

THE FOREST HERMITAGE

September 2004 / 2547

NEWSLETTER

THE FOREST HERMITAGE DIARY

ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS

(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)
at 10:00 on

Sept 18th with the AGM

and on Dec 4th.

OPEN DAY at WOOD COTTAGE

Sept 26th

From 10:30 until 4 pm.

The monks will walk over to collect
pindapata at 10:45.

MEDITATION, A DHAMMA TALK, A SUTTA READING

& a cup of tea on

Mondays & Fridays, 8 pm

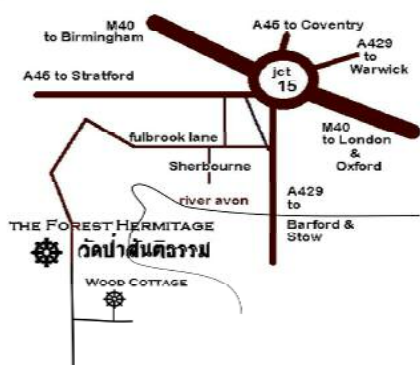
NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

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

You may just be able to see in the picture of our Shrine Room at the top of this page that the position of the hands of one of the Buddha Images visible is different from that of the others. Often when entering a Buddhist monastery or temple for the first time visitors and especially Westerners are struck by just how many kinds of Buddha Image there are, standing, sitting, walking, and reclining and they nearly always ask about the different hand positions. The one image you can see that is different from the rest has its hands folded one on top of the other in the meditation posture which is I suppose how most people conceive of the Buddha apart from those who still think of him as that jolly, fat Chinese fellow. The other three have the right hand pointing towards the earth, which is known sometimes as the Earth Touching Mudra or hand posture and sometimes as the attitude of subduing Mara the evil one and opponent of liberation. Mara appears in the texts both as a deity ruling over the highest heaven of the sensuous sphere and as a personification of that which is unskilful and worldly. As the Bodhisatta or Buddha-to-be sat under the Bodhi tree in the night when he attained Enlightenment, Mara tried repeatedly to prevent him from realizing Liberation. It was during that contest that the Bodhisatta called on the Earth to witness his right to Enlightenment. First, Mara tried to frighten the Bodhisatta and then he sent his daughters to dance for him and tempt him. Whether or not you think of Mara, his armies and his daughters as real or symbolic, I should think anyone who has practised meditation and tried to cleanse their mind must know that sooner or later

the passions fight back. Traditionally we think of Mara in five ways: as a deity; as the defilements or kilesa; as the five khandhas or aggregates of attachment; as kamma or karma formations; and as death. Mostly, Mara is a convenient generality for the habits, attitudes and all that we say and do that spoils our lives and comes between perfect happiness and us.

My purpose in drawing attention to these Buddha Rupas was in fact twofold. First, I wanted to discuss how Buddhism sees and understands evil. You should be careful about thinking of evil as a malevolent and absolute force with a life and agenda of its own; a force apart, for which we have no responsibility, that invades us and then can be rooted out and destroyed, just as some people recommend showing anger to get it out, as if it's something that can be extracted and once expressed and 'out' can be dumped and left behind. When some tragedy or other, like that at that school in Russia the other day, is glibly described as evil the awful complexity and suffering of all that led up to it and of everyone involved is denied and the way is paved for reprisal and revenge and anyone with even a limited grasp of history ought to know where that leads. Somehow when we're faced with people doing things that we think we wouldn't and couldn't and that we don't understand, whether they're asylum seekers, terrorists or whoever, we ought to exercise some imagination and try and put ourselves in their place and see what it is that drives people to do as they have done. The Buddha taught that all things, including ourselves and concepts like evil, have no self, soul or substance and that what we take to be real and absolute is





really just a sequence of events and experiences, one thing after another! We live lives that are a succession of actions and experiences, some good and some not and what we do and know and feel depends on our mind and is conditioned by our inner attitudes of greed, hatred and delusion, ultimately by our being unable to understand and relate to things as they really are and it's that wrong view that Buddhism commits us to correcting.

My other reason for drawing attention to the Buddha Rupas in our Shrine Room was to enable me to lead on to my growing concern over the commercial abuse and misuse of the Buddha Image and the word 'Buddha'. It is perfectly true that these images are not the real Buddha; they are symbols and representations. It is also perfectly true that Buddhism advocates non-attachment and the cultivation of a mind that is constantly letting go. But the Buddha did recommend and clearly supported respect. One of the foundations of our monastic life, which does not include a rule of obedience, is respect. In the frequently chanted Mangala Sutta the Buddha says quite clearly that to respect those who are worthy of respect is a great blessing. Nowadays we live at a time when the culture of respect is in massive decline and while I love the freedom to question and criticise I am nevertheless concerned that people and things that shore up and better our society are no longer valued and looked up to and, worse, are dragged in the dirt. Lately as the Buddha seems to have become fashionable there has been a plethora of misuse and abuse of the Buddha in marketing and advertising. Throughout Asia the other day there was an outcry over the three pictures of the Buddha that were used to decorate a bikini marketed by Victoria's Secrets. Then that was followed by some shoes from Australia with a Buddha Image under them and now just lately a poster has appeared with a man sitting on top of a Buddha's head advertising a film called 'Hollywood Buddha'. I can't remember what happened about the shoes except that they were banned from Thailand but because of the fuss both the bikini and the poster have been withdrawn. You might have read previously in these columns of our successful efforts to have Buddha Rupas removed from a pub and from Tesco's own brand Thai rice packets. Now we're turning our attention to the 'Buddha Bars' and the 'Funky Buddha' clubs. It really is too bad that the Buddha's name should be used to

promote the sort of establishments that he disapproved of and regarded as places of wrong resort. As Buddhists we go for refuge to the Triple Gem, and that includes giving high respect to each of the Three Refuges and anything redolent or in any way representative of them. I would therefore suggest that we have a duty to do our best to protect the good name of the Buddha not only by our own actions and example but also by doing what we can to prevent the abuse and misuse of his name and image. I would be grateful for your support.

Just before I left England for Thailand in 1971 and shortly before he died, I called at the now defunct Hampstead Vihara to say goodbye to Kapilavaddho. He wished me well and told me to come back, back to the UK that is, and I remember him saying then that another former pupil, Paññavaddho, never would. He wasn't far wrong. Venerable Paññavaddho did pay a short visit to Hampstead in 1974 but that was all. In Thailand at the end of last year and too late to go and see him, I heard that Ven. Ajahn Paññavaddho had cancer. He died on the morning of August 18th in the monastery of Wat Pa Bahn Tahd in the NE of Thailand where he had lived for so many years. When I went to see him in January 1997 when the picture of us together (above) was taken he told me that he was 72 and in quite good shape. Although I had known of him practically all my Buddhist life that was the only occasion we met. I remember him talking about his life and how he had lived at Wat Paknam in Thonburi where Kapilavaddho had been the first European to be ordained in Thailand and where the Dhammakaya method had originated. He said he'd practised that method when he first came to Thailand but when he'd realised it wasn't the way forward he had left and gone to another monastery and eventually having reordained he became a forest monk with Luangdtah Maha Bua. Originally from South Wales, he was an unassuming and kindly man, highly respected for his knowledge and experience and well known for his translations of Luangdtah

Maha Bua's books. I think he was the most senior Western bhikkhu. It can't be helped, what is born must die but I'm sure he will be missed and I hope he will attain the goal of the bhikkhu life to which he dedicated so much of his life.

The other picture is a post harvest view of Wood Cottage, our nearby retreat house, where there will be an Open Day and Alms Giving on Sunday, September 26th.

Uposatha Observance Days

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September	7	13	21	28
October	6	13	21	28
November	5	11	19	26

Pavarana Day - End of Vassa
October 28th

NEWSLETTER FROM VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO O.B.E. OF

THE FOREST HERMITAGE & ANGULIMALA, THE BUDDHIST PRISON CHAPLAINCY ORGANISATION

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