

THE FOREST HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER



OCTOBER 2543 / 2000

THE FOREST HERMITAGE DIARY:

THE VASSA ENDS

October 13th



UPASAMPADA

The Ordination of new bhikkhus.

October 14th



A DAY RETREAT

October 28th

Enquire for details, please.



ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS

(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)

December 2nd & March 17th
from 10 a.m.



TEA PARTY

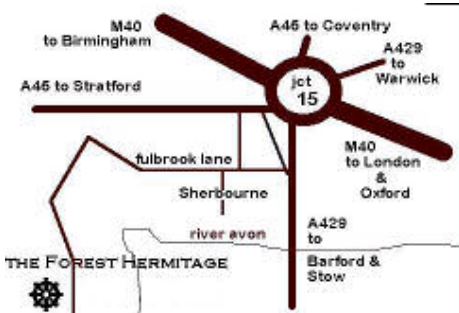
An informal 'get-together' for our
lay Buddhist members.

October 15th at 4 p.m.



MEDITATION,
A DHAMMA TALK,
a reading & a cup of tea.

Mondays & Fridays at 8 p.m.



NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

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

Someone has just left me a copy of The Independent newspaper open at two sizeable pictures of Buddha rupas, one grimly seated upright and the other reclining with a beatific smile. Looking further down the page, I realise that this is a half-page advertisement for British Airways. The Buddha images are there to indicate that you may now travel with British Airways both sitting and reclining but it's better reclining with their 'world's first flat beds in business class'. This is the latest of several adverts that have featured Buddha images or pictures of Buddhist monks. It's a trend that reveals an extraordinary lack of respect and sensitivity for what people hold dear as well as a remarkable degree of ignorance - which I suppose I didn't ought to be too surprised at.

I have just done a quick search on the web, and found an email address for someone at British Airways, and fired off a complaint to him. I have pointed out that with this advertisement they have shown disrespect to the person and the ideal that we revere the most and not only have they printed these images in a newspaper which may be discarded and used for all sorts of unclean purposes but they have used them in an advert aimed at, as advertisements generally do, promoting desire, the very defilement that the Buddha pointed to as the source of suffering and which he spent the greater part of his life showing people how to overcome.

I accept that one should not get angry and upset about these things. There will always be people willing to ridicule and abuse you and the things you value and as the Buddha advised his son, Rahula, one should do one's best to be like the earth that

remains unaffected by whatever is dumped on it. But against that you have to balance the fact that when something is wrong or causes misunderstanding and discontent then you have to bear some responsibility for what you do or do not do about it, especially if you are in a position of influence and might be listened to. It surely cannot have escaped the notice of most people that we live in a pretty awful world and the things that can really help us and lift us out of the mire are few. If we allow such aids to be degraded, they will lose their potency and suffering human beings will be the poorer. It is also important that we remain loyal to and respectful of that which we consider worthy of respect and which we value. If we have gone for refuge to the Triple Gem then we should want to venerate anything connected with or representative of any of those Three Jewels, from the lowest to the highest, from the tattiest to the most gorgeous and resplendent.

Whether it will be valued or not is a concern I often have when publishing pictures of Buddha images in this newsletter, or on the Forest Hermitage or Angulimala websites, or when a new Buddha Grove or Shrine is created in another prison. Since this newsletter will mostly fall into Buddhist hands I am fairly confident that the pictures will not be abused, as for those on the web pages, well, I hope nothing untoward will become of them. Happily, the Buddha-rupas we've installed as Buddha Groves or Shrines in the prisons have fared very well and I'm delighted to be able to report that this year has been a bumper year with five more having been built or being built.

On the third Friday in August, Lord Avebury and I went up to a women's prison, HMP New Hall in Yorkshire where we conducted a modest opening ceremony in the lush sunny garden where one of our large Buddha images had been installed. A few weeks later on September 3rd we were back at HMPs Grendon and Springhill for a fairly short and hurried gathering in Grendon at the Buddhist shrine in the Peace Garden before the much larger and more ambitious event at Springhill. Springhill's was the first of the Buddha



The Springhill Celebration this year.

experience of Buddhist practice. As we should always do when hearing of another's passing, let us meditate for a moment that for us to be born and die is the nature of things, the only secure peace being the happiness of Nibbana which we hope that Joan and all beings may speedily attain.

Going back now to the Springhill celebration and the various efforts we make to ensure that Buddhism is available in the prisons I would like to say a little more about why I feel this to be important. I know that there have been

Groves and the only one to date that really is in a grove of mature trees. This year was the ninth annual gathering since it was built in 1992 and as usual there was chanting and speech-making at the Buddha Grove followed by what looked a wonderful Thai buffet and to conclude, a candlelit circumambulation, three times, of the Buddha Grove in honour of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Then, on a drizzly Monday afternoon towards the end of September, I took my two novices and Lord Avebury into Long Lartin Prison near here where we inaugurated the Buddhist shrine in the garden there. Next month we are already booked for Ford Prison in Sussex and sometime we will have to go down to The Verne in Dorset, as well as Leyhill in Gloucestershire.

At all these events, in fact at every opportunity when I have prison personnel at my mercy, I retell the story of Angulimala and impress on my audience King Pasenadi's comment that what he and others had failed to do by force and with

I love the Buddha Image and I tend to agree with Sam Cutler, the inspiration behind the Springhill Buddha Grove, that a place is transformed by the presence of the Buddha Image. Sam with his wife and two boys leaves this month for a new life in Australia and will probably be already there by the time that you read this. Sam is a gifted artist and recently produced a few copies in a limited edition of a silk-screen print of a Reclining Buddha-Rupa that he had created. As a parting gift, he gave a few of us one each and I have photographed and printed part of mine at the top of this newsletter. The original is about three foot long and with a drawn frame and border surround, it is a large and impressive piece. I don't know how I'm going to get it mounted nor where I will put it but no doubt that will all be solved in time.

I'm sure that you will all want to join me in wishing Sam, Sally, Bodhi and Chesney a very happy future down under.

While I have my mind on people we're losing, let me pay a special tribute to Joan Hamze who has just died. I reported in my last newsletter that Joan was no longer on the list of Angulimala prison chaplains. In fact, she had become so frail that the prison she was visiting decided that it was not prudent for her to continue. Joan was a highly committed and determined woman who had it been left up to her would have gone on and on prison visiting regardless. I had known or been aware of Joan practically all my Buddhist life and she had been an early choice for the Angulimala chaplaincy team. She was much loved and highly regarded for her knowledge and

some people recently who have felt that it was neither necessary nor right to do anything for people who have behaved so badly that they have ended up in prison. Much of this comes, of course, from the popular press that well knows how to manipulate people's emotions and sell their papers. But I am willing to answer my critics. Very briefly, whatever the rights and wrongs of how people came to prison, prisoners are human beings with similar strengths and weaknesses as anyone else and prisons best fulfil their task of

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protecting society by being places not just of confinement but where people may learn about better things, especially by the actions and example of others. At the Springhill event, the Governor has spoken more than once of his vision of a prison as a place of hope. But they can never be that if better ways and better things are unavailable. Whether in a prison or anywhere else Buddhism brings better ways and a hope of better things and the Springhill event is a living example of that. Above all Buddhism brings the hope of a secure peace and a perfectly fulfilling happiness, not as a right or a privilege but as the natural outcome of approaching life in a wise and skilful manner. These teachings of the Buddha are a protection for us all and should be available to everyone, including even those in the secret and forgotten world of our prisons.

UPOSATHA OBSERVANCE DAYS

	☾	○	☽	●
October	6	13	21	27
November	4	11	19	26
December	4	11	19	25

weapons, the Buddha had accomplished with neither force nor weapons. The Buddha brought about change in Angulimala by persuasion and example and I hope people take note of that.

This Newsletter is from VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO of ANGULIMALA & THE FOREST HERMITAGE

The Forest Hermitage Lower Fulbrook nr Sherbourne Warwicks CV35 8AS United Kingdom

For VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO & ANGULIMALA, direct telephone & fax - 01926 624385 & mobile - 07941 013319

Another phone - 01926 624564

Email - prakhem@foresthermitage.org.uk

Website - www.foresthermitage.org.uk

THE BUDDHA-DHAMMA FELLOWSHIP, Registered Charity No 289913

ANGULIMALA, Registered Charity No 294939
