

River Dhamma

News & Articles From the Arrow River Forest Hermitage Community

President's Message

—Winston Loh

Welcome to the fall/winter edition of River Dhamma for 2011. The seasons keep turning, time keeps passing, and the community at Arrow River keeps working together to fulfill our existence of sharing the light of Dhamma in our corner of the world. This summer we were blessed with good stewardship from Sou Moua, who spent 4 months at Arrow River. His full hearted presence was appreciated by all, and we wish him all the best on his path.

At our annual AGM in September, we welcomed Stephanie Schmidt and Ed Yesno to our board of directors. It is heartening to see new members of the community giving the gift of service to Arrow River. We are also grateful for Anthea Kyle, who is again serving on the board of directors this year. Many thanks to departing board members Scot Kyle, Marianne Decrescenzo, and Darlene Barrett, who continue to contribute to Arrow River in many other ways.

For the past 6 months, the community had been considering the idea of a new, larger building project that



Above: The Arrow River Pavillion

would incorporate a library, sauna, and living quarters for up to 8 residents. This larger multi-use building was put forward as an alternative to the stand alone library building that we have been raising funds for over the past several years. At our AGM, the community had a good discussion about which project we should proceed with. The main concerns from the community were the high cost of a larger multi-use building, and also how such a building could change the experience of Arrow River, and also the future direction of the community in ways we might not be aware of.

After much discussion, the community decided together to proceed with a library building, with an attached steward's quarters. The advantage to this design is that books will be kept from large temperature fluctuations in the

wintertime. We are aiming to have enough funds to begin construction this coming spring. If there are folks who are wanting to help with a building project this spring/summer, we would be grateful for the help.

<http://www.arrowriver.ca/library/library.html>

The other bit of happy news to share is that Ajahn Punnadhammo marked his 20th year in monastic life on October 12. The community had a nice gathering at the hermitage to mark the occasion, and many people shared heartfelt appreciation for Ajahn Punnadhammo, for his presence, guidance, and teachings over the years. May we continue to be so blessed for many more years. Please enjoy this edition of River Dhamma.

Fall/Winter 2011/2554

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Three Alms Food Bodies

Reflective Stories From *Ajahn Punnadhammo*



Ajahn Punnadhamma Recounts his First Visit to Arrow River, 32 Years Later, and a Few Stories In Between. Above: The oft-snow covered Arrow River Pavillion

The winding road from Wawa delivered him here...

In the summer of 1979 I dropped out of a graduate studies program in European History and took to the road, hitch-hiking my way across the country. You might say it was a strange series of co-incidences that led me to the Arrow River Community Centre and to the Dhamma. But I prefer to think it was kamma.

To begin with, there was the timing. I had decided to leave London, Ontario months before and just kept procrastinating my departure. Then one day in April I was seized with a sudden restlessness and knew I had to go as soon as possible. I tried selling my possessions, and when that took too long, I began giving stuff away. In the end I abandoned a lot of in my apartment and just left.

In the few days remaining, as I told my friends of my plans, three separate individuals gave me the same hitch-hiker's advice: "Don't get stuck at Wawa!" This is a town in Northern Ontario that used to have the reputation of hitch-hiker's hell.

So, I was decidedly uneasy when a week later I found myself riding in a pick-up truck with a guy who was going to, you guessed it, Wawa. Then we spotted a big American car with Massachusetts plates stuck in the ditch and a young woman standing beside it looking quite helpless.

My driver, the Wawa guy, stopped his truck, which was equipped with a winch. I got out, took the end of the cable and crawled in the mud underneath her car and hooked it to the chassis. We soon had her out, and I talked my way into her passenger seat. After all, she was from "away" and was not likely to be stopping at Wawa.

At first she told me she was going to Thunder Bay. That was okay by me. But as we talked on the long ride across the Canadian Shield country, she asked me what I needed most after a week on the road. I replied; "A hot shower." She then said she was actually going to a Buddhist centre near Thunder Bay and maybe I could get a shower there.

Well, long story short, I did go and that evening I sat up late into the night talking with Kema Ananda and decided to come back later in the summer for a meditation retreat. I never looked back. I also never got that shower, and still haven't. (I have a superstitious fear that if we ever do install hot showers at Arrow River, I will take one and leave forever, having got what I came for.)

(Continued on page 3)

From 'Punna' to 'Punnadhammo'

In 1988-89 I did a one year solitary retreat at Arrow River and after that made the decision to seek ordination. A Thai monk I met in Toronto told me about Wat Pah Nanachat, the international monastery of the Ajahn Chah tradition, located near Ubol Ratchathani in NE Thailand. I sold my truck to buy an air ticket and arrived in Thailand in 1990 and headed straight for Ubol.

Thailand, which was to become my home for the next five years, seemed so exotic to me then. One vivid memory; after getting off the bus in Ubol, I sat in an outdoor cafe to get a bite to eat and watched with curiosity an old lady squatting on the pavement with a bunch of small wicker cages, each containing a song-bird. Passersby would pay her a few coins, and then release one of the birds. They would laugh and clap with delight as it flew away. From time to time the old lady would hawk and spit a thick red gob onto the sidewalk. I thought the poor old dear had tuberculosis, of course she was chewing betel.

I remember walking up the cool shady driveway of Wat Pah Nanachat for the first time. It seemed such a haven of tranquillity after the chaotic noise and heat of urban Thailand. Over the next year and a half I went through the three stages of ordination; first as a white-robed pakhaw (anagarika) and then a samenera (novice) finally taking my bhikkhu ordination in February of 1992.

During my novice year, my name was just Punna, after a character from the suttas. (Some might say prophetically, because the original Punna went to teach in the country of the rough hairy



Above: Wat Pah Nanachat near Ubol Ratchthani, North East Thailand

barbarians.) At my bhikkhu ordination by preceptor, a very venerable Thai elder, changed my name on the spot. He said, "What is this monk called? Punna? That's no good. It means 'full of' and people will ask 'what is this monk full of?' We better call him Punnadhammo."

—

Memories on the Mekong

My happiest times in Thailand were spent at our two retreat monasteries, Pu Jon Kom on the Mekong and Tow Dtum on the Burmese border. Tow Dtum especially retains a special place in my memory. It is located in one of the last big patches of unspoiled wilderness, real jungle country full of wildlife. There is a good reason that Buddhist monks have always sought out such places. The benefit for practise is not only the distance from the distractions of the village, but the hint of real danger sharpens and energizes the mind like nothing else.

The most scared I have ever been in my life was one night at Tow Dtum, sleeping in the jungle under a mos-

quito net. I heard something moving around near my place, and it was crashing and breaking the very large bamboos nearby. The only thing I could think of that could do that was a wild elephant. I tried to calm myself by thinking about everything I knew about elephants, which wasn't much. I knew that they are big, really big but that was about the extent of my elephant lore. How well can they see in the dark? Might he just blunder through and squash me like a bug, only later wondering what's this nasty mess on my foot?

Talking to Ajahn Pasanno the next day, he told me it was almost certainly not an elephant. They don't move around much at night, and they are actually quite silent. He thought it was probably a bear, climbing up the bamboos to nibble at the shoots and causing them to crack in the process.

If I'd of known that at the time, I wouldn't have been scared at all! I was used to bears from Canada, and the Thai bear is a smallish thing really.

(Continued pg 4)

Returning to Canada

It was on another trip to Tow Dtum that I got the news that Kema Ananda was sick and likely to die soon, and that he asked me to come back to Canada and take over the guidance of the Arrow River community. After getting permission from my seniors, I began working towards that direction. After about four months in Tow Dtum I found myself one day sitting in the Bangkok airport watching CNN on a big screen. It all seemed so strange, like being on another planet.

I managed to spend some time with Kema in Toronto before he passed on, and then headed up to Arrow River which was buried in snow, the winter of '95-'96 being the hardest in a long time. I must say it was quite a shock to my system which had become acclimatized to the tropics. I also noticed the strange effect of reverse culture shock. I was seeing the Canadians through Asian eyes, and they seemed like big, happy-go-lucky barbarians. Of course, by now I am used to the winter again, and also quite re-barbarized myself!

Thrice Through the Cycle

It is hard to believe that I have been back here now for fifteen years. I feel such a debt of gratitude to all those who have made it possible, my teachers, my supporters, the wonderful local community that has grown up and who come out regularly to listen to me babble about nothing.

Bhikkhus are encouraged to reflect on the fact that their very existence is dependent on the generosity of others. I don't really know if it is scientifically accurate, but I have often heard that the material composing the human body is completely replaced every seven years. If that is so, since everything I consume is a gift of others, I have already gone through three alms-food bodies.

- Ajahn Punnadhammo



Above: The recently new Sala at Wat Pah Nanachat

Advisory: Dhamma Talk Times

This is a kind reminder to those who visit the Arrow River Forest Hermitage for weekly Dhamma Talks of our upcoming schedule:

- *Due to the daylight changing, Dhamma Talks are now being held on Sundays at 2 pm. Please arrive by 1:50 so as to ensure an orderly commencement.*
- *For directions and future schedule adjustments, see our website, www.arrowriver.ca/contact.html*
- *Sharing a ride is encouraged and carpooling from Thunder Bay can be arranged, if enough notice is given.*

Please drive carefully to and from the hermitage, as the roads can get tricky in the winter season.

Winter Book Study, 2012

Anthea Kyle

This is the eighth year that Ajahn Punnadhammo has led a Buddhist Book Study for those who are interested in reading and discussing important works in Theravada Buddhism.

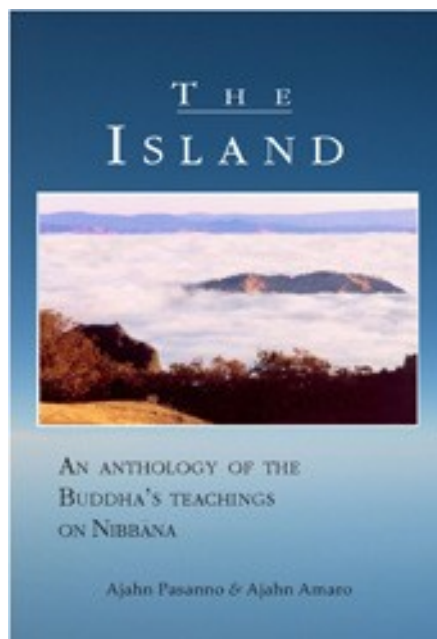
The text this year is *The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbana* by Ajahn Passano and Ajahn Amaro (Abbots of Abhayagiri Monastery in California).

As the title suggests, the book focuses on developing an understanding of Nibbana and follows the path of practice that leads worldlings to the fruit of this path.

The study begins on Tuesday, February 7th and runs for six consecutive Tuesdays till March 13th, from 6:30-8:00 p.m. in the Community Meeting Room at the Brodie Street Library. All

are welcome to attend the book study and as usual, the teachings are freely given.

Since space is limited, if you are interested in attending, please email Anthea Kyle at arrowriverforest@gmail.com to advise us of your intention to join the group.



Please get in touch with Anthea Kyle to reserve your place in the book study group. Space is limited!

arrowriverforest@gmail.com

The Hermitage has ordered extra copies of *The Island*, so please specify if you will need a copy of the text.

A PDF of this book can also be downloaded at:

<http://www.abhayagiri.org/main/book/1788/>

The Three Signs - Of What?

Scot Kyle

The three signs in the Buddha's teachings: **anicca**, **dukkha** and **anatta**, when given the *pali* suffix *ta*, denote the condition or state of being of...

Anniccata: the condition of impermanence, inconstancy or disintegration.

Dukkata: a state of tension, decay, conflict which prevent true satisfaction for the one who clings.

Anattata: a condition of non-self or a fundamental reality of voidness or lack of any abiding or enduring substance or self.

If we think of road signs, there are those guiding you to your destination, ie; "Thunder Bay 200km" and there are those which are more of a warning, as in "bump ahead" or "bridge out". The Buddha's three signs are more akin to the latter road signage than the friendlier guiding or directional signage, in that we ignore them at our peril. They may also be likened to three flags indicating your entrance into a certain territory. The territory of the three flags of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* indicate that you've arrived again in the conditioned realm of *samsara*.

And, like the roadside warning, if one sees the sign at all, one may want to slow down and pay attention. Seeing the signs is of course more than half the battle. Heeding them is perhaps the other half.

*Heedful is the path to the deathless,
Carelessness is the path to death,
The heedful do not die,
the careless are as if already dead.
-Dhammapada*

Seeing the Buddha's signs is not merely a matter of the observation with the eyes of the flesh, as on the highway, but mainly a matter of perception; perception being defined here as data collected through the sense doors as it unites with the consciousness of the sentient being.

We feel the frustration of the sand through our fingers which in the impermanence or fleeing nature of things: *annica*. Some of us have a general feeling too, that there is a kind of vague and pervasive pain inherent in existence: *dukkha*.

And on top of these two, but more obscurely, we may even begin to suspect a kind of hollowness, which penetrates even deeper than the temporal passage of time and its accompanying pain: *anatta*.

If perception is developed enough to allow the realization of these signs at more than an academic level, then, what to do? The answer is startlingly simple. There is nothing to do. These conditions or signs are inextricably tied to the very makeup of *samsara*.

This bit of knowing, that is, that there's nothing to do, could be the demarcation of achieving correct view: a view of reality (internal and external) which doesn't try to "fix up" the external, nor "self improve" or "keep a positive attitude" on the internal. We need something better than merely rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Once we observe that there's an iceberg out there which can destroy our massive creation, then we can stop purchasing a ticket for passage altogether. When doing is eliminated, one is left with one's being.

Now the work begins: sitting, standing, walking and lying down with the presence of breath. You may say that

we have just found another doing, but the difference between doing and being; the proof, is in the practice. Only with a certain measure of renouncing your doings, will you transcend The Buddha's three conditions or signs.

Why cling to further impermanence/**annica**, enduring pain/**dukkha** or the illusion of self and substance/**anatta**, when we should know by now their false rewards?

Peace to all brothers and sisters on The Path

-Scot Kyle

“ We need something better than merely rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Once we observe that there's an iceberg out there which can destroy our massive creation, then we can stop purchasing a ticket for passage altogether.”

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Donation Information

The Arrow River Forest Hermitage community greatly appreciates the generosity of all of our supporters throughout the years and in the future.

In order to continue offering the teachings of the Buddha to those who seek them , we do rely entirely on the generosity of our supporters, along with the funds generated by Ajahn Punnadhammo’s various talks and speaking engagements in Canada and the United States.

All donations towards our annual budget of \$35,000 are received with gratitude, and Canadian residents who donate \$10.00 or more will receive a charitable tax receipt.

Your contribution can be sent to:

Arrow River Forest Hermitage - Treasurer
c/o 634 Hartland Street
Thunder Bay ON P7B 2E6

Please make cheques payable to “Arrow River Forest Hermitage”

See also: <http://arrowriver.ca/danapage.html> for more info

Inquiries regarding donations: treasurer@arrowriver.ca

Arrow River welcomes visitors. Prior notification is required if you would like overnight accommodations. Retreats must be scheduled in advance with Ajahn Punnadhammo. Retreatants are required to abide by the 8 precepts. Guest are to abide by the 5 precepts.