

Dhamma Bell

Issue 2 ❧❧❧ Winter 2007



Newsletter



Dhamma Bell Newsletter

Dhamma Bell Newsletter shares news twice a year of Tathāgata Meditation Center (Nhu' Lai Thiên Viên), which was formed in 1987 as the Vipassanā Meditation Group under the spiritual guidance of the late Sayādawgyi U Silānanda. In 1991, the group founded a meditation center and named it Tathāgata Meditation Center. All are welcome to come to Tathāgata Meditation Center (TMC) and practice Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā meditation.

Editors' Note

EVERYONE AT THE TATHĀGATA MEDITATION CENTER HAS HEARD THE PHRASE *Māhasi Thāthana Yeikthā*. The word “yeikthā” has been translated as “center.” In Burmese, it literally means “pleasant shade.” It has the connotation of “pleasant dwelling place” because of its giving shade and protection from the sun, rain, and wind. Just as during Burma’s hot, tropical summers people use umbrellas as protection from the sun, when Burmese go either to a yeikthā or to a monastery, they know that they will find the kind of shelter there that an umbrella provides. They can hear the *Dhamma*, and they can practice *Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā*.

Here in the West, whenever we go to a meditation center or Dhamma monastery for an hour’s visit, a day’s visit, an hour’s practice, or a day’s practice, we, too, are taking refuge: we are taking refuge from the struggles of our daily life. Those who come to practice at TMC know that this is true.

One of TMC’s weekend retreat regulars has said, “Doing weekend retreats at TMC is like taking mental mini-vacations, with a sleeping space, food, a sitting place, and a walking place always there for me. All I have to do is just be there to do my retreat. Everything is provided for me.” Another weekend regular has said, “When I do weekend retreats regularly it’s like I’m weeding out my mental garden with the practice of mindfulness, paying attention to my thoughts and being aware of my mind and body conditions. My ‘mental weeds’ won’t get a chance to grow into huge things to deal with. Besides, if I practice at home regularly and do weekend retreats regularly, when I do a longer retreat—such as for nine days or fifteen days—I see not only a stronger cultivation of mindfulness, but also a stronger and deeper understanding of the *Dhamma*.”

TMC is always welcoming, always offering “pleasant shade”: a refuge from the struggles of daily life and protection from attachment, aversion, and delusion—for an hour’s visit, for a weekend retreat, for special long-term retreats, and for self-retreats.



Projects at Tathāgata Meditation Center

The following projects have been completed since Issue 1 of *Dhamma Bell*:

- Leveling of the ground for new parking lots
- Expansion of the yogis’ dining hall
- Relocation of the three yogis’ cottages

What has made all of these projects possible is the open-hearted generosity of this Dhamma community—their financial contributions and their contributions of labor.

2007 Special Retreats Held

Since Issue 1 of *Dhamma Bell*, the following special retreats have been held at Tathāgata Meditation Center:

May 5-June 17 A 44-day retreat under the guidance of Sayādawgyi U Pandita

September 3-13 A 14-day retreat under the guidance of Beelin Sayādaw (U Paññadīpa)

November 5-18 A 14-day retreat under the guidance of Sayādaw U Jatila

Also, the annual young adults’ and children’s retreats were held on the following dates:

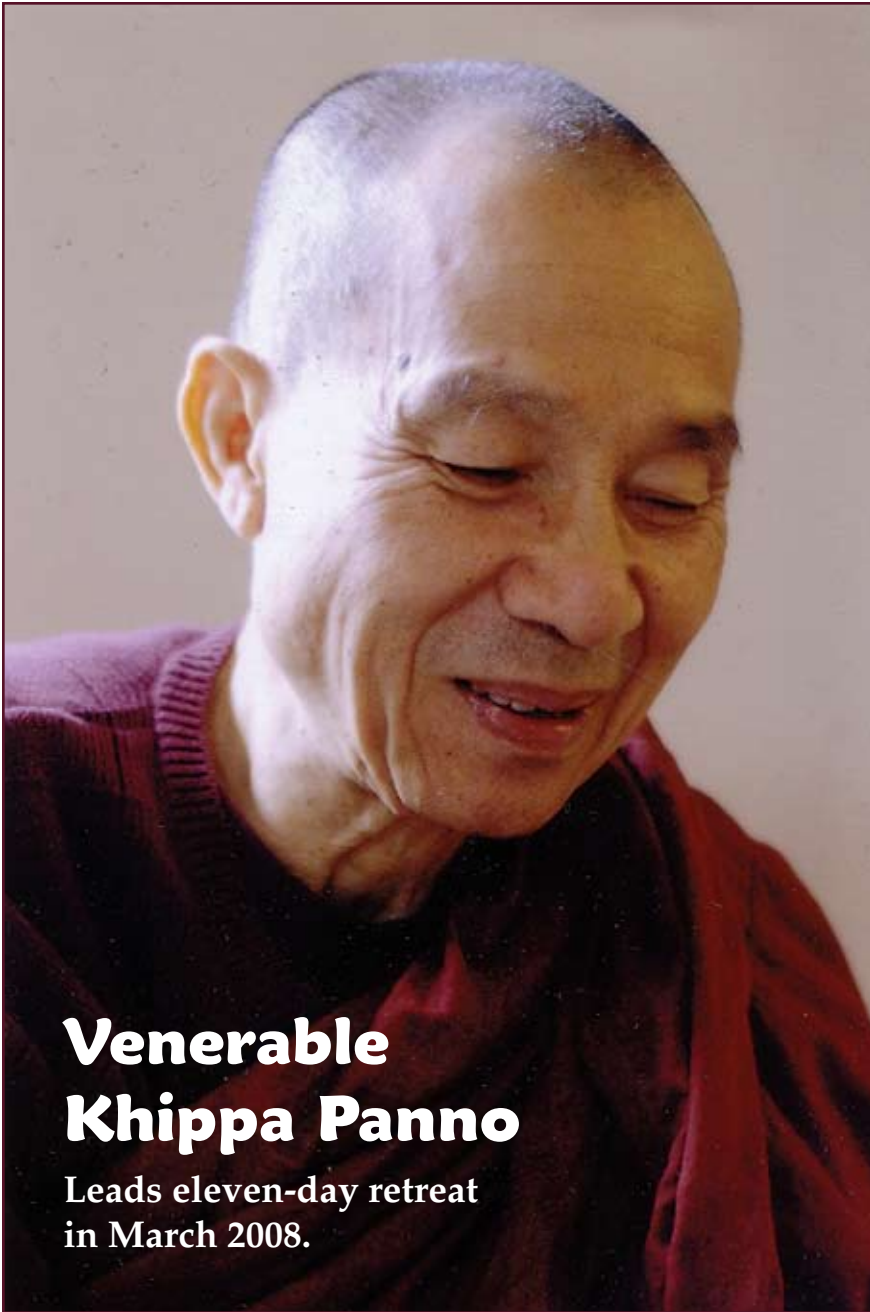
August 11-15 Young Adult retreat

August 16-19 Children’s retreat



Sayalay Mudubhanini

Read her article *What Makes Burma So Special?* on page 6.



Venerable Khippa Panno

Leads eleven-day retreat
in March 2008.



2008 Tentative Schedule of Events

2008 Special Retreat Schedule

March 20–March 30: Eleven-day retreat with Venerable Khippa Panno

May 17–June 29: Forty-four-day retreat with Sayādawgyi U Pandita

September 8–21: Fourteen-day retreat with Beelin Sayādaw (U Paññadīpa)

November 1–22: Twenty-two-day retreat with Sayādaw U Jatila

2008 Young Adult and Children's Retreat Schedule

August 9–13 Young Adult retreat

August 13–17 Children's retreat

2008 Weekend Retreat Schedule

January 5–6, January 19–20

February 2–3, February 23–24

March 8–9

April 12–13, April 26–27

July 5–6, July 19–20

August 2–3, August 23–24

October 4–5, October 18–19

2008 Youth Class Schedule

(9:30A.M. – 2:00P.M.)

January 13, February 17, March 16,

April 6, May 4, July 13, September 7,

October 12, November 23

2008 Events

February 10 Lunar New Year

May 11, Buddha Day

July 20 *Vassa*

August 24 Appreciation Day

October 19 *Kathina*

2008 Beautification Days

March 16, September 7, October 26



Dhamma Bell is a free publication of Tathāgata Meditation Center, which takes sole responsibility for its contents. The volunteer editors for this issue are Theikdi and Maureen O'Brien. The graphic designer is Marianne Wyllie.

Nhu' Lai Thiên Viên Tathāgata Meditation Center

1215 Lucretia Avenue

San Jose, CA 95122

(408) 294-4536 www.Tathagata.org

If you would like additional copies or if you would like an issue sent to someone else as a gift, please let the Tathāgata Meditation Center know. If you would like to help support the ongoing work of the Tathāgata Meditation Center, please feel free to offer dana.

May sati be your friend.

Mettā Sutta

Part 2 Transcribed by Sarah Marks

(from a Dhamma talk given on July 24, 1984, during a 15-day retreat at Lafayette, California by the late Sayādawgyi U Silānanda, adapted for Dhamma Bell)

After giving the qualities that a monk should have—which laypeople can also develop, to a certain extent—the Buddha taught the group of monks who had come to him how to practice loving kindness:

“Then he [a monk] should cultivate his thoughts thus:

‘May all beings be happy and secure. May their minds be contented.

Whatever living beings there may be, feeble or strong; long, stout, or medium; short, small or large; seen or unseen; those dwelling far and those dwelling near; those who are born and those who are yet to be born: may all beings without exception be happy-minded.’

Let none deceive another or despise any person in any place. Let him not wish any harm to another in anger or in ill will.

Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let him cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.

Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world—above, below and across, without any obstruction, without hatred, without enmity.

Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness in loving-kindness. This, they say, is the sublime state in this life.

Not falling into wrong views, virtuous and endowed with First Path Knowledge, he discards attachment to sense desires and truly, he does not come again for conception in a womb.”

IN THIS SUTTA, THE BUDDHA TAUGHT THESE MONKS TO PRACTICE LOVING-KINDNESS IN A DIFFERENT WAY. We can also say, “May all beings be happy.” Just that is also loving-kindness. Or we can be specific, saying specifically which kinds of beings we wish to be happy. According to this sutta, we can practice loving-kindness meditation in four dyads or pairs and three triads or groups of three, sending this thought: may all living beings be blissful in body as well as in mind—or we can just say, “May they be well, happy, and peaceful.”

The four dyads are the following: all living beings that are feeble and all living beings that are strong; all living beings that are seen and all living beings that are unseen (those that we have seen and those that we have not seen); all living beings dwelling far from us and all living beings dwelling near us; all of those who are born as beings and all of those who are yet to be born as beings: May all of these beings, without exception, be well, happy, and peaceful.

The three triads are the following: all living beings that are long (like snakes), that are of medium length, and that are short; all living beings that are large in size (like elephants or whales), that are medium-sized, and that are small in size; all living beings that are stout, or thick and fat, all beings that are medium, and all beings that are thin or lean: May all of these beings, without exception, be well, happy, and peaceful or be blissful in body as well as in mind.

We can practice loving-kindness in this way, according to this sutta. Loving-kindness can be practiced in many ways. What we have been practicing is the method given in the *Visuddhimagga*, that is, expanding the objects little by little until we reach all beings.

The *Mettā Sutta* says, “may all beings without exception be happy-minded”: may all living beings be well, happy and peaceful or may all beings be blissful in body as well as in mind.

In the next verse, “Let none deceive another or despise any person in any



place” is also an expression of loving-kindness. “Let him not wish any harm to another in anger or in ill will” is an expression of loving-kindness, as well: let no one wish harm to another being.

“Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let him cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings” is a very beautiful verse. Just as a mother who has only one child protects that child even at the risk of her own life, so too, must one cultivate mettā or a boundless heart towards all beings. When you practice mettā meditation, you must regard every being as your child—as your only child—to be protected at the risk of your own life.

“Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world—above, below and across, without any obstruction, without hatred, without enmity.” When we practice loving-kindness meditation, we should send these thoughts to pervade the whole world. “[A]bove, below and across”—these thoughts should extend above to the worlds of gods, below to the world of hell, across all of the universe without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity. When we practice loving-kindness meditation, ultimately our thoughts of loving-kindness must pervade all beings without exception, in all the universe, in all places. That is why loving-kindness meditation is called a measureless state or a limitless state: because its object—all beings—is limitless.

“Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness in loving-kindness” shows us when to practice loving-kindness meditation. Whether one stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as one is awake, one should maintain this mindfulness. “This mindfulness” means mindfulness that accompanies loving-kindness. Here actually what is meant is loving-kindness itself. So one should maintain this loving-kindness whether

one stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as one is awake. This means that loving-kindness must be practiced all the time. It can be practiced while you are driving, when you are on a bus, when you are on an airplane, when you are at work. Whatever you are doing, you can practice loving-kindness. This is why the Buddha said that whether one stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as one is awake, one should maintain this mindfulness of loving-kindness.

“This, they say, is the sublime state in this life” means that when you live with loving-kindness, you are living in a sublime state. You are living the Noble life; you are living in the Noble Abiding.

“Not falling into wrong views, virtuous and endowed with First Path Knowledge, he discards attachment to sense desires and truly, he does not come again for conception in a womb.” Loving-kindness meditation can lead us to reach first *jhanā*, second *jhanā*, third *jhanā* and fourth *jhanā* (but not fifth *jhanā*). By making the *jhanas* the basis for *Vipassanā*, one can practice *Vipassanā* meditation and reach attainment. “Not falling into wrong views” here means eradicating wrong views by the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment (*Sotāpanna*), the second stage of enlightenment (*Sakadāgāmi*), and the third stage of enlightenment (*Anāgāmi*), where one can eradicate sense desires once and for all: such a person discards attachment to sense desires and “truly, ... does not come again for conception in a womb.” Such a person will not return to this world of sense pleasures. Or we can take this to mean becoming an *Arahant*. When one becomes an *Arahant* through *Vipassanā* meditation based on loving-kindness, one will not be reborn in any other existence. That is an understanding that we can have of “truly, he does not come again for conception in a womb.”

Loving-kindness meditation by itself can give you happiness. It can lead you to attainment of *jhanās*. If you make loving-kindness meditation or the *jhanās* attained through loving-kindness meditation the basis of *Vipassanā*, then you can attain the first, second, third, and fourth stages of enlightenment. The Buddha’s wish was that we should not be satisfied with just attaining *jhanās* through loving-kindness meditation, but that we should practice *Vipassanā*, making the *jhanās* attained through loving-kindness meditation its basis and becoming Noble Persons or *ariyas*.

This loving-kindness is very highly praised by the Buddha. Once the Buddha

said: “*Bhikkus*, whatever kinds of worldly merit there are, all are not worth one sixteenth part of the heart deliverance of loving-kindness. In shining, in beaming, in radiance, the heart deliverance of loving-kindness far excels them.” When the Buddha said, “[W]hatever kinds of worldly merits there are, all are not worth one sixteenth part of the heart deliverance of loving-kindness,” he meant loving-kindness brought to the stage of *jhanā*.

In another sutta, the Buddha said, “*Bhikkus*, just as clans with many women and few men are readily ruined by robbers and bandits, so too, any *bhikku* who has not maintained in being and who has not made much of the heart deliverance of loving-kindness is readily ruined by non-human beings.” When there are many women and few men in a clan or in a house, that clan or house can be readily ruined by robbers and bandits. In the same way, monks who do not practice loving-kindness meditation can readily be ruined by non-human beings. So if you are afraid of non-human beings, practice loving-kindness.

In yet another sutta, the Buddha said: “*Bhikkus*, if a monk cultivates loving-kindness for as long as a finger-snap, he is called a *bhikku*. He is not destitute of *jhanā* meditation. He carries out the master’s teaching. He responds to advice. He does not eat the country’s alms food in vain. What should be said of those who make much of it?” In this sutta, the Buddha tells the monks that if a monk cultivates loving-kindness for just one second, he is the one who carries out the Buddha’s teaching, who responds to the Buddha’s advice, and he “does not eat the country’s alms food in vain,” “He does not eat the country’s alms food in vain” is very important. Monks are supported by lay people. Monks eat the food offered by laypeople. They must eat in such a way that they do not incur any debt. This is very important, for if they eat the food offered by laypeople heedlessly, then they are said to be in the laypeople’s debt. They will pay this debt in the form of being reborn as a servant in the house of the laypeople, and so on.

What must a monk do in order to not get into laypeople’s debt when offered food? He must do one of two things. The first is that he must eat with reflection. Monks must reflect in this way when they eat: “I eat this food not to beautify myself, not to get strong, not to take pride, but I eat this food so that I may follow the teachings of the Dhamma, so that I can practice meditation.” It is with

this reflection that monks must eat. That is why talking while eating is discouraged among monks. If a monk does not remember to eat with reflection, he must practice loving-kindness towards those who have offered food to him, towards his supporters. If he practices loving-kindness towards them, he is said, “to not eat the country’s alms food in vain.”

Loving-kindness was very much praised by the Buddha, and there are eleven benefits to be gained through the practice of loving-kindness meditation. I think I have talked to you about these benefits in one of my talks. What are the first one or two? You go to sleep with comfort or you go to sleep easily. You sleep comfortably and you get up comfortably. Just these benefits are much for us. Many people find difficulty in going to sleep. If you have difficulty in going to sleep, just practice loving-kindness meditation. Go to sleep with loving-kindness meditation. When you have lain down on the bed, instead of thinking of worries and other things, just practice loving-kindness meditation: “May all beings be well, happy and peaceful; may all beings be well, happy and peaceful.” If you go to bed saying this, you will sleep well and you will get up refreshed. And you will not dream unpleasant dreams or dreadful dreams.

We can see that there are many benefits to practicing loving-kindness meditation, so we should practice loving-kindness meditation as well as *Vipassanā* meditation.

In Buddhist countries, there is the custom of reciting the suttas. Sometimes what happens is that many people, without much thought, think that they are just for recitation. To recite a sutta is enough, they think. But this sutta is not for recitation only. When you recite the *Mettā Sutta*, you practice loving-kindness. Loving-kindness meditation is to be practiced, to be developed. That is why when I have you practice loving-kindness meditation, I ask you to say the sentences however many times you wish. In that way you practice, you develop your loving-kindness. The custom of reciting the *Mettā Sutta* at every ceremony is not bad, but reciting it is not enough. We must not be content with just reciting the sutta. We must really develop loving-kindness by practicing it seriously. ❧❧❧

The late Sayādawgyi U Silānanda, the founding Chief Meditation Teacher of Tathāgata Meditation Center, and former Abbot of the Dhammānanda Vihāra Monastery, is the author of The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Wisdom Publications).

What Makes Burma So Special? *Sayālay Mudubhanini*

AFTER I HAD RETURNED from a long intensive meditation retreat at Sayādawgyi U Pandita's forest retreat center in Burma, *Hse Main Gone*, many questions were asked by family and friends: "Why Burma?" "Why did you have to be so far away?" "Why couldn't you have just stayed here to practice?" "How is it different there from here?" "What makes Burma so special?"

Before answering these questions, I need to look at the causes and conditions that brought me to Burma. When I first came to Tathāgata Meditation Center five years ago for my first *Vipassanā* meditation experience, I was met with immense acceptance, support, generosity, kindness and boundless other qualities that clearly represent the fruits of the *Dhamma*, the fruits of the *practice* of the *Dhamma*. It was clear then, as it is now, that the beings who create this refuge and those who come here to practice do so with clear, pure, and wholesome intentions to gain and to offer the benefits of *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice. Reflecting on these conditions, I am continuously filled with deep gratitude to the TMC *saṅgha*, members, and *Dhamma* community for their boundless support, encouragement and nourishment of the path, which are offered truly for the benefit of all beings.

When I was encouraged to do five days of a *Vipassanā* meditation retreat in 2002, I had never sat for an entire hour before. I had simply never before considered that it was possible. In fact, as an American, I had rarely even sat on the floor. However, the seed was planted and well nourished by my first *Dhamma* friend. Soon I agreed to do the retreat and realized immediately when doing so that although very challenging, this was the path for me. Conditions later ripened and I was ordained by the Venerable Beelin Sayādaw (U Paññādīpa) at TMC. As a nun, I felt the freedom, strong desire, and duty to practice meditation more deeply, and eventually, as planted seeds sprouted and grew, I went to Burma for the first time to attend a three-week retreat. During that visit I was able to visit *Hse Main Gone*, where I met with

many of Panditarama *Dhamma* family members, *saṅgha*, and supporters. One nun mentioned that she had practiced at the forest center for a year. A year??? An entire year? At that time I could hardly wrap my mind around the idea of doing intensive meditation practice for a whole year. "What about weekends?" I asked. Despite the temporary shock, yet another seed had been planted, and it quickly aroused a strong wish to practice more deeply at the forest center.



Nourished by the presence of Sayādawgyi U Pandita, Sayādaw U Thamanay Kyaw, Sayalay Ma Caru and others during the 2005 Special *Vipassanā* Retreat at TMC, the seed of intention to practice at the forest refuge in Burma ripened. Following the youth and young adult retreats of that year, I left for Burma with the intention to practice for three months.

The conditions for practice at the *Hse Main Gone* forest meditation center are indescribable, mostly because it is so well run by the *saṅgha*, staff and volunteers that one may never become aware of how much work is done behind the scenes to support the yogis practicing there. The center, well designed and set in a spacious and peaceful jungle, can support hundreds of yogis and still allow one to experience the seclusion necessary for intensive practice. Initially the infinite sounds of animals, insects and jungle life are quite fascinating. Gradually, such sense experiences facilitate a deep opening to the natural cycles and rhythms of life, an opening to being with things just as they are.

Yogis begin the day at about 3 A.M. A short walking period is followed by an early morning sit and mettā chanting before taking breakfast at dawn. After the morning meal and a short break, yogis return to their practice in the *Dhamma* hall. Lunch is offered after the late morning session. Yogis then spend the rest of the day, aside from an afternoon juice break, following the schedule of alternating sitting and walking meditation periods in the *Dhamma* Hall. They return to their *kutis* at 9 P.M. after evening chanting. Mindfulness practice is to be continuous, during all breaks, mealtimes, and daily activities.

Innumerable acts of selflessness and generosity take place at the center. One example is of the volunteers who awaken at 2:30 A.M. daily to prepare breakfast for the *saṅgha*, sometimes hundreds of yogis, and for the staff and volunteers themselves. After cleaning up, they begin preparing to offer lunch, and later prepare fresh juice for all of the practicing yogis. They work extremely hard and always seem energetic and happy to do so.

Another example of tremendous care is of the supervising nuns and monks. The female and male *dhamma* halls are monitored by nuns and monks who ensure that the conditions are suitable and supportive of the yogis' practice. Even when ill, they work tirelessly to maintain a clean, quiet and well-functioning environment. They, in collaboration with the office staff, will go to great lengths to get yogis whatever they need.

Of utmost importance is the *saṅgha*, the community of *Dhamma* family itself, who sincerely wish and work for the well-being, progress, and benefit of all yogis practicing diligently to purify the mind. The support and guidance of the meditation teachers is extraordinary, and it can be very powerful to reflect upon the profound compassion of these teachers who are on the very same path of awakening, who patiently, very patiently, guide us along this invaluable path that was discovered anew, navigated, and proven to be the way to liberation from all ignorance by the Buddha himself.

The favorable conditions also include the maintenance and upkeep of the environment, which offers practicing yogis safe and supportive accommodations, walking paths, and a clean, quiet and peaceful environment in which to undertake the invaluable trainings of Morality, Concentration, and Wisdom through Satipaṭṭhāna practice.

The list of supportive conditions and wholesome, selfless, and incredibly generous acts goes on and on, and in reflecting upon these conditions, I am again filled with gratitude and joy. As a yogi there, one receives, and receives, and receives. And for all of this, one is asked only to note, to simply be mindful, to let go and to trust in the guidance that is given.

During the rainy season it rains. During the hot season it is hot. The cold showers are cold. These as well as all conditions can be perceived as pleasant, unpleasant or as neutral. As human beings, we will face pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral conditions anywhere. It is extremely rare, however, to meet such conditions in an environment that allow us to practice, only practice, rarely having to do any additional tasks: conditions that allow us to cultivate a deep letting go. When people ask about the heat in Burma, I sincerely reply that it was no bother to me, that the heat of the *kilesas*, defilements, however, really bothered me! One of the biggest lessons is that of letting go each and every moment, of meeting each moment anew just as it is.

Another question that I have been asked is “How did you stay so long?” When the goal of three months was reached, a strong knowing arose. How could I possibly turn away from such wonderful conditions in which to practice? The thinking mind creates our

concepts of long and short, and so on, and make our world of experience feel very small. When we’re in the moment, we can do anything because we’re doing it moment by moment and are not confined to or restricted by the thinking mind. So staying was not an active act of choosing, but a knowing and consequent trust that arose over and over again throughout the three months...six months...and ultimately eighteen months at Hse Main Gone.

We know well that a well-built house will not stand without a solid foundation. In my experience, the conditions at Hse Main Gone—the teachers, staff and volunteers, environment—offered a priceless opportunity to build a foundation of practice. As conditions shifted and as it became time to leave HMG, I observed that the mind was calm and restful. The mind could rest in the truth of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self—in knowing that this is simply how it is now.

Now back at TMC, I am happy to have the opportunity to support others in their practice. With a wealth of gratitude gained from my own experience, it is my hope and intention to support to the best of my ability the devoted yogis who come here to TMC to gain the benefits of insight meditation practice. With this opportunity to share some of my experience, I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to all beings who have made this journey possible. May the benefits and happiness gained from this



practice in this very life, in the past and in the future, be shared with all beings in and from Burma, where the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna still flourishes, and with all beings everywhere. May all beings everywhere come to know the deepest happiness of peace. *Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!* ❧❧❧



Sautéed Butternut Squash

Ingredients

- *A butternut squash (The size depends on how many you are cooking for.)
- Olive oil (The amount of oil depends on how “wet” or “dry” you prefer the dish.)
- 1–2 onions, sliced (depending on the amount of squash)
- Garlic, chopped (The amount of garlic, salt, and turmeric depends on your own taste.)
- Salt (To taste)
- Turmeric (To taste)

*If you don’t have butternut squash, you can use any other hard winter squash.

Preparation

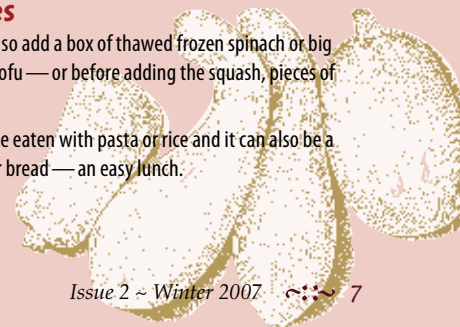
1. Wash and peel squash.
2. Cut the peeled squash into fairly thick rounds. Remove seeds and cut the rounds into smaller pieces.
3. Heat oil, sprinkled with turmeric, in a frying pan over low heat.
4. When the oil is hot, sauté sliced onion and chopped garlic. Sprinkle with salt as the onion and garlic are cooking.
5. Add the cut-up squash to the very lightly browned onion and garlic.
6. Cook, covered, over low to moderate heat, stirring occasionally.

When the squash starts to soften, sprinkle more salt. The cooking time depends on how small the chunks of squash are and how soft you like it (20 minutes or so).

Notes

You can also add a box of thawed frozen spinach or big cubes of tofu — or before adding the squash, pieces of chicken.

This can be eaten with pasta or rice and it can also be a spread for bread — an easy lunch.



Inside:

*Sayādaw U Sīlananda Dhamma talk
Sayālay Mudubhanini Article
2008 Schedules*

Dhamma Thoughts for Yogis

ACCORDING TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA, if we associate with persons of good character, we can become persons of good character; if we associate with persons of bad character, we can become persons of bad character. This is demonstrated in the following story:

Once there were some parrots with a nest in the forest. In the nest, there were two fledglings. Because they were so young, their wings were not yet developed and they could not fly. One day, a storm came through and those two baby parrots fell out of the nest. One fell into an encampment of bandits, who raised this bird and taught it how to speak. They taught it phrases like "Let's steal this." "Let's rob them." "Let's kill them." The bad character of the bandits, which was reflected in these phrases, influenced this parrot.

The other fledgling fell into the grounds of the dwelling place of ascetics. The ascetics raised it and taught it how to speak. All of the phrases that they taught this bird reflected the good character of the ascetics, which was demonstrated by such things as their politeness, their gentleness, and their practice of meditation. The ascetics' good character influenced the thoughts, speech, and deeds of this parrot.

One day, King Pañcala became separated from his entourage while he was out hunting, and came upon the bandits' encampment. When the bandits saw the king approaching, they abandoned their encampment, leaving behind just one guard, along with the parrot.

Exhausted, the king lay down and fell asleep as soon as he entered the bandits' encampment. Seeing the king sleeping there, the parrot said to the guard, "The king is sleeping. Why don't you steal his jewelry and clothes, and kill him?" The guard answered, "This is the king. It isn't proper to rob and kill him." The parrot was upset at hearing this and complained, "You've been saying all along, 'Rob them.' ...Kill them.' Now you're too frightened to rob and kill the king." Half awake, the king heard the conversation. Thinking to himself, "This is not a safe place," he arose and got away from that area.

After escaping from the bandits' encampment, the king arrived at the ascetics' dwelling place. At that time, the ascetics were out foraging for food, and the parrot was alone there. When the parrot saw the king approaching, it said, "Welcome, King. Please rest here. There is clear, icy water that my masters got from a cave. Please help yourself. There is also fresh fruit that my masters have gathered. Please help yourself to some.

Forgive me for not offering them to you myself. I don't have hands, only wings, so I can only tell you where things are." The king said, "Well, I have just heard another parrot, who was so rude and rough, and now I have met you, who is polite and gentle." The parrot replied, "That parrot and I were born of the same parents and were raised in the same nest until we were separated by a storm. He has been influenced by his bandit masters and I have been influenced by my ascetic masters. Because of this, I behave gently and politely."

When rotten meat or fish is wrapped in a fresh leaf, the entire package becomes rotten. When sweet-smelling flowers—like roses or jasmine—are wrapped in a fresh leaf, the entire package becomes sweet-smelling. Likewise, when one associates with noble friends, he or she becomes noble, and when one associate with ignoble friends, he or she becomes ignoble. ☺:~

(A brief excerpt—translated and adapted for Dhamma Bell—from a series of Dhamma talks given at TMC by Beelin Sayadaw (U Paññādīpa), called "Five Ways to Cultivate a Mature and Stable Mind"; this series of talks was later compiled in a book. This excerpt is an editor's translation from the original Burmese)