



RIVER DHAMMA

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President's Message

by Leah Thomas

Another summer has passed and many projects have been completed. The most striking change has been the installation of large glass panels and interior red cedar panelling in the sala. It is beautiful!

Ajahn Punnadhammo's Saturday night Dhamma talks have been very well attended. The talks will continue through the winter as long as there is interest.

At our annual general meeting in August, the current board of directors agreed to stay on for another year. In addition, a programming committee has been formed. Thank you Anthea, Tim, Winston, and Lori for volunteering to serve on this committee.

With your support and generosity, Arrow River will continue to operate as a center for long and short term retreats, a home for monastics and lay followers, and as a resource for all who are interested in the Dhamma. The Hermitage is supported solely by freewill donations. There are no set fees for programs or use of the facilities. Offerings to Arrow River can be in the form of service, groceries and supplies, or money. Financial contributions can be sent to: Ian Moores, ARFH Treasurer, Box 79, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, Canada, M3J 1P3. Groceries and supplies can be dropped off with the steward at the center. (For a list of current needs please visit our web site.) Our heartfelt gratitude to all who help maintain Arrow River Forest Hermitage.

For many of us in the north, summer is a time of outward projects and jam-packed activity. We glory in this short season of warmth and sunshine. I find it much more difficult to maintain my meditation practice in the summer. There are so many distractions. I know I should be more consistent and disciplined. Yet I've also learned that it is important not to blame myself or judge myself too harshly when I fail. OK. Just start again. Back in the saddle. With the darkness and cold of winter settling in, I'll again

find my cushion. The benefits of increasing clarity, calmness, and awareness will then make me wonder how I ever let external stimuli lead me away!

May you enjoy peace, good health and contentment. ■

Table of Contents	
President's Message	1
Turning	2
Contemplating No self	3
ARFH Updates	3
Smoke Shadows on Moonlit Snow	4
Retreat Announcement	4
What Meditation is Not	5
They Huffed and Buffed	6

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Arrow River Forest Hermitage welcomes visitors. Prior notification is necessary if you would like overnight accommodations. Retreats must be scheduled in advance with Ajahn Punnadhammo. Guests and retreatants are required to abide by the 8 precepts.

Turning

by Ajahn Punnadhammo

The year is turning, the fall colours are magnificent and we are enjoying a delightful Indian Summer. This has been a good year at the Arrow River Forest Hermitage. We have had a full house most of the time, including several people who did meditation retreats. In the spring, we enjoyed the company of Ajahn Kusalo of New Zealand who stayed with us for a few months and we are going ahead with the open Dhamma talks on Saturday nights, which are starting to catch on. But mostly 2004 will be remembered as a year of construction. In the spring, we built another kuti, making a total of seven places for people to stay. In the fall, we finally finished a project that has been on the wish list for more than twenty years, enclosing the shrine room of the pavilion with proper walls. This job is especially beautiful, with large windows and cedar paneling; it has lost nothing of its rustic charm but has gained warmth, sound-proofing and protection from nuisance animals. It is amazing how quickly the mind adapts to changing circumstances. When we finished the work, we were all delighted with the novelty of having the space finished. But we all noticed how quickly we came to take it for granted. This is the nature of consciousness - the mind is eternally greedy for new objects. The root defilement of craving seeks always for a satisfaction it can never ever have. For good reason, the mind is compared to a restless monkey leaping about in the tree-tops. With meditation, we seek to calm the monkey down. In samatha (tranquility) practice we seek to do this by training the mind to rest quiescent on a single point, the breath or other object. In vipassana (insight) we go further, seeking to end the restlessness altogether by carefully observing each object and seeing that it



is just another, more of the same. In this way, the mind gains dispassion towards the objects and the motive force of the craving gradually subsides. Doing insight meditation properly is not really a matter of technique. It is more like a knack that has to be learnt by doing. It is a twofold process, seeing each object clearly and distinctly just as it arises (choiceless awareness) and letting it go, to subside back into the void from which it came (non-attachment). Easier said than done. The tendency of the mind is to invest some objects with emotional punch. It takes diligence and steadfast courage to

learn to see every mind-state as just a passing state, nothing more nor less. "Yes, yes, but this one is different!" the mind cries again and again, seeking to hold on, to analyze, to wallow. Just see it, note it and let it go. "Move along, move along, nothing to see here." Gaining conscious awareness of our mind-states is a great blessing. To the untrained mind, the parade of states; joy,

grief, anger, lust, self-pity etc. etc. are something like the weather. Sometimes calm, sometimes stormy, sometimes dark and heavy but always uncontrollable, unpredictable and overwhelming. They are a great source of suffering. It does not have to be like that. One very simple home-truth I am always trying to get meditators to see is not to take your mind states so seriously. Even the most powerful and overwhelming is just a mind-state. Void, empty of substance, essenceless. It came from nowhere, is composed of nothing and will sooner or later fade away back to where it came from. How can you let something so utterly ephemeral cause you to suffer? ■

Contemplating No Self

by Maggie Phillips

The great thing about monks is they always inspire one to think and contemplate. I vaguely remember when I first heard about no-self. I was on one hand enthralled and the other quite bewildered. I thought the good monk was dish-ing out some weird concept to baffle and bewilder my mind instead of inducing tranquility, which at the time is what I thought monks should do. So being a fairly good student I set out to conquer the knowledge and knowing of no-self and I must say that after 6 years it seems a rather slow process. I started the journey by using sculpture as a medium. Sitting in front of my lump of clay I would think No-self ...No self....repeating it non-stop, hoping it would induce some kind of revelation. What I got were these figures with empty space and holes in their heads. So then I contemplated the hole in the head and remained somewhat mystified. A tingle, a vision, anything would have been nice, but alas nothing. Now it came upon me one day that nothing might be a something. So laying in bed at night chanting Om-ahum in my head, it came into my mind a glimpse of something I had not seen before. That there were spaces in-between the thoughts and if one watched closely and observed the falling away of thoughts one would be engulfed in a certain kind of space. In the space there was no Maggie, no persona, no thought, no feeling. In truth all I can say is that it was very refreshing. I wish that I could accurately describe it but I cannot. What have I learned ... that observing and paying attention to the mind and its antics is nothing less than fascinating and that the old Chinese proverb is true "better to travel well than to arrive". So have I conquered no-self...no, but a glimpse is a beginning to knowing and evolving is in our nature. As to the good monk I have much to thank him for. He told me once a long time ago that the more I delved into my being the more I would find something clean and beautiful. That when I dropped the things that I thought were me, and examined the truth, good stuff would happen - and so it has. ■



⊗ ARFH Updates ⊗

Website

Our website has been spruced up. Be sure to check it out at: <http://my.tbaytel.net/arfh>

Donations

Donations can be sent to the treasurer at the following address:

Ian Moores
Box 79
4700 Keele St.
Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3

IMPORTANT ▶ All cheques should be payable to: **Arrow River Forest Hermitage.**

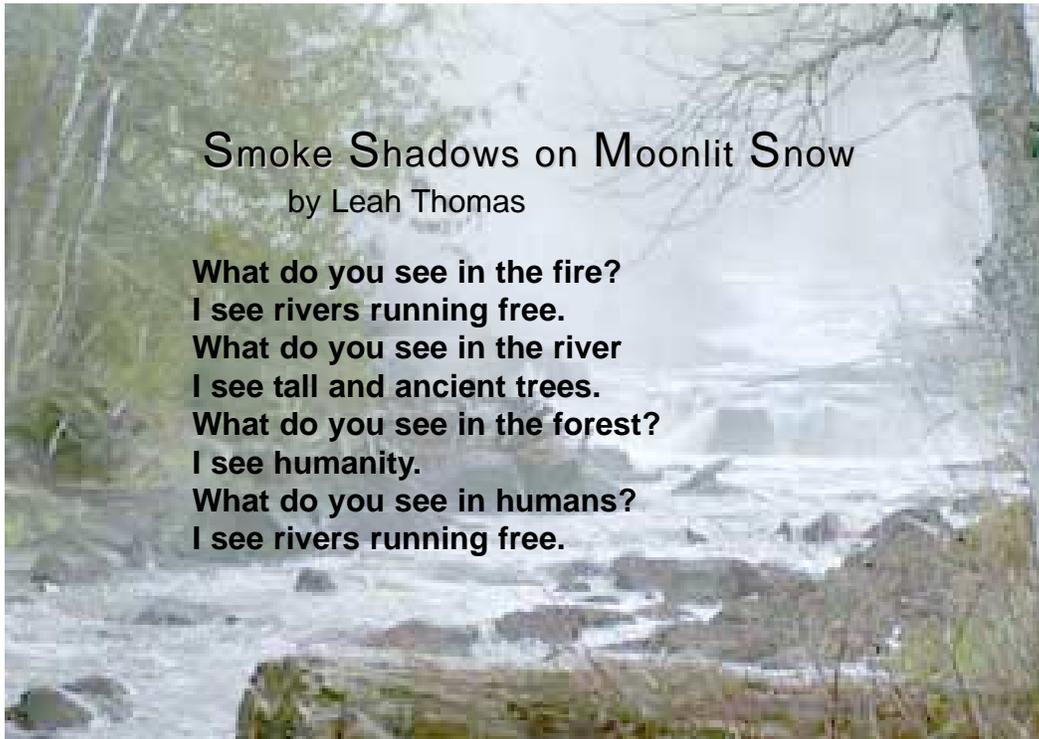
🔔 **NEW** 🔔

Receive River Dhamma By EMAIL

To receive *River Dhamma* in full colour PDF format by email just let us know! Our email address is:

riverdhamma@sympatico.ca

This will allow ARFH to save on the cost of printing and postage.



Smoke Shadows on Moonlit Snow

by Leah Thomas

**What do you see in the fire?
I see rivers running free.
What do you see in the river
I see tall and ancient trees.
What do you see in the forest?
I see humanity.
What do you see in humans?
I see rivers running free.**

Retreat Announcement

"Meditation is like a single stick of wood. Insight (vipassana) is one end of the stick and serenity (samatha) is the other. Insight has to proceed from peace and tranquility..."

To provide an introduction to Tranquillity Meditation, the Hermitage invites interested participants to register for a three day retreat, from

Friday, June 3, 2005, from 6:00 pm to Sunday, June 5, 3:00 pm

Other important details to note:

- The Meditation Weekend is a silent one where meditators will receive instruction and participate in a series of walking and sitting meditations. On Sunday afternoon, meditators will have an opportunity to discuss their meditation practice and experience.
- Food will be prepared on-site for the daily meal. Please bring your own accommodations (tent, sleeping bag, extra blankets) and be mindful of the time of year that might bring a shift in weather.
- There is room for 12 meditators during the Tranquillity Meditation weekend. If you are interested in attending, please complete the **Visitors Form**, which you will find in the *Visiting Arrow River* section of the website. Reviewing the additional information from "what is expected from guests" will help prepare you for your stay.

Once you have submitted the Visitors Form, one of the weekend's organizers will be in touch with you to answer any questions you may have.

How do you know if you are ready for a three day meditation retreat? You might consider the saying "Don't just do something, sit there" as you make your decision.

What Meditation is Not

by Ajahn Punnadhammo

⊗ **M**editation is not any particular technique. Each school and even each teacher of Buddhism has produced techniques of meditation. Dzogchen, Rinzai and Soto, Mahasi and Goenka etc. etc. All these are means to an end, skilful tools to induce the experience of meditation. We should not imagine that mechanically following x-y-z instructions will guarantee x-y-z results. (Nevertheless, we should diligently follow the instructions of our teachers!) Vipassana is a quality of mind, vipassana practice is a skilful method for inducing it, it is not in itself vipassana. To mistake the one for the other is rite-and-ritual clinging. In any case, we should avoid foolish partisanship as to the superiority of our favourite method.

⊗ **M**editation is not (just) a relaxation exercise. It is true that one of the benefits of samadhi is a pleasant abiding here and now, but that is not the final and ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. We should certainly not expect meditation practice to be always pleasant. In the vipassana tradition, they speak a lot about the series of insight knowledges. These include stages such as knowledge of fearfulness and knowledge of disgust, head-on confrontation with the gritty reality of sangsaric existence. This "dark night of the soul" must be crossed to get to the other shore.

⊗ **M**editation is not self psychoanalysis. All too often westerner meditators go to the cushion with a lot of theoretical baggage picked up from popular psychology. Instead of doing the work they are there for, they analyze their neuroses and their childhood traumas. It is important to realize that these things are merely the working out of dukkha in one particular case. The work of meditation is to resolve the issue of dukkha itself, not its particular idiosyncratic manifestations. We should be more interested in process rather than content, in the universal rather than the particular. Over emphasis on one's own "issues" is really a form of ego-clinging, giving undue importance to one's own story and perspective.

⊗ **M**editation is neither suppression nor indulgence. We shouldn't be straining to stifle our thought processes, nor should we indulgently allow day-dreaming and nostalgia. The effort should be to be fully aware of each mental event and then to fully relinquish it to oblivion. Know it and let it go. Both aspects are crucially important.

⊗ **M**editation is not ultimately separate from life. When we sit on the cushion or walk on our favourite path we are creating an artificial and ideal environment for the cultivation of mindfulness, effort, concentration and other wholesome states. This should not be the only time we cultivate them. The formal practice is just that, a formal exercise for the development of meditative mind. It is of little value if we don't take these experiences out into the workaday world.

⊗ **M**editation is not the whole of the path. Right effort, concentration and mindfulness are only three of the eight path factors. Without a solid base in morality the meditation cannot bear the ultimate fruit. Keeping the precepts is the essential preliminary. Right view, also, is of crucial importance. The Buddha taught that nothing was more injurious to liberation than wrong view. Practicing meditation with wrong view is like trying to drive across Canada with a map of Australia. ■

They Huffed and Buffed and a Building Came Up

by Esko Parviainen



Not far from the existing kutis a new one was built this past spring. By all accounts a modest undertaking which in the course of four weeks transformed a truckload of assorted construction materials into a 16' square, plywood clad frame structure. And yet on the last day of construction the four builders stood back to view the results with pride and a sense of accomplishment feeling as if they had just completed erecting the Taj Mahal. Perhaps, the true achievement was not so much the kuti itself, but the fact that four weeks prior a motley crew of four had come together from their individual solitudes. That they brought with them personal attitudes and independent minds, but little by little had managed to cross over and forge a reasonably well functioning team.

In all fairness one can't give total credit to the magnificent seven minus three. Significant credits are also due to the mischievous little devas, so much kin to trolls, elves and leprechauns, whose constant assistance became repeatedly manifested in excessive amounts of bent nails, boards cut too short (in spite of several measurements being taken), bevelling the wrong way, near-miss falling of hammers from rafters and crew members tipping off the ladders. However, each of the aforementioned incidents was attributable to the devas who conveniently served as

the vehicles to detour any personal blame or oversight - cause and effect in reverse mode.

Projects have a continually evolving life of their own and this project was not an exception. The first four to five days witnessed great enthusiasm, easy laughter and jokes, even small oversights such as initially forgetting to frame a window or two became a source of amusement. Midway through the project the construction site was coloured grey even on sunny days, the exuberance had been overtaken by a mundane mood expressed by a four letter word - work. Everything in the frame seemed to be in need of blocking and toenailing; short blocks of wood squeezed everywhere, mainly into the most inconvenient places to provide support for drywalling and sheeting. Not many funny stories were heard at the construction site now. But as the old adage states, "This too will pass", and so did the blocking.

With the further passage of time the crew grew into a team and the spirit around began to resemble that of maturing professionalism... or did it only feel that way because the end was near?

When it was all said and done, including the mandatory photographs and necessary reminiscing about this and that and the muddy service road the four builders quietly drifted away. No, not into the sunset but back to their respective solitudes, attitudes and independence.

The new kuti adorned with the Bodhi leaf shaped attic vents and with other touches stands in the forest blending into its surroundings unobtrusively but invitingly. Three meditators have already experienced and perhaps influenced the spirit of its essence as others will do in days and months to come.

Project's cast of characters

Kuti Designer
Construction Foreman
Blocker 1
Blocker 2
Blocker 3
Cameo Appearances

Leah Thomas
Ajahn Kusalo
Ajahn Punnadhammo
Chad
Esko
Eliza, Jude and Bob
the Builder

P-S. Why is it that foremen never do blocking? Oh, never mind.■