
THE FOREST HERMITAGE

Summer 2007 / 2550

NEWSLETTER



Coming Soon:

ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS

The next will be at the Forest Hermitage at 10 a.m. on Saturday, June 30th.

The one following will be on Saturday, September 8th, 2007.

(These are for Buddhist Prison Chaplains only, attendance otherwise is by invitation and to Angulimala members only)

WOOD COTTAGE RETREATS

Ven. Manapo will lead weekend retreats on

July 6th – 8th

September 14th - 16th.

There will be a special nine day retreat from August 10th – 19th.

Places are few.

To apply or inquire, email enquiries@foresthermitage.org.uk or phone 01926 624564.

ASALHA PUJA & THE VASSA

Asalha Puja falls on

Sunday, July 29th,

and we will celebrate from 10 a.m.

The following day is when we enter the Vassa.

MEDITATION, A DHAMMA TALK

at The FOREST HERMITAGE.

Every Monday & Friday at eight o'clock.

“Do everything with a mind that lets go.” Ajahn Chah.

The last time I wrote a newsletter it was New Year and now it's summer already. Of course there has been my blog in between but not everyone has the Internet and in any case some people say it's not the same as getting this piece of paper in their hands. So, only weeks after finally deciding to hang up my newsletter for ever after twenty-eight years, I've done a U-turn and already it is making a comeback!

Nearly every year when I go to Thailand for Ajahn Chah's Remembrance Day someone refers to the two or three weeks that I am away as my holiday. Well, I've never done holidays. I've never really believed in them and I've never felt comfortable about going anywhere without something to do, just as when I was a young actor I could never bring myself to call on my friends for no reason. But this year all that changed and for the first time in my life I had a real holiday. As usual I went for the big occasion at Wat Pah Pong on the 16th January and as he has done for the last couple of years my right hand here, Tahn Manapo, went with me. I managed the long circumambulation of Luangpor Chah's Chedi but my damaged foot was still troubling me and I was very grateful for the attentions of the massage people who spent a lot of time working on me and taking away from me some of my discomfort. Then, when the celebration was over and when we'd paid our customary visits to old friends as well as a little journey down memory lane to a now sadly neglected place where I spent my second year as a monk, Tahn Manapo and I took the plane to Bangkok and on to Chiangmai on our way to Wat Pah Khantidhamma in Lamphun. There we were very well received and enjoyed a couple of memorable excursions, one to an amazing labyrinth of huge caves and another to the highest point of Thailand. We also went to eat at Bob and Nee Savage's house in Chiangmai. Bob and Nee used to come here in the days when they still lived in Southampton. Then it was back to Bangkok and the holiday. We had been invited to the Island of Phuket to what had been described as a small hotel but which was in fact a collection of discrete and tastefully simple villas, each with an infinity pool that, as you looked out across it, merged into the view of the ocean and distant islands behind. And there was nothing to do. It was wonderful! In those four days about the only major decision I had to make was whether to have a cup of tea or a cup of coffee.

When we got back here it was a very different story. For all that we try and accomplish from this place we are, seriously undermanned. But it's often been this way and every time you think and worry about it you end up coming to the conclusion that there's nothing else for it but to get on and do your best. So we decided to smarten the place up a bit, first of all by the application of several gallons of paint and then with the planting of seeds which, as the year has progressed, have given us pots and boxes of wonderfully colourful and scented flowers. Our inspiration for the painting was Sri Panwa, that small hotel on Phuket, where the villas were all painted terracotta with brown woodwork. That's how The Forest Hermitage looks now - pretty good, but sadly neither the view nor the infinity pool have we been able to replicate. Gardening here – and we've got plenty of it with the two properties – is not so simple, mostly because of dozens of furry friends that hop about eating everything we plant, hence the boxes, pots and tubs.

Locally, there's an increasing demand from the schools for Ven. Manapo, sometimes he goes to them and sometimes they come here and afterwards you should see the fan mail! He's also started

going to the Banbury Buddhist Group every month and got involved with Warwick District Faiths Forum. Jo, one of our BDF committee members, has with her husband a small farm in the remote wild west of Wales and there Manapo recently spent a useful break enjoying some real solitude.

My travels away from The Forest Hermitage have as usual mostly been to prisons but earlier this year I had smashing evening at Imperial College where I gave a talk at an event hosted by the University of London Buddhist Association and Imperial College Buddhist Society. Some of these new friends, mostly Chinese, I met again when I gave a talk at the London Buddhist Vihara's Vesak celebration and again at the Bathing the Buddha Ceremony that the London Fo Guang Temple arrange every year in Leicester Square. A few weeks later a group of them came here with masses of food and while the rain poured down outside spent the afternoon cleaning and polishing.

In May at the London Buddhist Vihara we held the second meeting of the Theravada Buddhist Sangha in the UK (TBSUK). It has always seemed to me one of the enduring strengths of Buddhism that not since the time of the Buddha has it been possible for any individual, neither person nor organisation, to claim authority over all Buddhists. And the same is true of the Sangha. Although aims and objects have yet to be agreed I am hoping that TBSUK will at least improve communication and foster friendship within the Sangha here and enable us to look at any matters that might concern us and the world of Theravada Buddhism in this country. I am hoping we will meet again in September.

From time to time all sorts of questions and hypothetical dilemmas get put to us. One that I heard this summer was about a woman pregnant with twins who had been diagnosed with some problem that meant that all three, the mother and the two babies, were certain to die unless one child was aborted. What to do? You either abort the one child or you do nothing. But isn't doing nothing doing something? I don't think so. When you determine to do something the outcome is certain but when you do nothing, perhaps because you don't know what to do, there is no determined result and the outcome is uncertain. The karmic effect is entirely different. If you decide that the child must be aborted it will certainly die and even if you are only a party to the decision you will bear a measure of responsibility for the death of that baby. But if you do nothing you are not directly responsible and you never know what might happen. I'll give you an example. You know I love animals. Curled up asleep in my room now are two dogs and outside is my pet cockerel and two tortoises. Ten years ago I still had with me a little terrier called Toby. He was by then pretty old and one day it was obvious he was very poorly. If he ate at all he couldn't keep the food down. So off we went to the vet, an experienced man, who did various tests and then told me that Toby had had it. Although he knew I didn't approve, he offered to 'intervene'. Of course I refused and brought Toby back to the temple. I decided to cancel the things I was supposed to do that week and spend my time caring for Toby and bidding him farewell. That was on the Tuesday. On the Thursday I was just about to feed Oscar, my other dog, with a tempting piece of left-over omelette when Toby suddenly jumped up, snatched it out of my hand and bolted it down. I remember wondering how soon it would be before it came up again. But it didn't because Toby had got better and he went on to enjoy the summer and live another six months. Had I followed the best medical advice, Toby would have been killed but doing nothing, apart from caring for him, the outcome was uncertain and the unexpected was allowed for. I would say, if you can't do something skilful and good, better do nothing.

So far this year our festivals have been well attended and very happy occasions. For the first, Magha Puja, the weather was good enough, for Songkrahn it was pretty good and for Visakha Puja it was utterly brilliant. Now we're looking forward to Asalha Puja, the celebration of the Buddha's first sermon, which this year falls on July 29th and the Vassa, the three month 'Rains Retreat', that begins the following day.

Another little bit of excitement for July is the Snowdon trip. It's being organised for July 15th and will be led by Venerable Manapo. This sponsored walk up Snowdon with meditation at the summit was someone's brainwave for raising funds to help pay off the Wood Cottage debt. The idea is to get as many people as possible walking up Snowdon, meditating together near the summit and then walking back down again; and for others to donate however much they want to to the Wood Cottage appeal for each, or however many they like, of those who successfully complete the walk. It's a long way from here to Snowdon and back and we don't want any tired drivers falling asleep at the wheel after an exhausting day, so a coach has been arranged. At the very least it should be an exhilarating day out with wonderful views, fresh air and meditation, and if it helps the Wood Cottage appeal, so much the better.

I won't be joining the Snowdon trip because at short notice I'm off to Thailand for a few days, hopefully to have a little break in the forest but also to be present at some occasions that are being organised in Bangkok to raise support for the Wood Cottage appeal. I shall be away from July 6th to the 18th.

Looking at the calendar the other day I realised that it's already a year since we began running monthly weekend retreats at Wood Cottage. They run from Friday evening till Sunday afternoon and are all led and taught by Tahn Manapo and I am so pleased to see them so popular. We bought Wood Cottage just over four years ago, it was terribly expensive but the only property nearby and our only chance to expand. Now we wonder how we ever managed without it. Not only do we have a very suitable place for these small retreats but we can easily accommodate guests, and we have a place where we can offer women the chance to train and develop their practice. It's very quiet at Wood Cottage, very lovely and only a short walk from The Forest Hermitage.

Some weeks ago I met a chap in a certain prison I go to who proudly showed me an unusual Buddha Rupa, about two foot high, that a Chinese friend had made for him. His friend, another prisoner, had for several weeks sat patiently folding pieces of paper he'd found around the wing and finally put them together to make this amazing origami Buddha Rupa. I was pleased to hear that when officers had come to do a routine search of the cell they'd been very careful and respectful of it, although I wasn't surprised to hear that they'd been a bit taken aback when they saw what had happened to their precious Request and Complaint forms!

I have just passed the thirtieth anniversary of my involvement in prison chaplaincy. In May 1977 I returned to London with Ven. Ajahn Chah for what was supposed to have been a two month visit. We stayed at the Hampstead Vihara, the very place where I had first found Buddhism, and as it happened the address the Prison Service had for things Buddhist. We hadn't been there long when letters came from Pentonville and Parkhurst Prisons and a phone call from Holloway, all requiring someone to visit their Buddhist prisoners. For the weekend that preceded the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations I took Ajahn Chah to visit my parents and on the train down to Portsmouth I asked him what he thought of my responding to these invitations to the prisons. He replied with one word, 'Go!' So now I've just begun the thirty-first year of my sentence!

This Newsletter is from Ven. Chao Khun Bhavanavitesa (Ajahn Khemadhammo) OBE of

The Forest Hermitage & Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation

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

For Ven. Ajahn Khemadhammo & ANGULIMALA - direct telephone: 01926 624385 mobile: 07941 013319

Email address: Lpkhem@foresthermitage.org.uk

Websites: www.foresthermitage.org.uk & www.angulimala.org.uk

THE BUDDHA-DHAMMA FELLOWSHIP, Reg. Charity No 289913

ANGULIMALA, Reg. Charity No 294939
