



# THE FOREST HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 6 of 2001 / 2544

FROM VENERABLE AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO  
OF SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE &  
ANGULIMALA, THE BUDDHIST PRISON CHAPLAINCY ORGANISATION

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA  
Honour to the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully-Enlightened One

It's mid-November and had things turned out as planned we should have been off on our pilgrimage to the Buddhist Holy Places by now but in the uncertainty that followed September 11th it was decided to postpone our trip until February and March of next year. So if you've been thinking that we're not here and that our usual activities are not happening, let me tell you that we are here and things are going on pretty much as normal.

Obviously the postponement of the pilgrimage has meant a lot of extra work and worry for the organisers and some disappointment for the pilgrims but on the bright side, had we gone as planned it would soon have all been over, whereas now we still have it to look forward to in February. Not only that but in February with a little rearrangement of the original route we can be in Rajgir for Magha Puja, right where the events commemorated by that festival actually took place. The plan now is to fly out on February 21st and have a look round Delhi on the 22nd before a marathon overnight fifteen hour train ride to Patna. From Patna we will visit Vesali and then move on via the ruins of the ancient Buddhist university of Nalanda to Rajgir. That night, February 26th, will be Magha Puja and we hope to visit Veluvana, the Bamboo Grove and first Buddhist monastery. This is where the Buddha on a previous full moon of Magha, many hundreds of years ago, having come down from the Vulture's Peak, was seated amongst an assembly of twelve hundred and fifty arhats, all of whom he had personally ordained and who had all come from various places without any prior arrangement to gather at the Bamboo Grove and meet him. Seated there he recited the Ovada Patimokkha, a summary of his teaching and discipline (Dhammapada vv 183 - 185), the recitation of which henceforth he caused to be the custom on each full and new moon - an important step in the growth and development of the Sangha - until it was superseded by the evolution of the bhikkhus' basic rule, the Patimokkha of 227 precepts. On such a special occasion I expect there will be other pilgrims congregating at Veluvana as well and so we four monks in our group plan to sneak off and find a quiet spot nearby for our recitation of Patimokkha and where we may perhaps spend the night meditating. At dawn I hope everyone in our party will join us for puja and meditation at the remains of the Buddha's kuti on the Vulture's Peak. And then it will be on to Buddha Gaya, to Sarnath, Kusinara, Lumbini and Savatthi before another train journey back to Delhi and the flight to London on March 9th. This will be no ordinary trip, neither a tour nor a holiday in the normal sense of

the word, although I hope and expect that time spent in places frequented by the Buddha and his great disciples, time spent too remembering and contemplating the great events and teachings associated with them will refresh and recharge everyone in ways that no amount of flopping about on beaches or merely following the pleasures of the senses can ever do.

Not unlike the need people commonly feel to have photographs and reminders of their nearest and dearest or the tours and memorials they make to where the great, the good and the not so good have lived and died, Buddhist devotees often like to raise up Buddhist Shrines and Images and make pilgrimages to where once the Buddha lived and taught. But while these images and journeys may be a natural expression of a devout wish for a tangible presence of the person whose teachings and example are so loved and admired they should really be rather more than just that. When successfully practising Buddhānussati or Contemplation of the Buddha, it is said that it is as if one is for a while in the company of the Buddha and in that perfect presence one is, albeit temporarily, transformed. Imagine, how, close to such a person, could one possibly dare to misbehave? Contemplating the Buddha steadies and inspires one's mind and leads one on along the path of purification and it should be with such an attitude that devotional projects are approached. Really to be close to the Buddha you must strive to be like the Buddha and that means not just going where he went but doing what he did and knowing what he knew. And what did he do and what did he know? He purified his actions of body, speech and mind and waking up to the true nature of things realised a real and lasting happiness. And that is the journey which I hope our pilgrimage ultimately will encourage our pilgrims to complete.

The date of our return is also the date of Angulimala's first workshop of the New Year but since our party of pilgrims includes Angulimala's secretary, Sue Wood, as well as myself I am hoping we may agree to changing that workshop to March 16th.

The search for happiness and understanding emerges from recognising that all is not well with us and our world, to believe otherwise is a shallow and unwise attitude that magnifies and blows out of all proportion the separation and loss that in common with others we all have to bear from time to time. That sense of suffering is heightened when it comes close and affects us personally or those near to us and so it has been for us here recently with the sudden death of Herbie and Prema Munasingh's

# DIARY:

## THE LOTUS PATH

A Pilgrimage to Buddhist Holy Places where the Buddha was born, lived and passed away.  
February 22nd - March 9th 2002.

✿  
**ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS**  
(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)  
December 8th & March 16th from 10 a.m.

✿  
**MEDITATION, A DHAMMA TALK**  
a chat, a reading & a cup of tea  
Mondays & Fridays at 8 pm

✿  
If you are on our mailing list and/or a member of BDF or ANGULIMALA, your name, address, phone number & membership details are on our computer files. If you object and you let us know we'll willingly remove you.

eldest son, Graham and Dorothy Clark's loss of their youngest son in a motorbike accident, Lord Avebury's close call and three weeks in hospital when a car knocked him off his bicycle, Ven. Dhammatejo's few days in hospital, Rosemary Alcock's enforced immobility and hospitalisation after a fall, Marta, whose car was pinched and used to ram raid a clothes shop and the unexpected death of Ron, who spent the summer here and gardened for us, a few days after he crashed his motorcycle. While our hearts go out to those who are grieving and in pain we must not lose sight of the fact that we live in an imperfect world and none of us, whatever our age, station or position, are immune from ageing, sickness, death and the force of change. To live with an expectation that it should be otherwise is simply unrealistic.

Without wishing to diminish the pain and loss caused by dramatic events like that in New York on September 11th, it is this perspective that is missing from the cries that follow for justice and revenge with an inability to grasp that far from mending the damage violence met with violence means only more of the same. The defeated nurse their wounds and plot revenge and the hatred passes from generation to generation.

At the time of the destruction of the giant Buddhas of Bamian in Afghanistan I said that what we should learn from that was to take nothing for granted and to be reminded that all conditioned things are impermanent. Similar lessons might be drawn from the destruction of these more recent monolithic symbols of power and stability in New York. Surely it was the assumption that such a thing could never happen that made it the more shocking and harder to bear. But the unexpected did happen and we'd be the wiser and happier for learning to live without expectations.



That needn't stop us though from making plans and currently at The Forest Hermitage we are exploring the possibility of extending the main building. We have a very beautiful place that we love very much and we have done all we can to make it serve our needs but as we've kept on rearranging things we have been forced to concede that we are desperately short of living and storage space and room for the occasional guest. Following a rumour that what had been the twin of this property on the other side of Hampton Wood might be coming up for sale we did flirt briefly with the idea of trying to buy it. When we heard how much they were wanting we fairly rapidly abandoned that ambition and adopted instead the idea of extending the present building by a third. This will give us a larger Shrine Room, better toilet and washing facilities and more accommodation upstairs. The shaded area of the floor plan represents the new building of two storeys, while the entire extended Shrine Room remains single storey with nothing but the roof and the sky above it. There is no certainty that this will come to fruition. It will take time to have plans drawn up, seek planning permission and look at the cost before any work can go ahead but we have decided to at least take it that far.

Since the last newsletter we have held the Annual General Meetings of both Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy and The Buddha-Dhamma Fellowship which supports Wat Pah Santidhamma, the Forest Hermitage. Both went off all right with all the necessary business, including the presentation and acceptance of the accounts, successfully concluded. And as I did at both meetings, I would like to repeat my gratitude to all those who work so hard and give so generously in their support.

As usual I have continued to be out and about at the prisons I visit and at meetings of the Advisory Group on Religion in Prisons and the Immigration Detention Service's Religious Affairs Advisory Group. After a quick appearance at a conference that I'd been

persuaded to attend one day, I had a bit of fun ringing up the prison I was due to visit to say that I'd been delayed by the Prime Minister - and they didn't believe me, but it was true!

Lastly, and I must apologise for taking so long over this, I want to pay a belated tribute to everyone who made this year's annual Springhill Buddha Grove celebration another brilliant success. Anumodanaa!

## UPOSATHA OBSERVANCE DAYS

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November	8th	15th	23rd	30th
December	8th	14th	22nd	29th
January	6th	13th	21st	28th

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