



THE FOREST HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

February 2000 / 2543

AVOID WHAT IS UNWHOLESOME AND WRONG,
DO WHAT IS PROPER AND GOOD,
AND PURIFY YOUR MIND.
THIS IS THE TEACHING OF THE BUDDHAS.

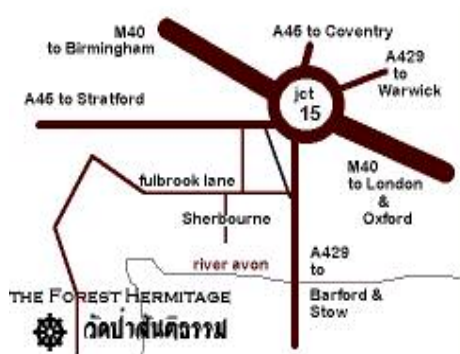
At SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE

We will celebrate
MAGHA PUJA
On Sunday, February 20th
from 10:30 a.m.

**ANGULIMALA
WORKSHOPS**
(mainly for Buddhist
Prison Chaplains) on
March 18th & June 24th

MONDAYS & FRIDAYS
at 8 p.m.
**MEDITATION,
A DHAMMA TALK**
& tea with a reading from
Buddhist texts

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



NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMA-SAMBUDDHASSA HONOUR TO THE BLESSED ONE, THE EXALTED ONE, THE FULLY-ENLIGHTENED ONE

Again over the next few weeks I shall be doing my bit for religious education and tolerance by appearing in front of groups of schoolchildren and talking to them about the Buddha and Buddhism. I will be telling them about the early life of Prince Siddhattha, the Buddha-to-be, and his momentous encounter with old age, sickness and death. If you've nothing better to do, you might even tune in and see me for yourselves at 9:45 a.m. on March 21st and again on March 24th on Channel Four telling this well-known tale. The story goes that out for a drive with his charioteer for company Prince Siddhattha unexpectedly saw for the very first time an old man, then a sick person, a corpse and finally some kind of monk. This was the last straw and soon after he left home in search of Enlightenment. That tale like some others that we associate with the Buddha and repeat over and over again doesn't actually appear in the original texts of the Tipitika, at least not as a story about Prince Siddhattha. But the Buddha tells it about one of his predecessors, the Lord Buddha Vipassī who arose in the world ninety-one aeons ago. Apart from a few details, the life story of Vipassī is remarkably like that of Gotama's and indeed of all other Buddhas. In the Mahāpadāna Sutta or the Great Discourse on the Lineage the Buddha outlines the events and attributes that characterise the lives of all Buddhas. These include the birth, the encounter with old age, sickness and death, the great renunciation, the Enlightenment, the turning of the Wheel of the Dhamma, the development of the Sangha, the dispersal of monks to spread the Dhamma and the great meeting for the recitation of the code of practice. Whether or not you're supposed to take all

this about former Buddhas literally, I have no idea. Perhaps it's just a clever literary device that enabled the Buddha to talk about his own life without endlessly going on about himself in the way that some who think rather too much of themselves tend to do. So, although it isn't said of Gotama that he and his followers convened for a recitation of a disciplinary code, we understand that it should have happened as it happened with Vipassī and the commentaries do in fact confirm that. They tell us that the gathering was a spontaneous one and occurred while the Buddha was residing at the Vulture's Peak. One thousand, two hundred and fifty arahant disciples all of whom had been personally ordained by the Buddha appeared at the Bamboo Grove monastery at Rājagaha. It was the Full Moon of the month of Māgha and the Lord Buddha came down to them and recited an encouragement to practise, the Ovāda Pātimokkha:

“Forbearance is the highest austerity,
'Nibbāna is supreme'; say the Buddhas.
He is not 'one gone forth' who harms
another.
He is not a recluse who molests others.
Give up what is unwholesome and
wrong.
Do what is proper and good
And purify your mind.
This is the Teaching of all the Buddhas
Speak no ill, do no harm,
Observe the Rules,
Be moderate in eating, live in a
secluded place,
Devote yourself to meditation;
This is the Message of the Buddhas.”
That was the first Māgha Pūjā which falls
officially this year on February 19th and
which we will celebrate on February 20th.

The last gathering of any size that we had here was back in November when the new Abbot's Kuti was presented to the Sangha. It proved to be a very happy day and those present represented practically the entire range of our support over the years. We were also fortunate to have the two Venerables, Ajahn Munindo and Puñño, down from Harnham for the occasion. In the Shrine Room after the meal, the lay assembly joined in reciting the traditional words of offering and the new kuti was formally handed over to the Sangha. Ajahn Munindo then delighted everyone with a little reminiscing and some words of encouragement and we concluded that portion of the proceedings by chanting the Parittas. Then those who could togged up a bit to brave a wintry afternoon and collect down in the bottom garden around the new kuti itself. There to the certain strains of the Stanzas of Victory recited by the monks and novices I snipped at the golden ribbon across the kuti entrance and as the two fragments fell apart, declared the new building open for business.

While they were here, Ajahn Munindo and Ven. Puñño managed to wring an agreement out of me to return their visit by joining them in Harnham for their Vesākha Pūjā celebration on May 21st. That means that here our annual celebration of the Birth, Enlightenment and Passing of the Buddha will be on May 14th, the actual day being May 17th and an impractical weekday. It also means that I shall be travelling further north than usual on at least two occasions this year. The other is April 29th when I will be leading an Angulimala workshop in Edinburgh at the Portobello Buddhist Priory.

I'm sorry that I've had to say that the day on which Vesākha Pūjā falls is impractical but that's about the size of it. Our ancient Buddhist calendar is a lunar one and doesn't chime very well with the seven-day week. During the tea break following our Monday and Friday evening meetings I've been offering a sort of Buddhist Book at Bedtime and reading from what I've considered appropriate and useful texts. I'm currently going through Ven. Ñāṇamoli's 'The Life of the Buddha according to the Pali Canon'. The other evening as I was about to begin there was a question from someone about the origins of the Uposatha Observance Days and a

few minutes later in my reading I came to the very text which gives the story of how this tradition began. It seems that at one time, the Buddha was living on the Vulture's Peak at Rājagaha and wanderers and religious of other sects were then in the habit of meeting together on new and full moons and on the half-moons between. The people enjoyed attending these meetings and listening to the wanderers talking and debating. King Seniya Bimbisāra observed this and being a devotee of the Buddha decided to ask the Buddha whether he and his bhikkhus would consider also meeting on these occasions. When the King had left the Buddha addressed the bhikkhus and after a talk on the Dhamma, he told them that henceforth they should gather on the new moons, full moons and half-moons. So, those bhikkhus began meeting as they had been told and they sat in silence, practising meditation. This did not go down too well with the folk who came along hoping to hear some teaching and they complained that these bhikkhus just sat there like dumb and stupid pigs. When this was relayed to the Buddha he told the monks to use these meetings to preach the Dhamma and that is what has been happening ever since. Returning now to the story of Māgha Pūjā, when he had recited the Ovāda Pātimokkha the Buddha then said that it should be recited on all new and full moons. This custom later gave way to the recitation of the Pātimokkha that we have today which where a sangha of four or more bhikkhus is gathered has to be formally recited every lunar fortnight.

I mustn't forget Alan, a contact I have who is teaching English to prisoners in Katmandhu where they would like some pen friends please. I can put you in touch.

Many years ago and long before I took off for Thailand I used occasionally to attend meetings and talks at the old Thai

temple in East Sheen. At one of those talks, a woman in probably late middle age was sitting right under the nose of the speaker and frantically scribbling into her notebook as much as she could of what he said. I remember marvelling at his ability to remain concentrated and apparently unaffected while she toiled away. A few years later and I'm back from Thailand, a young monk and myself occasionally being asked to give talks and one day there I am somewhere in London and that same lady is sitting in front of me with her notebook and pencil! In time, I got to know her and she visited us here at Warwick and took a keen and supportive interest in Angulimala and our prison activities. Then in January I had a letter from a London firm of solicitors to tell me that this lady, Lory Alder, had passed away on January 3rd and that she had left her large wooden Buddha Rupa and all her Buddhist books together with a small share of the residue of her estate to the Forest Hermitage. The money is to be used for Angulimala and I hope for the installation of more Buddhist shrines. Perhaps one of these, even the one I've just been asked to provide for in Long Lartin will be, a memorial to a dedicated Buddhist lady and a keen supporter of Angulimala.

In December, I was invited to the launch of 'The Prisons Handbook'. This is an encyclopaedic guide to the prisons of England and Wales with information on just about everything to do with imprisonment. The idea for it was born in the mind of a long-term prisoner as he sat one day at Wandsworth going through reception with all the uncertainty and questions you find in that department. Now it's in its fourth edition and the man behind it, Mark Leech, is a respected writer, journalist and prison reformer. For this edition, he co-opted the assistance of Deborah Cheney who I first met when she was writing about foreign prisoners and now I'm proud to have on my shelf a copy of The Prisons Handbook that they both signed and gave to me. The launch was at the office of the Prisons Ombudsman, now Stephen Shaw, formerly of the Prison Reform Trust. It was a gathering of the great and the good and a renewal of old friendships and I'm happy to say that a marvellous outcome has been Stephen Shaw's agreement to address the next Angulimala Workshop on March 18th.

UPOSATHA OBSERVANCE DAYS

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FEB	4	12	19	27
MAR	4	12	19	27
APR	3	11	18	26

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

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