



# THE FOREST HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

November 1999 / 2542

PEOPLE GIVE ACCORDING TO THEIR FAITH  
AND AS THEY ARE PLEASED.

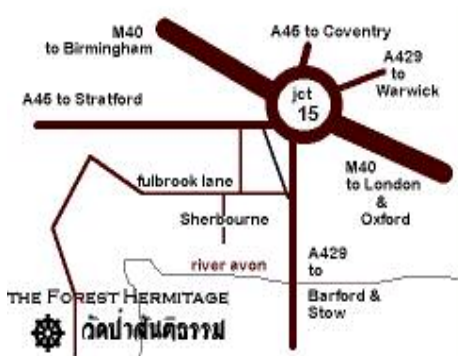
## At SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE

On Sunday, Nov. 21st  
the new ABBOT'S KUTI  
will be presented  
to the Sangha.  
We will begin at 10.30 am  
with puja, then pindapata  
& food will be followed by  
the ceremonial offering.

ANGULIMALA  
WORKSHOPS  
(mainly for Buddhist  
Prison Chaplains) on  
Dec 11th & March 18th.

MEDITATION,  
A DHAMMA TALK  
& a cup of tea on  
Mondays & Fridays, 8 pm.

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 SAMMAA-SAMBUDDHASSA HONOUR TO THE BLESSED ONE, THE EXALTED ONE, THE FULLY-ENLIGHTENED ONE

Amongst my post, one morning in the second week of November was a letter from a young friend of mine who for many years as a guest of her Majesty has been serving out the life-sentence passed on him. 'Hope the donations poured in for the kuti you had in mind', he wrote. And I know Jim will cheer when I write back and tell him that that's just what has happened. The response to an appeal for funds to build a new Abbot's Kuti here has been absolutely marvellous. Between October 11th and November 12th, £10,300 was paid into the bank and the new kuti is already up and being fitted out. The amount that was originally appealed for was the bare cost of the structure and so what has been given over and above that will pay for all the extras, the electricity and water and things you don't think about until you need them. Should anyone retain any lingering suspicions that we are funded by wealthy Buddhists overseas, I must tell you that just about all this money has come in from a diversity and wide range of Buddhist practitioners, British, Burmese and Thai people, here in Britain. Amongst them, for example, at least one serving prisoner, two others who I've known while they've been inside and a young lady – very talkative by all accounts – who did a day of sponsored silence. Even other Buddhist organisations, and of schools other than our own, have also contributed. Not surprisingly, I suppose, my interest in Buddhism in the prisons and Buddhist prisoners has been a factor in the success of this appeal. On behalf of the Sangha, the Buddha-Dhamma Fellowship that cares for us here and everyone connected with this hermitage may I express my heartfelt ANUMODANA!

One of the four supports that a Buddhist monk needs is a place, in which he can sit and lie down. Such accommodation can be pretty basic but for at least the duration of the Vassa it has to be reasonably weatherproof and equipped with a door. In the formal sermon that is known as the Anusasana and which follows every monk's ordination, the Upajjhaya explains the four requisites or supports. In the case of each of them, the food, the robes, the dwelling and the medicine, the simplest, most inexpensive and easily obtainable is recommended. And then follows an allowance permitting rather more sophisticated alternatives. So in the case of the dwelling it is a lodging at the root of a tree that is considered suitable but the extra allowances include a dwelling with a peaked roof, a pent-roofed building, a multi-storied building, a large flat-roofed building and a cave. In other words, practically anywhere is allowable, bearing in mind the principles of simplicity and fewness of wishes. It is after all supposed to be a place to be used for the care and protection of a monk's body – keeping off the cold and the heat and protecting it from the wind and sun, from mosquitoes and other small predators. I have said before in these pages that a Buddhist monastery or hermitage should be a place where monks and meditators do their work and I regard my kuti as primarily my workshop – and nowadays my office! In fact, it is because it is a working environment and my workload has increased that somewhere larger is so welcome. This new, all wooden building is split into three rooms. The smallest will be the computer room, the next largest will be a store and where I can make the tea – how else do you get

any work done! – and the third, the largest of the three, will be where I can arrange my projects at their various stages of completion and where I can hold small meetings. Above the two smaller rooms is a low loft area, another work space and one that I intend to use for my most important work. It will make an ideal meditation room. A place I can climb up to and where I can sit, apart and away from all the other bits and pieces with which I'm involved. I'm very much looking forward to that.

Further on in his letter my young friend reported that he'd recently heard from Lord Avebury and then went on to mourn the passing of the House of Lords as we've known it. He conceded though that that was impermanence for you, in other words, everything changes including the things you'd like to hold on to. He should have added that the Lords, the Government, politics, in fact all the measures for organising society as well as being impermanent are inevitably unsatisfactory. Let me remind you, the Buddha taught that all conditioned things are impermanent, unsatisfactory and without self or substance. I suspect Jim's concern at the change overtaking the Lords was not unconnected with his admiration and affection for Lord Avebury, an hereditary peer, who for many years has championed the causes of the oppressed and disadvantaged.



Lord Avebury at Springhill last year.

It was possible that with the expulsion of the hereditaries this significant and needy minority would have lost his voice in Parliament.

Lord Avebury is also a Buddhist and the Patron of Angulimala,

the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation and a tremendous help to us too, another minority without statutory representation. Fortunately Lord Avebury's tireless efforts are widely appreciated and he is one of those who has been elected by his colleagues to remain in the transitional upper chamber until the next stage of the reforms is completed. I



suppose it's inevitable that minorities and important but unpopular issues as well as institutions like Buddhism will have to continue without proper parliamentary representation. I wouldn't want to see a Buddhist political party and I abhor the idea even of a Buddhist central office, but I do think it is as well for us to be heard occasionally.

I am sometimes asked to contribute to seminars and give talks on Buddhist Social Action, as though doing your bit for society or helping your neighbour was an unusual and esoteric form of Buddhism, or at least a special compartment. This to me is nonsense. And the main reason I am so unsympathetic to the concept of Buddhist Social Action is because it suggests that being generous, kind and helpful is not normally included in Buddhist training - which is patently untrue. It is true that westerners particularly reject or avoid areas of Buddhist practice they judge to be mere cultural baggage or superstition and

that some people think Buddhist training is only meditation and nothing else, even though the Noble Eightfold Path comprises morality, meditation and wisdom and includes Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. The Buddha stated that where there is no Eightfold Path there would be found no Enlightened Beings of any of the four stages. Without the Noble Eightfold Path there is no Buddhism. Then go a little further and remember how the Buddha remonstrated with monks who had failed to tend a sick bhikkhu and having washed and cared for the patient himself the Buddha uttered those memorable words, 'He who would tend the sick, tends me!' To traditional Theravadan Buddhists, the practice of merit is very significant. Doing a wholesome and helpful thing repeatedly, cleanses your inner attitude, it helps others and it can even lift them to a point from where their spiritual life, their bhavana or cultivation, can take off. This by the way is an important point and another reason why the work of people like Lord Avebury is so meaningful. If you are cold, hungry and being regularly beaten and abused you are unlikely to be able to receive or practise the Dhamma. Remember that chap who came to hear the Buddha, tired and hungry from searching for a lost animal and how the Buddha made him eat before having him listen to the Dhamma? It is rare for someone to develop their practice in extreme circumstances, like that wonderful Tibetan monk who's only fear during the many years he was tortured by the Chinese was that he might lose his compassion. It might seem futile, worldly and unnecessary to be tinkering with the nuts and bolts of material welfare but that merit, that example, and that comfort could permit the beginning of someone's spiritual growth.

I was giving a talk the other day at St Mary's Hospice in Birmingham to health-care professionals and just getting into my stride when the fire alarm went off. Waiting outside in the damp autumnal gloaming for the fire brigade to come and declare it a false alarm, I reflected that I'd never experienced a fire alarm go off before. We'd just got back inside and under way again and off it went again. Then about a fortnight later, on November 5th, I arrived to give a talk at a school just as the alarm was about to go off for fire practice - but they postponed it.

UPOSATHA OBSERVANCE DAYS				
	☾	●	☽	○
NOV	1 30	7	15	22
DEC		7	15	22

The new Abbot's Kuti will be presented to the Sangha on Nov 21st.

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

The Forest Hermitage Lower Fulbrook nr Sherbourne Warwicks CV35 8AS United Kingdom  
 For Ven. Ajahn Khemadhammo & ANGULIMALA - direct telephone & fax 01926 624385 & mobile 0585 944813  
 Email address - phra.khem@zetnet.co.uk Website - http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/phrakhem/  
 THE BUDDHA-DHAMMA FELLOWSHIP, Reg. Charity No 289913 ANGULIMALA, Reg Charity No 294939