



# CLEAR MIND



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The Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc. Madison, WI

August 2007

*By effort and heedfulness,  
discipline and self-mastery,  
let the wise one make  
for oneself  
an island which no  
flood can overwhelm.*

Dhammapada 25



## Ajahn Amaro Residential Retreat, November 5-11, 2007

In November, we will welcome the Venerable Ajahn Amaro to Madison to lead a residential retreat at the Christine Center in Willard, WI.

We are very fortunate and excited to be hosting this retreat for a number of reasons: this will be our first longer retreat in a number of years; this will be the first monastic retreat we have ever offered; and Ajahn Amaro has been limiting the amount of time he spends traveling to lead retreats, so we are grateful and appreciative that he has chosen to come to Wisconsin.

This retreat will offer a sense of what it is like to practice in Asia or in a temple environment. In addition to daily instruction and dhamma talks, the retreat will

include chanting, lighting of candles and incense, and living on the eight precepts. For questions about the eight precepts or a monastic retreat, contact Jan at (608)820-0944 or [uppekha@yahoo.com](mailto:uppekha@yahoo.com) (See article inside for more details)

To register complete the form on the insert with this newsletter and mail it as instructed on the form. To discuss special needs or registration contact Julie: [juliehome@tds.net](mailto:juliehome@tds.net) We have limited scholarship funds available. Please contact Laura at (608)238-7376 for details about the scholarship fund and to discuss your situation. We expect this retreat to fill quickly so we encourage you to register early!



Venerable Ajahn Amaro

## Sitting Together as a Spiritual Community, A Residential Retreat, October 12-14, 2007

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Enjoy a beautiful fall weekend of spiritual renewal and connection with old friends and new by the shores of Pine Lake near Westfield, Wisconsin.

This retreat will offer ample opportunities for silent meditation along with the chance to participate in small group dhamma discussions. Other activities may include guided meditations, a silent group walk through the woods and an extended closing circle before Sun-

day lunch. Our Saturday evening dhamma talk will be a joint effort, at a bonfire, with those who wish offering a brief reading, personal reflection, poem, or song.

While this will not be a teacher-led retreat, meditation instruction and check-in opportunities will be available for anyone who would appreciate support for their practice from our two Community Dharma Leaders, Jan Sheppard and Cindy McCallum.

The retreat will be held in noble silence except during structured talking times, which will be optional. To register complete the form on the insert with this newsletter and mail it as instructed on the form.

The board of Madison Vipassana, Inc. hope you will come to the forest for a weekend of community practice and connection!

## Ajahn Amaro at Sunday Night, November 4

Ajahn Amaro will lead and give a dhamma talk at our regular Sunday night meditation at 7pm on November 4, 2007. If you are unable to attend the retreat, this is a wonderful opportunity to benefit from his teaching and ability to explain the Dhamma.



## The Dhamma is Beautiful in the Beginning, Beautiful in the Middle, Beautiful in the End by Jan Sheppard

The phrase that titles this article is something I heard when I first attended a monastic retreat. It is part of the daily morning-chanting recitation of the homage to the Buddha. It stayed with me throughout that retreat and has continued to inspire and comfort me ever since.

An embodied sense of beauty, simplicity, clarity, and wisdom has drawn me to practicing with monastics again and again, so I am very happy that Ajahn Amaro will be leading our November retreat. I hope that others will find a similar sense of purity and release when practicing in a monastic environment.

This sense is not accidental or due to my personal propensities, but is the result of the Buddha's wisdom in outlining the precepts and establishing rules for living in spiritual community. On a monastic retreat we join with the community of monks or nuns to devote ourselves to purifying the mind, and we experience first-hand the safety and good will characterized by a setting where everyone present has undertaken the eight precepts.

I find that being around monks or nuns energizes my own practice. Seeing the evident benefits, to themselves and others,

of their commitment to cultivate kindness, generosity, and wisdom encourages me to put forth that same effort. Now that I have known various monks and nuns over a period of time, I have seen how living in accord with the precepts while also training the mind results in a countenance that is increasingly bright and clear and a manner that is increasingly kind and at ease.

For monks and nuns, the process of training the mind is structured by the rules set down by the Buddha in the *Vinaya*. Just as Ajahn Amaro says in the excerpt republished in this newsletter, the rules establish the best conditions to encourage turning inward, where true freedom is found.

On retreat, following the eight precepts offers lay practitioners an opportunity to establish conditions supportive of turning inward and training the mind. I find a great sense of relief and release when living on the eight precepts. Particularly on longer retreats, when the eight precepts become second nature, it is evident how much they support a sane and healthy lifestyle; and equally evident the ways that my habitual choices and patterns, when not on the eight precepts, contribute to suffering

and delusion.

The eight precepts build upon the basic five precepts. When living in accord with the eight, the precept on refraining from sexual misconduct changes to refraining from all sexual activity. The additional three precepts are: to refrain from eating after noon; to refrain from beautification, adornment, or entertainment; and to refrain from sleeping in high or luxurious places. This last precept is usually interpreted to mean refraining from overindulgence in sleep or from using sleep as just another way to distract the mind. These precepts in addition to the basic five, simplify daily living so that effort and attention can more easily be directed to the purification and training of the mind.

The precept regarding not eating after noon is the one that causes people the most concern or worry. I too was worried about how I would handle not eating after noon, but in fact have found that (cont' p. 4)



## Puja Practice Every Other Monday in September & October

At the November retreat, Ajahn Amaro and his attendant monk will lead us in a 'puja' each morning and evening. Puja consists of chants, taken directly from the Buddha's discourses, in Pali and English.

There will be chanting sheets at the retreat and everyone

will be able to follow along. However, if you would like to get a head start, or are just interested in learning some of the chants, you are invited to attend a practice group that will start in September.

The sessions are open to all, whether or not you plan to attend the retreat. We will

meet from 7 to 8:15 pm on Monday Sept. 3, 17, and Oct. 1, 15, and 29 to learn some of the chants that we will recite each morning and evening with Ajahn Amaro. Among others, we will learn the morning chanting in Pali & English, the evening chanting in English, the three refuges and the 8 precepts in Pali, several chants in English,

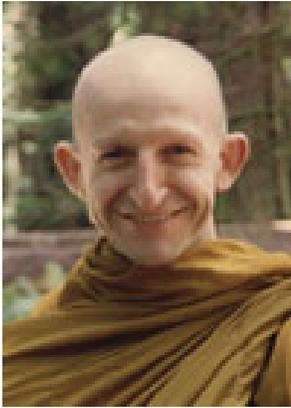
as well as how to request a dhamma talk in Pali.

The sessions will be held at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, WI. Directions are at [www.vipassana.net/weekly](http://www.vipassana.net/weekly) under the description for the Tuesday night meditation.

## The Search for Freedom by Amaro Bhikkhu

### Small Boat, Great Mountain

(entire book available at: <http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/book/138/>)



“Probably like many people, I wrestled at length with the question of freedom in my teens and early twenties. I was a late flower child, having been born in 1956. I just caught the tail end of the good stuff. Through much of my early years, I worshipped the ideal of freedom and longed for the true experience of it. Rather than becoming a bomb-throwing anarchist, though, I became more of a flower-waving, philosophical anarchist. Nevertheless, I took this aspiration to freedom very seriously. And I had a profound intuition that freedom is possible—that there is this potential we have as human beings to be totally free, and that there is something utterly pure, uninhibited, and uninhabitable within us. My experience, however, was one of colliding with endless restrictions and frustrations. First it was getting away from my parents; then it was the law; and then it was not having enough money. I thought that this or that was standing in my way, and if only it wasn't there, I would be free.

I was completely bewildered. No matter how much I tried to be free and unhindered by conventions, forms, and structures (mostly by defying these things), there always seemed to be another layer and another layer

and another layer. I kept meeting up with limitations, and as a result I was constantly feeling frustrated. I was suffering, and I had no idea why.

I left England and began my travels in hopes of finding freedom somewhere, anywhere. I went to Southeast Asia and pursued a Dionysian lifestyle of eat, drink, be merry; sex, drugs, rock and roll; dancing in the moonlight. But inside me was a feeling that I was coming to a desperate crunch; I knew intuitively that this decadent path really was not leading to freedom. So I searched some more.

I took off to the northeast of Thailand, where hardly any Western tourists ever went, and found myself wandering into a forest monastery. It was the branch of Ajahn Chah's monastery where his Western monks lived. It's important to know that the Thai forest tradition is the stiff end of an already narrow orthodoxy; it's the strict observance of an already conservative tradition. What was immediately apparent to me, however, was that these people were living the most bizarrely austere life, yet they were also the most cheerful characters I'd ever met. They were getting up at three o'clock in the morning, eating one meal a day, drinking a cup of tea twice a week, sleeping on thin grass mats, having no sex—definitely no sex—no drugs, alcohol, or rock and roll. Yet they were fully at ease, very friendly, and uncomplicated people. I asked myself, “What have they got to laugh about? How come they are so happy when their lifestyle is so restricted?”

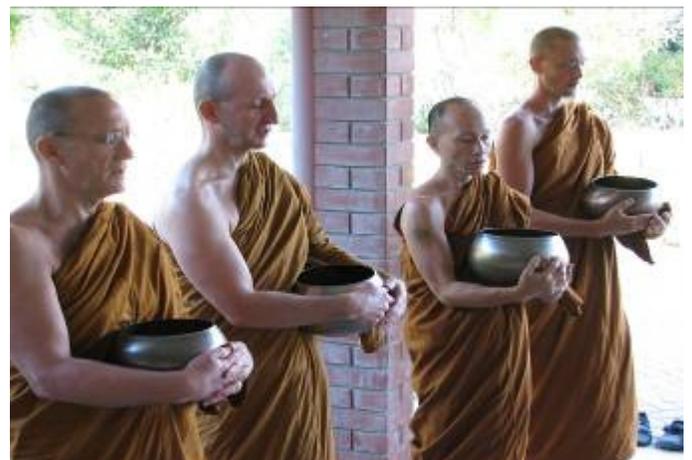
Then I met Ajahn Chah, the teacher. If I'd thought the monks seemed pretty content with their lot, meeting him was

even more striking. Ajahn Chah appeared to be the happiest man in the world. He had been living as a monk in the forest without any sex, music, or drink for 40 years. You would imagine someone would be pretty dried up by then. But here was a man who was totally at ease with life. In fact, he was thoroughly enjoying it, totally content.

The monastery routine was extremely restrained. It was aimed at simplifying all the externals so that one could put one's attention directly, very pointedly at the one place where one can find freedom—in the inner world. So rather than monastery life being a negation of the sense world or a criticism, hatred, or fear of it, the whole style of life was built around simplicity of living. It was the monks' job to place attention on the inner dimension, where one could truly be free. I was so taken by this way of being that, to my amazement, I found myself staying. When I'd showed up, I hadn't thought I would stay for more than three days. I quickly realized that I had been looking for freedom in the wrong place. I remember opening up to myself and chuckling, “How could I

have been so stupid?” It never crossed my mind that freedom could come only from within. Until then, I had been looking for freedom in that which was inherently bounded. My misguided way of finding freedom was by defying conventions, by trying not to be inhibited by the rules of society or the dictates of my personality or the conditioning of my body. I appeared free on the outside, but on the inside I was a prisoner of my beliefs and behaviors. It was only by turning my attention inward that I could discover the freedom that was already there.

I realized that the external forms and structures that we pick up and use (for example, the retreat routines and schedules, the language and jargon of Buddhism, the different meditation techniques) are designed to help us direct our attention to where we are already totally free. It is not like we need to *become* free. It is a matter of discovering that quality of being that is inherently unhindered and unbounded.”



# The Dhamma is Beautiful

(continued from p. 2)

following it is pleasant and conducive to greater ease of well being.

For me (and for others who I have spoken with), it is just fine and not difficult to be on eight precepts. For most of us, our bodies are well nourished and we do not experience much hunger. In fact, it has helped me realize that what I thought was hunger has little to do with a need for food, but is usually thirst, or sleepiness, or boredom, just a desire for distraction. By late afternoon, the habit to expect food will arise for me, but I find that the clear fruit juice that is put out around 5pm is completely sufficient as it tastes wonderful, is incredibly satisfying, and gives a welcome energy boost. Also, the fact that no one else is eating, and that there are no sights or smells of 'dinner' makes it much easier not to eat.

And there are a number of benefits I appreciate about eating only early in the day. I am drawn to the simplicity of eating only at specified times.

I enjoy the experience of knowing that when I look at my plate of food, I am seeing everything I'll eat for the rest of the day. That allows me to assess it in a way that is much harder to do when I'm grabbing a snack here and a meal there throughout the day. To my surprise, the simplicity of seeing it all laid out, eating it, and then being finished with eating until the next morning, is a great relief. It is one less thing to deal with or make decisions about. I feel better, and sleep better because I feel light and comfortable. I notice that after a retreat, when I return to eating throughout the day, I think about eating more often, I feel full and heavy most of the time, and, illogically, the sense of being full seems to encourage me to eat more frequently.

Being on eight precepts means I have to be smarter in how I eat at breakfast and the main meal and be certain to eat a variety of foods while avoiding those that fill me up without any nutritive value. In effect, I have to be intentional in eating

wisely for the true purpose of eating—to nourish and maintain the body!

One practice that has been extremely helpful is to recollect a short chant before I take my first bite of a meal. At the November retreat we will have this chant on cards in the dining hall for those who would like to chant it to themselves before eating:

*Wisely reflecting, I eat this food  
not for fun, not for pleasure,  
not for beautification, not for  
fattening, but only for the main-  
tenance and sustenance of this  
body, for keeping it healthy, for  
living the spiritual life. Thinking  
thus, I will allay hunger without  
overeating, so that I may con-  
tinue to live blamelessly and at  
ease.*

We frequently have strong views about what is necessary for our happiness. The wisdom of the Buddha's teachings, and our own meditation experience, shows us that these views are often incorrect. We have been taught that activity, conversation, and fulfilling our sensual desires are necessary for content-

ment. However, when we let go of what we thought we needed, we discover for ourselves a beauty, purity, lightness, and ease previously unknown to us. By living within rules that may initially seem constraining, we find within ourselves a place that is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end.

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The Newsletter of Madison  
Vipassana, Inc., Madison, WI

This newsletter is published periodically to inform our meditation community of activities and events of interest. This newsletter and other information is also published on our website at: <http://www.vipassana.net>

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