troublesome people have to be sorted out violently, that there are times when war is justified and that ends justify means. However, none of this is the Buddhist view. Not only are such things wrong in

**Victory breeds hatred.
The defeated live in pain**



**Happily the peaceful live,
letting go of victory and defeat.**

themselves but it takes only a cursory view of history to see the truth of the Buddha's words that I've quoted here in red from the Dhammapada. Look back and see how often war has spread hatred and more war, how the defeated have lived in pain and plotted revenge, how tit for tat, arguments have persisted for generations. Not only that but wars kill and maim people. Karma, what you do and the effect of what you do, depends on what you intend to do and then what you actually do, never mind the motive or excuse. Once, the Buddha is believed to have appeared between two opposing sides about to do battle over access to a stretch of river and to have demanded of them which was the more valuable, a piece of river bank or a human life? Of course, there could be only the one answer. It doesn't matter whether it's done legally or illegally or for whatever reason, life is one thing you can take but never return. When they'd calmed down and looked at the problem reasonably, they found that actually it wasn't all that difficult for both sides to share and benefit from the same river. I suppose there will always be tensions of one kind or another between people and it's likely that most when they or their nearest and dearest are harmed or threatened will instinctively respond with anger and perhaps violence. However, I believe it has to be part of life's challenge to try to do things better and find happy and

peaceful ways out of these difficulties and often all that's needed is a dollop of common sense.

To come back to our pilgrimage last year, I've been gradually over a number of newsletters serialising an account of our adventures and my plan is eventually to find the time to put it all together with the pictures and at the very least publish it on the Forest Hermitage website. The last time I wrote about it, I got as far as Day 12 and our morning visit to the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini in Nepal.

In the afternoon of Day 12, we crossed back over the border and into India for the next leg of our journey. Our destination that day was Savatthi, a distance of about 130 miles and en route, we were to call at what are believed to be the ruins of Kapilavatthu, the city where the Buddha grew up and his father's capital. The discovery and identification of these ancient Buddhist sites has been a long and laborious process and archaeologists and scholars have been struggling for around a hundred and fifty years to find and then make up their minds about the location of Kapilavatthu. For some time a group of ruins in Nepal was the favoured candidate, the only trouble was that although they looked the part apparently no really substantial and conclusive archaeological evidence was ever found to support the claim. Then in the early 1970s, a rather unprepossessing collection of brick remains was excavated on the Indian side of the border at Piprahwa and in their midst was discovered a casket containing relics of the Buddha. After the cremation of the Buddha's body, his disciples divided the remains into eight portions, and sent each to be enshrined in



THE ANANDA BODHI TREE

a place of significance. Over one portion the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu built a stupa. Almost certainly it was this stupa and its contents that the archaeologists unearthed at Piprahwa. Those same relics are now in Delhi museum where we saw and venerated them at the start of the pilgrimage. Just before depositing us at the Kapilavatthu ruins, our coach called briefly at a small hotel to allow us a 'comfort stop'. I surmised that some entrepreneur had built this place expecting hordes of Buddhist tourists and pilgrims to flock to the newly discovered remains and put up for a day or two. However, all they've ever done of course is, like us, drive up, stay for an hour or so and go and no one it seemed had ever stayed in that quiet little hotel out there amongst barren fields and oxen. What a heart-stopping moment it must have been for the manager when our coach pulled in! Unlike most of the places we visited, wandering amongst the ruins of Kapilavatthu it was difficult to imagine how it is once supposed to have been. We paid our respects, climbed back into the coach and raced on, as best one can on Indian roads, to Savatthi. We arrived as darkness fell and checked into a partially finished Japanese hotel to stay for two nights.

Next morning, after the meal, on Day 13 our coach dropped us at the gates of the Jetavana Grove. How it had changed since last I was there! Then the Sri Lankan Vihara opposite, now large and prosperous,

consisted I think of just three rooms and the old monk who lived there, Venerable Sangharatana, was struggling against all sorts of local opposition to extend it. Of an evening, he would read to us as we sat on the veranda in the gloaming from the Dhammapada Commentary and I remember marvelling that I was sitting only yards from where these stories of the Buddha had happened. Here after all was where the Buddha had spent twenty-five rains retreats, nineteen in Jetavana itself and six in the adjacent Pubbarama offered by the laywoman Visakha. We entered and made our way first to the ancient Ananda Bodhi Tree. When the Buddha was absent from Jetavana devotees naturally missed him, so Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, asked of the Buddha what in his absence might be revered and in answer the Buddha mentioned bodily relics, things reminiscent of him and things that he had used, in particular the great Bodhi Tree under which he had attained Enlightenment. Ananda then had a seed of the Bodhi Tree brought to Jetavana and planted so that it would be, as the Buddha himself said, as if the Buddha were constantly present at Jetavana. To this very day, that tree is known as the Ananda Bodhi Tree. We moved on to the foundation remains of a building known as Gandhakuti or the Perfumed Chamber in which the Buddha used to dwell and teach and there as the sun rose higher and beat down on us with increasing ferocity we offered incense and candles and meditated for as long as I thought we could manage without getting sunstroke. Then we wandered as we wished amongst the ruins until around midday when we took a little trip up the road from Jetavana to what were probably the remains of two chedis, one dedicated to Anathapindika and the other to Angulimala. And there I must leave my

LIPOSATIJA OBSERVANCE DAYS

	☾	☉	☽	☀
May	8	15	23	30
June	7	14	22	28
July	6	13	21	28

story to be concluded in the next newsletter.

Now for news from the Forest Hermitage. First of all on March 8th at one of our quarterly Angulimala Workshops for



SIR DAVID RAMSBOTHAM

DIARY:

VESAKHA PUJA

Sunday, May 18th, 10 a.m.



ANGULIMALA WORKSHOP

(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)

with Sir Stephen Tumim

June 7th from 10 a.m.



MEDITATION and a

DHAMMA TALK

Mondays & Fridays at 8 pm

Buddhist Prison Chaplains we were privileged to have Sir David Ramsbotham, the former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, to speak to us. We were treated to a memorable afternoon during which he spoke about the Inspectorate, his experiences and discussed with us his compassionate and forthright views on what should be done to improve our prisons. Then the following week, on March 14th, we finally took possession of Wood Cottage and moved in. This means that at last we have somewhere suitable to accommodate retreatants, particularly women and already there have been some to stay, including one nun. On March 30th we had an ordination and welcomed into the fold a new novice, Samanera Sataro. Finally, the Thai New Year, the sun came out and our Songkran began decorously enough with the respectful bathing of the Buddha Image and the Sangha, before turning pretty wet for some but a fun way to begin a New Year nevertheless!

VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO'S NEWSLETTER FROM

THE FOREST HERMITAGE & ANGULIMALA, THE BUDDHIST PRISON CHAPLAINCY ORGANISATION

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