

# THE FOREST HERMITAGE

JUNE 2001 / 2544

# NEWSLETTER



## DIARY:

### ASALHA PUJA & VASSA ENTRY

We will celebrate on July 8th.



### ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS

(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)

June 16th, Sept 15th & Dec 8th.



### MEDITATION, DHAMMA TALK,

a reading & a cup of tea, here on

Mondays & Fridays at 8 p.m.



### THE LOTUS PATH

We are organising a Pilgrimage to the Holy Places of India where the Buddha lived and taught.

November 16th - December 1st.

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

**Honour to the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully-Enlightened One**

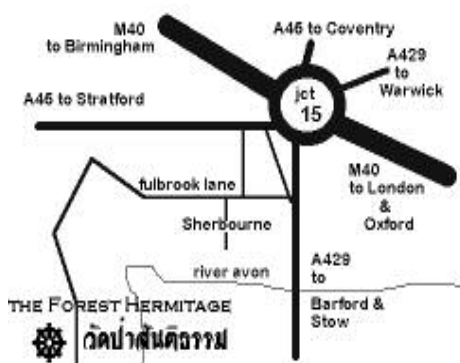
On a certain occasion the Buddha in conversation with a monk called Punna asked him where he was going to live. When Punna answered that he was off to a place called Sunaparanta the Buddha remarked that the people there were a rough lot and asked Punna how he would cope if they ridiculed and insulted him. If that happened, Punna said he would just be grateful they hadn't hit him with their fists. 'And if they did, what then?', asked the Buddha and Punna replied that he'd be grateful they hadn't hit him with a clod, and then if they did hit him with a clod he'd be glad that it wasn't a stick, and if a stick then that it wasn't a knife and so on. Elsewhere the Buddha remarks how through our inner attitude we add to pain. For instance, having been hurt physically we then add to that discomfort by wanting a pleasant feeling in its place or by resenting the present discomfort, and each time because of our attitude it's as if we've been hurt twice. Even before our intuitive understanding of the way things are deepens we should be able to recognise the rationale of this and however painful and unhappy we feel, like Punna, remind ourselves to be grateful that things aren't a lot worse and that, sadly, for many they are.

Of course there are many things that here in Britain could be much better but equally there are many things that could be much worse and although it's not always appreciated, we do enjoy a number of freedoms and privileges that are the envy of people in many parts of the world. We don't live in dread of a knock on the door late at night but live under a system that respects the right to freedom of thought, conscience

and religion. However, although I'm grateful to be able to go about my business and do what I do protected by this respect for Human Rights, I can't help being a bit troubled by a mental attitude that this protection can sometimes engender. Interestingly, Buddhism doesn't speak of rights but of responsibilities, including a duty to respect that which is worthy of respect. This has an important impact on our inner attitude. Instead of either a passive anticipation, or worse, an indignant demand for what is supposed to be rightfully ours, we actively undertake certain obligations to others and to society without thought of or demand for anything. This is such a healthy way forward, taking us away from desire and attachment and towards generosity and loving-kindness.

Looking through my diary there are a number of things that have happened in the two months since last I produced a newsletter that I ought to report. I'll go through them more or less as they occurred.

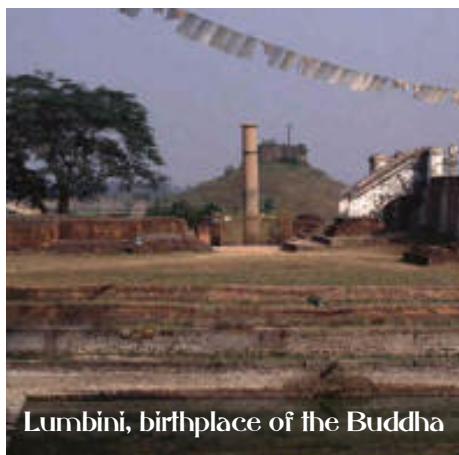
In March I was one of a small group of people of various faiths who were gathered to discuss the provision of pastoral care in the Immigration Detention Centres. These are not prisons and although privately run come under the authority of the Immigration & Nationality Directorate. As a relatively new concept, unencumbered by a past, they are able to write the script as it needs to be, thus each of the handful of these detention centres has its religious affairs placed in the hands of a manager who may be of any faith or denomination. In a similar vein to the Prison Service's Advisory Group on Religion in Prisons, Immigration is forming a Religious Affairs Advisory Group



and I have been asked to join that as well.

At the end of March I spent an afternoon at Hindley Young Offender's Institution up near Wigan discussing the siting of a 'Buddha Grove'. A week later I was at the 'One World Week' at Haslar Holding Centre on the south coast. Then on April 26th and a couple of weeks after our excellent Songkrahm celebration, I went with Lord Avebury, a couple of monks from here and Rob Yellowhammer to The Verne prison at Portland for the inauguration of its newly built Buddhist shrine. The Verne is an amazing place, it overlooks Weymouth harbour and was originally an enormous Victorian citadel. I used to go there regularly at one time and I remember the first time about twenty years ago, sitting in the back of a taxi driven by a large silent man in shades and wondering as we wound our way upwards and passed beneath the massive stone walls whether I was on my way to Dr No! More recently The Verne has been in the news for its Kairos, then later renamed Kainos project, a Christian based approach to managing and treating offenders and even more recently, if you spotted the picture in The Guardian, for the establishment of the small Buddha Grove or Buddhist shrine. Also now in the pipeline are similar ventures at Channings Wood and Dartmoor prisons in Devon and one other which is just being talked about at the minute. Oh yes, and the annual Springhill Buddha Grove celebration will be on Sunday, September 16th.

Quite a few years ago now I remember an inmate at Wellingborough prison telling me that he had attended the service at which the new C of E chaplain had been licensed and introduced to the prison and that during the reception afterwards he had purposely gone up to the new chaplain and on behalf of Wellingborough's Buddhist group formally welcomed him to the prison. I remember thinking that this was an unusual but kind and thoughtful thing to have done - there couldn't have been more than half-a-dozen at most in the Buddhist group. It proved a good beginning to what grew into a very cordial and rewarding relationship with the Reverend Nigel Dent. In time, Nigel and I became friends and that friendship persisted even after he left the Prison Service and become the rector of a parish. Early last year Nigel contacted me



and asked if he might stay for a short time and make a retreat here. It was all arranged but before he could come he was diagnosed as having a particularly virulent form of leukaemia. It wasn't until the end of the year that with the cancer in remission he was able to spend a splendid few days with us. He was a very fine person who in his spiritual journey was undaunted by the conventions and limitations that so frequently restrict and stifle exploration and growth. Unfortunately the leukaemia was soon to return and with very little chance of a successful outcome to the treatment available Nigel took the brave decision to allow nature to take its course. With time in which to prepare himself for death he had time to give some thought to his funeral and ask us to be there and chant some of the words of the Buddha. He died on April 23rd. The following Sunday evening his body was brought into his church and two of us joined a few members of his congregation for that quiet and moving ceremony and then we all attended the much larger requiem mass the following day when I read in English and we chanted in Pali the Karaniya Metta Sutta, the Buddha's words on Loving-Kindness.

Vesakha Puja this year was on Monday, May 7th and we held our modest celebration the following Sunday. At Vesakha Puja we remember the Birth, the

Enlightenment and the Final Passing of the Buddha. The Pali canon records that each of these events took place some years apart on a full moon of the ancient lunar month of Vesakha and so each year on this one occasion we honour all three. The places where each occurred are known and when we make our pilgrimage to India later this year we will be visiting them. They are three of the four main sacred sites of Buddhism. According to tradition, in 623 BCE, or in the opinion of some scholars, in 563 BCE, Queen Maya, pregnant with her first child, was as custom required on her way to her ancestral home for the birth when she stopped to rest in the beautiful garden of Lumbini and her child who later was to become the Buddha was born. The spot is marked by a battered stone pillar erected by the Emperor Ashoka. Lumbini lies just inside the border of modern Nepal. Thirty-five years on, sitting under a great tree that we now call the Bo or Bodhi Tree, Gotama, the prince turned ascetic, attained Full Enlightenment and became the Buddha. This place is now known as Buddha Gaya or Bodhgaya and the place of the Buddha's Enlightenment is marked by the Maha Bodhi Temple, the origins of which are cloaked in obscurity, and a Bodhi tree which is presumed to be a descendant of the original under which the Buddha sat. Then forty-five years further on we find the Buddha at Kusinara where his body finally stopped breathing and he entered Parinibbana. There is a chedi that marks the spot and a recent barrel-roofed building which houses an ancient image of the Buddha reclining and passing away. Nearby, a badly damaged chedi marks where his body was cremated. At Kusinara were uttered the Buddha's last words, 'Impermanent are all conditioned things, work out your own salvation with diligence.'

Around the first two weeks of May I took a break from my usual round of prison visiting to prepare for the upasampada or full admission of Samanera Manapo into the Bhikkhu Sangha. Ven. Dhammabhojo was here and two monks came over from Wat Sanghatan to help and to ensure we were quorate. Khun Laksana, the sponsor, from Bangkok, came with her family, and a number of people gathered to witness this rare and special occasion, which is pictured at the top of the front page.

**Oposatha Observance Days**

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June	6	14	20	28
July	5	13	20	28
August	4	12	18	26

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

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