



# THE FOREST HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

March 2001 / 2544

## AT SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE

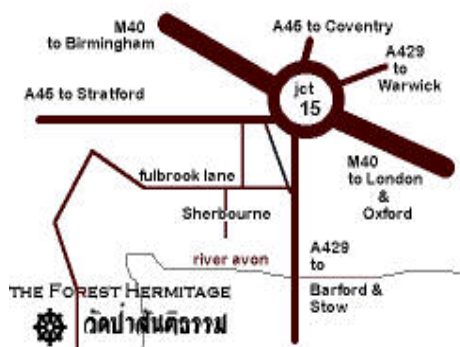
### ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS

(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)  
March 17<sup>th</sup> & June 16<sup>th</sup>.

MEDITATION,  
A DHAMMA TALK,  
a reading & a cup of tea.  
Mondays & Fridays at 8 p.m.

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.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY  
BUDDHIST SOCIETY  
in Trinity Hall College,  
March 8<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 p.m.  
VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO  
will talk about ANGULIMALA.



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

This particular edition of The Forest Hermitage Newsletter has been long in the making. I'd better say that at the start in case any of you are thinking that you've been forgotten or struck off the mailing list or something. Until a few days ago it was the February 2001 edition and before that it said January at the top of the page but time and tide waits for no monk and now I've retitled it again and live in hope of completing it before the end of March.

It is said in the Buddhist scriptures, in the passages describing the events leading up to the Buddha's final passing away, that the Buddha, recognising the need for there to be in his absence some tangible connection with him, suggested that in future after he had gone, devotees should visit the places that had been of special significance in his life. He particularly mentioned Lumbini where he had been born, Bodh Gaya where he had become Fully-Enlightened, Sarnath where he had given his first teaching and set in motion the Wheel of Truth and Kusinara where he had finally passed away. Many years ago I was there and on my way to Thailand I visited each one of these four sacred sites as well as other famous places frequented by the Buddha. My mind has been returning to those days recently because this year is my thirtieth year as a monk and my thirtieth Vassa or Punsah - the annual Rains Retreat by which we count our age as monks - and in celebration of that we are planning a pilgrimage which we hope will take us to the Buddhist Holy Places in November of this year. The idea is to do it in some style and comfort - not as I did it in my pre monk days, roughing it and hopping on and off trains through carriage windows - so that

anyone, even those advancing in years can join us on this journey of a lifetime. In deference to British holiday periods we plan to spend two weeks in India and then those with the time and inclination will round off the trip by flying on to Thailand and visiting Wat Pah Pong where we will pay our respects to Ajahn Chah at the chedi which contains his relics. At least that is the plan so far. Enquiries are now afoot to work out the best way of accomplishing all this and Ann Logan is the person to contact for more information.

My mind has also returned to those days when I made my first Buddhist pilgrimage because en route to India I passed through Afghanistan and spent some time in Kabul dithering about how and whether or not to visit the great Buddha Images of Bamiyan - those very images which as I write are again poised for destruction by the Islamic fundamentalists who are now in control of Afghanistan. I seem to remember that although Bamiyan wasn't too far it meant either a rather precarious flight with the prospect then of being stranded for a few days or a long uncomfortable bus ride that left Kabul every day from one of the dodgier parts of the city at about three or four in the morning. In the end I escaped my indecision by accepting a lift on to Delhi and comforting myself with the thought that I could always see Bamiyan next time. But sadly there isn't always a next time.

The destruction of the Buddha Images of Afghanistan has at least informed the world that that war torn cradle of bigotry and suffering was once a very different place where freedom of thought and expression were probably as taken for

granted as the hard-won liberty and rights that most of us currently enjoy. I say 'most' because I am aware that this newsletter finds its way into parts of the world where people are not as privileged as we are in Britain and I am also aware that even here there are minorities and individuals who still live in fear and who are discriminated against. But still, by comparison with many places we are extremely fortunate and the destruction of the mighty Buddha Images of Afghanistan, symbols of wisdom and compassion, peace, tolerance and hope, which at one time must have seemed unassailable and indestructible, should warn us against complacency and encourage us to value, guard and widen the liberties we enjoy.

This might be a time to ask whether Buddha Images are important and really necessary at all. We are usually told that during the Buddha's lifetime no likenesses of him were made and that for a considerable time after his passing his presence in any depiction of his life was symbolised in some way or another. However, both the Chinese monk, Fa-Hien, who travelled through India in search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline in the early years of the Fifth century CE and another famous Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang, who followed about two hundred years later, mention seeing a wooden image of the Buddha at Jetavana which had been made during the Buddha's lifetime by order of King Pasenadi. Fa-Hien wrote that during the Buddha's absence, 'the King, longing to see him, caused an image of him to be carved in Gosirsha Chandana wood, and put in the place where he usually sat. When Buddha on his return entered the vihara, Buddha said to it, "Return to your seat. After I have attained to pari-nirvana, you will serve as a pattern to the four classes of my disciples," and on this the image returned to its seat. This was the very first of all the images (of Buddha), and that which men subsequently copied.' Hiuen Tsang described that when he went to Jetavana this wooden image was preserved in a shrine made of brick. Whatever happened to it, I have no idea and so far as I know there are no other references to it. But this story of King Pasenadi missing the Buddha and the Buddha's mention of the four Holy Places,

together with one other reference all help to explain why the Buddha Image is important. Again at Jetavana where the Buddha spent so much of his time, devotees would come, even in his absence when he was away on tour, anxious to show their respect and so Venerable Ananda was asked to inquire of the Buddha where or how his followers might pay their respects while he was away. The Buddha replied that it was suitable to venerate bodily relics, personal requisites of his and things reminiscent of him. The Buddha then said that the Bodhi Tree, the tree under which he had realised Enlightenment could be an object of reverence and so a seed was brought and the Buddha agreed to it's being planted at the entrance to Jetavana with the comment that it would then be as if he were constantly present in Jetavana. Whether you use a Buddha Image or not, when you contemplate and bring to mind the Buddha it is as if you are then in the presence of the Buddha and all that that implies.

Really and truly we have to do the work for ourselves and neither the Buddha nor images of him will do it for us but at the end of the day, in this difficult task we need all the help we can get and any sense of his presence is an inspiration, reminder and encouragement and that for me is the importance of the Buddha Image.

Ever since Ajahn Chah's death, and even before, I have tried to go back to Thailand and Wat Pah Pong every year. I didn't manage it last year but then the year before I had been twice. And this year I thought I would wait until the India trip that I want to round off with a visit to Wat Pah Pong. So, I was pretty much reconciled to soldiering on with what is at the moment a fairly busy life and foregoing any winter or spring break. That is until certain very thoughtful and generous persons made

me an offer that I was clearly not expected to refuse. Jim and Nui had it all worked out from the ticket at Heathrow to meeting me at Bangkok and driving me up to Ubon and around for a week before dropping me off again for the flight back to England. What could I say? What could I do? Of course I said yes and I went and it was terrific. I treat these trips as pilgrimages during which I can pay my respects to Ajahn Chah, meet old friends and colleagues and nourish my monastic roots.

Off the plane we drove straight up to Ubon and Wat Pah Nanachat. The next day which was the anniversary of Ajahn Chah's death I spent first at a little do for some students at Ubon Teachers College where I told them about what I do here and then at Wat Pah Pong for the annual circumambulation of the Ajahn Chah Chedi. The day after I visited my old friend, Ajahn Dang, at Numyeun near the Cambodian border and the day after that I went to see Ajahn Tongjun's latest monastery near Amnat Jarern. Then on the Friday it was back to Bangkok with a stop off at Khun Rattana's village near Buriram and a visit to her home. Saturday was spent first at Jim and Nui's house before Khun Tipvadee took me off to get a few things and to see my friend Sathienpong Wannapok. Then a few short hours later it was time for a dramatic drive to the airport and the flight back to Britain and a blizzard on the M40!





Since my return it's been the usual round of prison visits with a few school appearances thrown in. We also had Ven. Dhammabhojo (Pra Maha Sompoch) here for a week. He of course is an old friend who has visited and stayed on numerous occasions but it was more than two years since his last visit so it was good to see him here again.

Occasional news by email and postcard seeps through from Matthew, who used to live in and look after us, and Tamara who are currently roaming the Holy Places in Northern India. They are due to move on to Thailand shortly.

We have an Angulimala Workshop coming up with a speaker who works with young offenders. Most of the rest of the day I want to devote to talking about resources, especially the multifaith rooms we're often expected to use. That's on March 17th.

Finally, a fairly major piece of reorganisation and refurbishment has created an Angulimala office that is now up and running with Rob in the hot seat.

### UPOSATHA OBSERVANCE DAYS

				
<b>MAR</b>	2	9	17	24
<b>APR</b>	1	8	16	22
	30			

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

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