



**NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA**

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

In front of me on the wall of my study hangs a picture of a door, it's a cell door in Dartmoor Prison. It's a door that Bill, a former Dartmoor inmate, used to describe to me as a door with no handle on the inside. I keep that picture in front of me as a reminder that while I sit here free to come and go more or less as I please, free to ramble with my dogs in the early morning and late at night there are thousands locked away sitting behind doors like that with no handle on the inside.

I was in Dartmoor the other day listening to an American Evangelist boasting that such was the success of his programme to cure offenders that men on the programme often wanted to go back after release to help those left behind. With typical Texan chutzpah, he asked if we'd ever heard of such a thing, a prisoner wanting to go back after release. And immediately I thought of Bill, *our* Bill and formerly of Dartmoor too.

Bill went back. He went back to Dartmoor with a big Buddha Image from Angulimala in his van. They let him in too and the Buddha Image is still there. But all that was years ago now when big Bill was Angulimala's secretary and treasurer and a rock I could depend on, always there to sort anything that needed sorting. Since then time and his problems have taken their toll and on Monday, June 6th, Bill Gates died. He was just fifty-two. I always used to say that he was *our* Bill Gates not the other one. The night before he died, I went with other monks to see him. We sat with him, we chanted the Parittas and I talked to him. He was conscious but couldn't speak. I kept reminding him of his merits, of all those wonderful things he had done to help establish Angulimala and make it possible for people to hear and practise the teachings of the Buddha in prison. Like most people, of course Bill had his failings and like most he had his virtues but unlike many Bill for all his difficulties could go a step further and take the time and trouble to follow through with some action what he believed was important. He never forgot what it had meant to him when he was in prison to have Buddhism available and a Buddhist chaplain to visit him and so he went out of his way to see to it that that would continue and be there for others. At his funeral there was only one tribute on the coffin, a wonderful flower sculpture from his wife Lynn of their three cats at play. For the rest, it was donations to Angulimala – supporting us to the end. Our Bill Gates was special and unforgettable. We offer him our love and gratitude and our best wishes and hopes for better things through the rise and fall of whatever follows until with the stilling of all conditioned things comes true peace.

In May, I was rather preoccupied with our annual Visakha Puja celebrations in praise of the Buddha that this year for me began with a trip to Maidstone Prison. With prisoners and staff we were joined by Lord Avebury, Ven. William Noblett, the Chaplain General, members of the local Mid-Kent and Medway Buddhist Group and an official from the Royal Thai Embassy representing the Ambassador and on a dull day that brightened with the sun beginning to shine as our ceremonies began, we dedicated another Buddha Grove. We also remembered that day, Joan Hamze. Joan I'd known practically all my Buddhist life. Formerly the doyenne of her local Buddhist group in Maidstone, Joan continued to visit prisoners in Kentish prisons well into her eighties and practically until the day she died. The Maidstone Prison Buddha Grove is in memory of Joan.

**THE FH DIARY**

**ASALHA PUJA  
(Dhamma Day) &  
ENTERING the VASSA**

Our celebration at The Forest Hermitage of the Buddha's First Sermon and the beginning of the annual Vassa Retreat for Bhikkhus.

July 17th from 10.30 a.m.

**ANGULIMALA  
WORKSHOPS**

These are primarily for Buddhist Prison Chaplains, attendance otherwise is by invitation and for Angulimala members only.

at 10 a.m. on September 4th and on December 10th.

**MEDITATION,  
A DHAMMA TALK,  
A READING**

& a cup of tea on  
Mondays & Fridays, 8 p.m.

**Uposatha Observance Days**

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June	6	14	21	29
July	6	14	21	29
August	5	13	19	28

Asalha Puja / Dhamma Day - July 21st,  
the Vassa begins next day, the 22nd.

For us Theravadans, Visakha Puja or Buddha Day honours the Birth, Enlightenment, and the Passing of the Lord Buddha but for those of other traditions it can be the Enlightenment or in the case of the Chinese Fo Guang Temple in London the Birth of the Buddha that is celebrated. Every year in the heart of London's West End in Leicester Square the Fo Guang Temple holds a big celebration for the Buddha's Birthday which includes a dragon led procession through China Town, chanting and speeches and the ritual bathing of images of the Buddha as a baby. This year they invited me to be one of their honoured guests and I was so looking forward to it when one day I took a phone call from Thailand that invited me to attend a Visakha Puja celebration and conference in Bangkok. It was to be quite a big affair and to begin on the 18th of May. Fine, I said but only if I could be back for my date in Leicester Square on the 21st. That was agreed. With the time change, I reckoned that I could leave Bangkok on the night of the 20th and step off the aircraft in the morning at Heathrow in time to make it to Leicester Square before noon. But, to cut a long story short, after a number dramatic phone calls at all times of the day and night a seat back for when it was wanted couldn't be had. So I went to Pentonville and Chelmsford Prisons instead - not nearly as glamorous but rather more my style.

When we did drive down to London that Saturday morning for the Leicester Square date the rain was so heavy at times you could hardly see. Leicester Square when we arrived was awfully damp but the Chinese were making a tremendous effort to cheer everything up and we enjoyed a very happy couple of hours there with them. Afterwards we popped round the corner to see an old friend of mine and then sped back to Warwickshire to get ready for our celebration at The Forest Hermitage the following day. For that, I'm happy to say the weather smiled on us and we had a marvellous turnout.

We don't usually see the local papers which is why we didn't know until someone told us that a neighbour is trying to create a reservoir near our Wood Cottage. It might or might not happen and may not be a problem for us if it does but we have had to register a concern as both our properties are dependant on wells for their water and digging a whacking great hole up the road might just interrupt the flow. Anyway, back to the local papers. The other day looking through one, it had something about me in it and carrying on turning the pages as you do, there it was, a half-page feature about a new trendy bar in Leamington Spa and in one of the photographs, on the wall of this bar, a large reproduction of that wonderful and famous 5th Century Gandhara style tilted head of the Buddha. It's such a pity, it's hard to know what to do about pictures and images of the Buddha. Some Buddhists, I know, think it doesn't matter and airily go on about letting go and all that. Yes, it's perfectly true that we should strive not to be upset by anything. But read the Pali Canon and hear the Buddha firmly admonishing those with wrong view and condemning unskilful and foolish deeds. He didn't mince his words and quite right too. If nothing is ever said how on earth are those who don't know that we don't approve of booze and do mind the mess it makes to ever learn any different. They may never understand the meaning of the Buddha Image and might never learn to respect it.

You may have read that the Ministry of Defence is to

appoint a part time Buddhist chaplain to minister to personnel in the armed forces and you may have wondered about this and even been worried by it. At the end of last year, I was asked, given my prison chaplaincy experience, if I would be a member of a small group who would be the Endorsing Authority for this post. I agreed and took part in the selection process. For the time being, the post is to remain civilian and it's to be a three year appointment with the chaplain being employed as a part time civil servant. But this is supposed to be only an interim stage and the MoD hopes to move on to the appointment of a commissioned uniformed chaplain. I know that many Buddhists are not at all comfortable with the idea of a Buddhist chaplain to the Armed Forces, especially one who is in their pay and perhaps a uniform could be a step too far. Still, there's an obvious need for someone to advise the Services on Buddhist matters and to be there to help men and women in the forces who in their suffering turn to Buddhism. But in any case it seems to me important for chaplains to any institution, whether it be the Prison service or the Army or whatever, to be in it but not of it, in other words to be able to keep a certain reserve and to be clear that first and foremost they are chaplains. I support a Buddhist chaplaincy to the Armed Services because I believe that there are serving personnel who can be helped by Buddhism but I still in no way support or sanction warfare or violence of any kind.

Many years ago I remember Ajahn Chah telling us and demonstrating with his two hands held in front of him, palm facing palm and bending first the left hand to the right and then the right to the left, to bend ourselves to the Dhamma, and not to try bending the Dhamma to suit ourselves. Now I pass this advice on to you, bend yourself to the Dhamma, and don't try to bend the Dhamma to suit yourself. This is not just a plea for orthodoxy but a reminder that the Dhamma, the Buddha's Teachings, are not there to sanction but to challenge your limitations, to help you improve the way you live your life and to push out the boundaries of your understanding. It may well be that concepts like non-self don't make much sense to begin with or that you feel uncomfortable when you read that Enlightened Ones don't grieve or that you don't want to give up your weekly visit to the pub or your occasional wine with a meal. As the Buddha himself observed, we're not unlike lotuses, rooted in the mud and darkness and groping for the light, each at our own level of growth and development. We can't understand all things all at once but that's no reason to apply to Buddhism the current fashion for convenience and dumbing-down and alter or adapt what the Buddha taught. I'm not for one moment suggesting a blind adherence to dogma, by all means question those teachings but question and investigate also what it is that is disturbing to you about there being no self or why you feel uncomfortable with non-attachment or what stops you giving up the drink.

We've just had Ajahn Cittagutto who ordained here and used to live here some years ago to visit for a few days and while he was still here Ajahn Jayasaro turned up one afternoon with some of his supporters from Thailand.

In July I hope to make my annual visit to Scotland to meet with our Angulimala team there. And please make a note that here on Sunday, July 17th we will celebrate the Buddha's First Sermon and the beginning of the Rains Retreat.

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**THIS NEWSLETTER IS FROM VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO OBE (CHAO KHUN BHAVANAVITAYT) OF THE FOREST HERMITAGE & ANGULIMALA, THE BUDDHIST PRISON CHAPLAINCY ORGANISATION**

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