
News and Musings from The Forest Hermitage

January 2552 – 2009



Coming Soon:

MAGHA PUJA

actually falls on Feb 9th
but we will celebrate on
Sunday, February 8th from 10 a.m.

ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS

At the Forest Hermitage at 10 a.m.
on March 7th, June 6th,
September 12th, December 5th.

(For Buddhist Prison Chaplains only,
attendance otherwise is by invitation to
Angulimala members only)

BHAVANA DHAMMA RETREATS

Ven. Manapo will lead a number of
one day, weekend and five and
seven day retreats this year.

Details can be found at
www.foresthermitage.org.uk/bhavanadhamma/retreats.html

Places are few.

To apply or inquire, email
enquiries@foresthermitage.org.uk
or phone 01926 624564.

MEDITATION, A DHAMMA TALK and a cup of tea

at The FOREST HERMITAGE.
Every Monday & Friday at eight o'clock.

A Happy & Peaceful New Year

First of all before Tahn Manapo and I depart for our annual trip to Thailand from January 13th to February 1st this year let me wish you all a very Happy and Peaceful New Year.

It being that time of the year one of my students told me over the phone that she'd been writing up her New Year resolutions and when I asked what they might be she hesitantly let me know that they already covered two pages! Well I can vaguely remember trying New Year resolutions myself years ago when I was a child but I was never any good at them and usually gave up on them or forgot all about them by January 3rd. However, thinking things over after that conversation I thought I might just dip my toes in once again and this time resolve to revive my newsletter. I began writing a monthly newsletter when I arrived at Little Duxmore on the Isle of Wight in early 1979. Over the years it went through various changes of form and appearance until after becoming more and more infrequent I finally let it lapse just over a year ago. I'd begun to think that there were enough words written and spoken about Buddhism - too many - and I didn't need to add any more. But lately on reflection, yes, I would like you to know about this special place, The Forest Hermitage, and what goes on here; I would like you to know about how we try to make the Dhamma alive and available; and I would like to reach out to involve you more in this wonderful teaching so that you too can benefit. So here goes and it's already January 4th!

Another thing I've tried but never managed to keep up is a diary, so to tell you what I and the Forest Hermitage have been doing during 2008, I shall have to rely on my memory, which isn't quite as good as it once was. So if I forget to mention you or something you think I really ought to have included, please don't be too hard on me.

The cold today reminded me of our first outing of last year when we joined a silent march through London from Marble Arch to Trafalgar Square in remembrance of the terrible events in Rangoon a few months previously. Sadly the media stayed away and there were precious few once we'd assembled under Nelson's Column to gape at us standing in the freezing cold and to hear our speeches. The horrors of Rangoon in 2007 were no longer front page and already rapidly being forgotten. But then as I stood there, suddenly amongst the crowd a little frantic waving and a pair of dancing, smiling, lively eyes grabbed my attention just as they used forty years ago when their owner directed me in a Sunday night special at the National Theatre. Then Victor Spinetti used to wander the Old Vic auditorium flicking his lighter and waving, encouraging me as I spoke John Lennon's poetry – for that was what the play was composed of - to talk to the audience. Afterwards, when we'd finished in Trafalgar Square and the gaggle of onlookers had dispersed, it was to his flat we went to warm up and reminisce.

A few days later Tahn Manapo and I left the cold behind and flew to Bangkok in time to join up with some members of Warwick Uni Buddhist Society and make a brief appearance at Pie and Nun's wedding. First we had a trip to Ayutthaya and then on the big day were invited for the meal and to have our photos taken with the happy couple. Pie was a PhD student at Warwick, a stalwart of its Buddhist Society and a real help and support to me. I know he was pleased to be married and glad to go back to Thailand but I was sorry to lose him. Afterwards we went up to Ubon for the Ajahn Chah Memorial Day and stayed for about a week at Wat Pah Nanachat and visited a few friends and places that I like. Then after a few days rest on the Island of Phuket at Sri Panwa and a short stay in Bangkok, it was back to England.

One of the first things I had to do when we got back was to arrange a full meeting of the Theravada Buddhist Sangha in the UK (TBSUK) at the end of February in the Sri Lankan London





Buddhist Vihara. For our two committee meetings this year we have met at the Thai Buddhapadipa Temple in Wimbledon while for our second full meeting of the year in August we met at the Buddhavihara Temple in King's Bromley. That was an encouragingly well attended and successful meeting with senior monks from fifteen temples around England present and indicated that step by step we are gradually bringing together our community of the Theravada Buddhist Sangha in the UK. Our next meeting will be at the Burmese Peace Pagoda in Birmingham in March.

Throughout the year at The Forest Hermitage we observed and celebrated all our major festivals and for each one of them we had a very good attendance and some brilliant, if not sometimes unusual, weather. For instance, just one week before Songkrah, the Thai New Year and Water Festival, one of our supporters celebrated her sixtieth birthday by organising here a tort pah bah, an alms giving, which for many who couldn't be with us the following Sunday was also a chance to celebrate Songkrah, and although it was a beautiful sunny day, what did we wake up to – snow! So instead of everyone dousing each other with water as is traditional at Songkrah, they were throwing snowballs. And that was in April! If you thought the picture of the Buddha in the snow at the top of this newsletter had been taken in the recent New Year cold snap you would have been wrong, it was April 6th last year.

A major and important effect of our festival celebrations are the supplies that are so kindly and generously donated to keep us and the temple going. All sorts of things are brought, food, cleaning things, stationery, all sorts. The only thing that we sometimes get that we don't understand and don't quite know what to do with is shampoo! And of course at festivals and at other times throughout the year a lot of money is donated. For the last few years the focus of our fund raising has been the reduction of the debt outstanding on the purchase of Wood Cottage, now known to us as Bhavana Dhamma. When we bought it just before Christmas 2002 we had to beg and borrow £425,000. Now thanks to all the help, great and small, that we've received we have just £45,857.11 left to go to finish it. Let's hope that this year it'll be done and dusted.

In the prisons too festivals are important and a frequent topic at our quarterly Angulimala Workshops is how to organise and celebrate a Buddhist festival in a prison. Despite the restrictions and security that are part and parcel of prison life some prisons manage the celebration of festivals very well. At Open Prisons like Springhill where we hold our annual event at the Buddha Grove every September it's relatively easy and even in a low security closed prison like Haverigg it's not too difficult. I went there last year for Buddha Day. In the prisons we celebrate three festivals a year honouring the Triple Gem with Buddha Day at Visakha Puja, Dhamma Day at Asalha Puja and Sangha Day at the end of the Vassa. Haverigg is a pretty remote establishment on the southern shore of the Lake District. As you might imagine the M6 wasn't much fun but the last part of the three and a half hour drive was quite beautiful. I got there just in time for the six o'clock start and I was made very welcome by the Governor, the chaplains and the men who packed the chaplaincy to enjoy the occasion and to hear me tell the story of the Buddha and afterwards the story of Angulimala and his meeting with the Buddha. The Buddhist prisoner who introduced me tried to show how important my visit was to

the Buddhists of Haverigg by saying that having me there was for them comparable to a visit by the Archbishop of Canterbury or even Prince Charles. Well I've never been mentioned in the same breath as Prince Charles quite like that before but it was very generous of him. I found out since that it wasn't just the Buddhists who had worked to make it such a splendid evening but their friends of other faiths and none had joined in. There are plenty of interfaith and multifaith talking shops but this was practical friendship and co-operation at grass roots level. A bit more of this and the world would be a happier place. It was a great evening but over all too soon and by eight o'clock I was back on the road for another three and a half hours. A couple of months later Dhamma Day fell on my 64th birthday and I spent that in Gartree and Stocken Prisons. I was very pleased then to be able to take in for the Gartree Buddhist group a lovely carved wooden Buddha Rupa from Thailand. The picture is a birthday photo of me as I placed it on the shrine there for the first time.



Talking of birthdays, last year's was a very special one for Lord Avebury who at the end of September turned eighty. At the conclusion of the Springhill Buddha Grove celebration we presented him with two birthday cakes, one to cut and share then and another for his actual birthday a bit later. Here he is with the cake and eight candles. In November I joined a gathering at the Savile Club - where the doorman was a bit taken aback when I strolled in - to honour his birthday and it was so inspiring to hear him determining again as he had at Springhill never to retire but to carry on his work in the field of Human Rights, doing what he could to make the world a better place for as long as he could.



And there have been other milestones passed by others associated with The Forest Hermitage and Angulimala. I've already mentioned Pie and Nun's marriage but then they were followed by two more former stalwarts of Warwick Uni Buddhist Society, Mark and Jin, who in November tied the knot in very traditional style in Jin's native Korea. Next it was Bob's turn. She - aka Alexandra - you may remember used to live at Bhavana Dhamma and cook for us. Well now she's in London training and studying to be a nurse and in December she became Mrs Poppa. And last, but far from least, just in time before the end of the year, it was the turn of another former pillar of the WU Buddhist Society, the indomitable and incomparable Big Sis, otherwise known as Jung-Li or Rowan. She married just after Xmas. I hope things will work out for all of them, that they will be happy and that they will care for their life partners.

Other milestones have meant losses, losses that have touched us too at The Forest Hermitage. In 2008 three exceptional supporters died. The first at almost eighty was the wonderful Rosemary Alcock. Her passing from an old age she did not relish was not a surprise. But what a shock when we got the news that faithful Simon Bromwich had died of a heart attack just a few days into a family holiday in Vietnam. Nor could we have predicted the phone call the night before New Year's Eve to say that a sudden stroke had taken the marvellous and ever so generous Jayanthi Wijesingha. While we wish them all a favourable rebirth their passing and that of the old year reminds us that all that is born will die and nothing can be held and kept for ever. With that in mind may we each of us this year try to live our lives wisely with an attitude that is for ever letting go.

This Newsletter is from Ven. Chao Khun Bhavanaviteht (Luangpor Khemadhammo) OBE of

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