



*Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery*

*Annual Review*

*2022*

*This Document contains the [ratanagiri.org.uk](http://ratanagiri.org.uk) news blogs from 2021, generally published on new moon days, as well as Luang Por Munindo's full moon Dhammapada reflections for this year*

*Those two publications have been interwoven to offer a chronological reading experience.*

*For the latest Dhammapada reflections, please see [ratanagiri.org.uk/teachings/dhammapada-reflections](http://ratanagiri.org.uk/teachings/dhammapada-reflections) where you can also subscribe to receive them via email.*

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## NEW MOON UPDATE: JANUARY 2021

Posted on January 13, 2021

Today, Wednesday 13th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of January 2021. The next *Upasatha* day will be the **Full Moon** which falls on Thursday 28th January.

The doors to our Dhamma Hall vestibule are once more **closed** to visitors. Please be sure to read the **announcements** page for current conditions. If you have any questions or concerns, either email us at [dana@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:dana@ratanagiri.org.uk) or telephone us on 07958 394 796.

In the talk that I gave at the monastery on New Year's Eve I reflected on the theme, Because Some Things Matter More. We all have a sense that some things matter more than others, but how do we confidently engage a contemplation on these matters. In the talk I suggested that it is fundamentally important that we determine to emphasize the cultivation of honesty. When our actions of body and speech are dishonest our minds become deeply disturbed and we can't trust our own judgement.

The Buddha taught that without a wholesome sense of shame and fear of falling into shamelessness, our world disintegrates. In the Pali language, a wholesome sense of shame and fear of falling into shamelessness are referred to as *hiri* and *ottappa*, and the Buddha calls them *lokapala*, or protectors of the world. Whatever beautiful ideas we might entertain in our heads or expound to others, if our behaviour of body and speech is not beautiful, we are susceptible to disintegration - inwardly and outwardly i.e. our psychological and physical worlds are at risk of falling into chaos.

Conversely, with increased honesty comes increased trust. When trust and confidence arise out of our commitment to integrity they will serve to support

clarity of heart and mind. We can expect to feel more ready to meet life's challenges. We may not immediately find all the answers to our deep questions, but we might feel more able to handle the uncertainty without defaulting to simplistic notions. Fundamentalism and extremism - religious or political or any other form - can be understood as reactions to a level of uncertainty that we are not ready to deal with. With the increased ability to trust ourselves that comes with *hiri-ottappa* we are better placed to view the inner and outer chaos, to honestly and mindfully feel how we feel about it, and carefully enquire into the causes of chaos.

None of us know what the future holds. This is not because something is going wrong; pandemics, unrest and conflict are all part of being human. We cannot immunize ourselves against uncertainty, however we can protect and strengthen our spiritual immune systems by heeding the wise teachings of the Buddha.

Our Evening Puja is still live streamed every Saturday at 7pm BST, and you are warmly invited to join us.

With sincere well-wishing,  
Luang Por Munindo

# FULL MOON – LIVING WISELY

Published Thursday, 28 January 2021

*Surrendering oneself to Dhamma  
leads to serene being.  
The wise perpetually delight in the truth  
taught by the Awakened One.*

*Dhammapada v.79*

We are all aware, at least in theory, that self-centredness is a state to be avoided. However, have we ever enquired into just how and why it is so dangerous? That which we call the ‘self’ is not something we are born with. In fact it takes roughly seven years for a human being to develop a stable sense of individuality. And this sense of ‘self’ is not a secure thing. Perhaps it could be described as a dynamic process of patterns of mental and emotional activity. Attempting to find security by focussing on something that is inherently insecure is not at all sensible. Many who have practised meditation know the experience of stillness and serenity that exists even when much of that activity that we think of as ‘me’ has quietened down. They discover that they don’t disappear just because the coarse level of thinking and emoting has ceased. There is still a sense of ‘knowing’. Surely focussing on this ‘knowing’ would be a wiser way to live.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: FEBRUARY 2021

Posted on February 11, 2021

Today, Thursday 11th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of February 2021. The next *Uposatha* day will be the **Full Moon** which falls on Friday 26th February.

Shortly after that next full moon day will be the thirtieth anniversary of my arriving at Harnham. In the first week of March 1991 Tan Vipassi and I arrived here, having spent the winter retreat at Amaravati. As with all new ventures, we had no idea what might lie ahead, but we had faith in the benefits of spiritual community and a strong sense of gratitude for being invited to be part of the project of building this monastery.

Anyone who has been involved in activities here over the years would be aware that the challenges we have faced have been testing. However, the lessons learned and the benefits accrued far outweigh any difficulties. Even now, when much of the world is in chaos, the goodness and generosity of our friends and supporters means our annual winter retreat proceeds relatively uninterrupted. There is so much for which we can feel grateful.

Over recent months I have been reflecting a lot on gratitude. Not so much as a spiritual strategy that I thought I was obliged to engage with, but more out of a sense of it feeling appropriate. And as I did engage with the exercise of consciously dwelling on gratitude, I kept finding more to be grateful for. One of the results of these contemplations is a book called, *In Any Given Moment*. Presently, with the help of Tan Gambhiro, my reflections on gratitude and sustaining a spiritual life are being typeset and should be ready for distribution as an e-pub on the forest sangha website next month.

Although this is winter retreat, and the restrictions resulting from the pandemic mean we are not able to see each other, rest assured you are not forgotten. Our Evening Puja is still live streamed every Saturday at 7pm BST, and you are warmly invited to join us. At the meal time we recite the *anumodana*, and each

full moon a verse from the Dhammapada is sent out with a short contemplation that I hope serves to nourish your own practice of wise reflection.

If you are unsure about restrictions that are in place, please read the announcements page for current conditions. If you have any questions or concerns, either email us at [dana@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:dana@ratanagiri.org.uk) or [sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk) or telephone us on 07958 394 796.

With sincere well-wishing,  
Luang Por Munindo



# FULL MOON – PURIFICATION

Published Friday, 26 February 2021

*Refrain from wrongdoing,  
cultivate that which is good;  
purify the heart.  
This is the Way of the Awakened Ones.*

*Dhammapada v.183*

When we inhibit wrongdoing, we develop a form of strength that comes with self-respect. Without the ability to inhibit unwholesomeness, all the spiritual books we read, the talks we listen to, and even the hours spent meditating, are compromised. It is like cooking healthy organic food in a filthy kitchen. Conversely, when we are skilled in wise restraint, the good efforts that we make are enhanced. Then, with unwholesomeness restrained and goodness developed, we are ready to purify awareness from the troublesome habit of setting up right against wrong, good against evil, self against other. The awareness of the Awakened Ones is free from all compulsive habits of taking sides, and is therefore free from all suffering.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: MARCH 2021

Posted on March 13, 2021

Today, Saturday 13th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of March 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day will be the **Full Moon** which falls on Sunday 28th March.

*These monthly updates are usually prepared by Luang Por Munindo, however since this is the thirtieth anniversary of his arriving here at Harnham, this blog is being overseen by Ajahn Punnyo.*

Last Tuesday on 2nd March, the midday meal at the monastery was sponsored and offered on behalf of the Harnham Buddhist Monastery Trustees, friends and supporters, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Luang Por's abbotship. It was shortly after the end of the annual Winter Retreat, thirty years ago, that a good friend of the sangha, Tulanjit Wijisuriya, drove Luang Por Munindo and Tan Vipassi up from Amaravati to Harnham, where Ajahn Vajiro was waiting to hand over the keys. Ever since then, for three full decades, Luang Por Munindo has been guiding the community.

Before long, on our forest sangha website there will be a memoir available which has recently been written by Luang Por, '*In Any Given Moment*'. It offers insights into his journey over these years and takes us behind the scenes to the New Zealand of the 1950s and 1960s, and then brings us forward via 1970s Australia, and on through SE Asia to Bangkok. This was a time when many other intrepid travellers were doing the same thing, some of them also on their own journeys to Buddhist Monasteries. Eventually arriving in Northumberland, the story is interwoven with many pertinent Dhamma reflections.

Having myself first come to live at Harnham in June 1991, I have observed as Luang Por has resolutely kept the ship afloat for that whole time, through many different seasons. Naturally I feel appreciation and gratitude for all that he has given so generously to the community. Thank you very much Luang Por.

Also, forty years ago around this date (it is thought to be 10th March), Ajahn Sucitto and Anagarika Philip (later to become Ajahn Chandapalo) first arrived at Harnham. Thank you also to them and everyone else who has been part of building and maintaining this spiritual sanctuary.

On the latest Full Moon, Friday 26th February, Luang Por shared a contemplation on the *Ovada Patimokkha* in a talk called, '*Clear and Simple Teachings*'. Shortly after the next Full Moon, on Sunday 28th March, the annual Winter Retreat at the monastery will end.

Having been away for a year supporting my mother in Yorkshire I hope to be able to return to Harnham in a few months. The situation with guests visiting, either for the day or for longer, is still unclear. We ask that anyone interested in visiting please check our announcements page for the latest update.

# FULL MOON – INVITATION

Published Sunday, 28 March 2021

*The Buddha's perfection is complete;  
there is no more work to be done.  
No measure is there for his wisdom;  
no limits are there to be found.  
In what way could he be distracted from truth?*

*Dhammapada v.179*

What good fortune to have access to the teachings offered by the Buddha and the Awakened disciples. What a great blessing to find that we have faith in these teachings; a faith that encourages us to question, to enquire, and not to merely believe. When we merely believe, we abdicate responsibility for the consequences of our unawareness; and surely it is unawareness that is at the very core of all suffering – our own and that of the world. So let's be careful that we are not becoming lost in feeling good just because we believe in the Buddha. Instead of asking, 'Am I a good Buddhist?', perhaps we ought to be asking, 'Is my Buddhist practice helping me hear my heart's deepest doubts and concerns?' And, 'Am I learning to rightly trust myself as I engage those true questions?'

## NEW MOON UPDATE: APRIL 2021

Posted on April 11, 2021

Today, Sunday 11th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of April 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day will be the **Full Moon**, which falls on Monday 26th April.

Winter Retreat for 2021 is over, spring is here, and gradually life at the monastery is entering a somewhat more active mode. Tan Samvaro has already moved to live at Cittaviveka Monastery in West Sussex for one year and Tan Mahesako has taken over as our work master. Tan Sucinno remains as the kitchen overseer and is the go-to person if you have any questions about making food offerings.

As the UK in general inches towards increased openness we are looking at when, and to what degree, we can relax restrictions. We have ongoing consultations with a number of informed friends and supporters and although it is tempting to move faster, on balance, it seems better if we wait a bit longer. Sadly, as was mentioned in the 'Spring Update' message, this means that once more we will not be marking the traditional South and Southeast Asian New Year (*Songkran*).

I am sure this is disappointing for those of you who are used to enjoying the gatherings at the monastery and I apologise if anyone thinks we are being too cautious. It is a balancing act. Our preferences tell us what we like to hear, and if we are not sufficiently alert we are convinced by them. In a talk I gave last Saturday 3rd April called, *Including the Sense of Self*, I attempted to lead a contemplation on the theme of how we relate to our desires. Unfortunately, many Buddhists hold to a view that desire is the cause of suffering. On a conceptual level something like that is true, however in terms of actuality it is clinging to desires - i.e. craving - that causes us suffering, not desire itself. And until we bring mindfulness into the whole body-mind we are unlikely to understand this point. As a result we can be fighting our desires in a

futile effort to be free from them. Wanting to get rid of desire is like wanting to get rid of fire. There is nothing wrong with fire if it is contained in a fireplace. There is nothing wrong with wanting if it is informed by right understanding. Desire is a movement and if we are attentive we can observe that movement. Going for refuge to the Buddha means abiding *as* that observer. From this perspective, even if we desperately want this pandemic to be over, even if we want to be able to visit friends again, the wanting does not have to be a cause for suffering. Pain is one thing; resisting pain is suffering.

Though the monastery is still not open to the public the live-streaming of our Evening Puja is up and running again, 6 nights a week. I hope you will join us.

With well-wishing,

Ajahn Munindo

# FULL MOON – HONESTY

Published Monday, 26 April 2021

*One who transforms old and heedless ways  
into fresh and wholesome acts  
brings light into the world  
like the moon freed from clouds.*

*Dhammapada v.173*

Sometimes we focus inwards, paying attention to the deep causes of discontent. At other times we pay attention outwards to the suffering of the world in which we live. Becoming lost either inwardly or outwardly brings greater imbalance. What we are aiming at is learning how to take full responsibility for our heedless habits. Both inner and outer work can be difficult. It is hard to be honest and admit that it is because our heart is closed that our capacity for caring and discernment is compromised. Living with an open heart is not about being weak or soft; it means simply allowing our native sensitivity to shine through. Certainly we will have to face the risk of feeling hurt; however we learned to close our hearts in the first place because we didn't know how to accurately feel what we feel. Hopefully, by this stage of life we have acquired enough skill in mindfulness, restraint and wise reflection to be better able to allow the hurt and disappointment, to allow the hope and the delight, without losing balance too seriously. Our contribution to the sad and sorry world can be our honesty.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: MAY 2021

Posted on May 11, 2021

Today, Tuesday 11th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of May 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day, which is *Vesakha Puja*, will be the **Full Moon**. This falls on Wednesday 26th May.

Regrettably our monastery is still not open to the public, however the live-streaming of our Evening Puja is up and running again, 6 nights a week. I hope you will join us. For a second year we will not be holding a public event to mark Vesak. There will be a live-streaming of our evening puja.

The community here these days is not as large as it has been though those who are here have been quite active. The process of rebuilding the pond in the memorial garden, along with the surrounding woodwork, has begun. We anticipate it taking quite a while since besides reconstructing the pond, the garden is being redone and the seating around the outdoor shrine.

From Monday May 17th we expect the vestibule to the Dhamma Hall will be open again for anyone who wishes to bring offerings. As it was last year, there is still a requirement for visitors to maintain social distancing and only one individual (or members of one bubble) can be in the vestibule at a time. A full update of measures that will be in place will be available under ANNOUNCEMENTS nearer the time.

Also as part of the process of relaxing restrictions, we are now accepting guests who commit to a stay of a minimum of six weeks. And the period of quarantine is reduced also, depending on how many vaccinations they have or have not had. Further details will soon be available on our Visiting and Staying page of the website. In the meantime, anyone interested either in staying or in taking up monastic training can write to [guestmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:guestmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk)



Tan Mahesako has penciled in a lake work day for later this month. Anyone wanting to participate can contact us via the email address [sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk) and they will be given a precise date. (The weather is quite changeable these days). Also requirements regarding restriction will be explained then.

Thanks to the helpful guidance of Tan Gambhiro, Tan Adicco has recently learned the skill of preparing print-ready files from which small Dhamma booklets can easily be produced. These will be similar to the booklet *Sanity in the Midst of Uncertainty* that was printed in 2018. Probably within a few days a new one titled, *Sitting In The Buddha's Waiting Room*, should be available as an e-book. We will send out an announcement when it has been posted.

A secondary sink and workspace has been placed in the corridor behind the kitchen by Tan Sucinno. He has also built a small storage shed for under the fire escape of Kusala House. Other ongoing projects include his preparing drawings in support of a planning application for developments at the lake. Among other things we hope to be permitted to significantly enlarge the nesting island (see picture below). It is not clear if the island has shrunk due to the lapping of waves or the shrubbery has grown. Either way it would be good to have a bigger island for the wildlife. Anyone who has constructive suggestions about this project can write via [sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk)

Last Saturday I offered a shared contemplation on the theme of Wholesomeness Strengthens the Heart. Oft-times we focus our attention on the ideas we have of the goal of spiritual practice. The Buddha did speak about the goal, however he also spoke a lot about how we find the right kinds of supports to sustain us as we travel towards the goal. Feeding on hope and aspiration that one day we could be free from suffering and abide in a state of imperturbable ease and aliveness, is not sustainable. Indeed, the journey can sometimes be wonderfully rewarding; we feel confident and grateful. At other times it can be confusing and uncomfortable. It requires agility and a willingness to look deeper and to think wider as we encounter the apparent

obstacles to clarity and contentment. I hope that reflection on cultivating wholesomeness proves helpful.

With well-wishing,

Ajahn Munindo

# FULL MOON – A GREAT BEING

Published Wednesday, 26 May 2021

*I say a being is great  
who stands not on this shore,  
nor the other shore,  
nor on any shore at all.  
Such a being is free from all ties.*

*Dhammapada v. 385*

We all like to feel safe and secure. Before his Awakening the Buddha-to-be sought security by setting up conditions in the outer world to suit his convenience. It was only when, at the age of twenty-nine, he actually registered the fact that no matter how comfortable or convenient his outer circumstances might be, none of them could protect him from the inconvenience and discomfort of old age, sickness and death. Henceforth he referred to these three ‘signs’ as heavenly messengers because they generated in him an interest in seeking security in the cultivation of consciousness instead of merely manipulating outer conditions. What he discovered was that so long as we are attempting to find a feeling of safety and security by holding fast to fixed positions or to possessions, we will always be disappointed. The end of disappointment is the end of seeking security in that which is ever changing and therefore inherently insecure.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: JUNE 2021

Posted on June 09, 2021

Today, Wednesday 9th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of June 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day will be the **Full Moon** which falls on Wednesday 25th June.

What a difference a few weeks and a bit of sunshine makes. The clematis are flowering, the birds are singing and several good friends joined us for a thoroughly productive and pleasing lake work day. Their company and their contribution - the first time in over a year - was indeed welcome. Work continues apace on reconstructing the Memorial Garden and Tan Mahesako has been repointing the capping stones on the main Dhamma Hall building. Another lake work day is planned for the end of this month of June. Please check our calendar for up to date information.

As mentioned in the UPDATE on 16th May, the vestibule to our Dhamma Hall is open again and available for anyone wishing to make offerings. The situation with guests staying keeps changing depending on what the government allows and various other variables. It is still important to remember that there are some older and vulnerable people living here on Harnham Hill and this helps inform the decisions that we take. For the latest details please go to the VISITING and STAYING page of this website.

It won't be long before we enter our annual Rains Retreat (*vassa*) and this year Samanera Jotisaro has the good fortune of being able to spend it with the sangha at Amaravati. Bhikkhu Atthadassi, who is usually resident at Amaravati, will be joining us here for that same time. Also expecting to join us before long is Bhikkhu Samacitto, a young German monk presently living at Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand. He and Ajahn Kevali are currently working their way through the complexities arising out of the Covid pandemic and Brexit. Being caught up in wanting things to be straightforward is a source of suffering.

In a talk called Bowing to Suffering that I gave on 29th May, I suggested that we would do well to pay attention to the way we view the struggles of life. When, for example, we feel disappointed, whether it be triggered by apparently burdensome bureaucracy or a workman not turning up when he said he would, that feeling of disappointment is ours to deal with. It does not belong to anyone else. If we fail to pay close attention to these things we can easily become caught in reacting in ways that only increase suffering. If we heed the Buddha's encouragement in these matters we might find that suffering is not a sign that we are failing, rather it could be a message saying, 'pay attention here'. The pain that we experience when we stub our toe is an important message: we need to pay attention otherwise our foot could become infected. The pain is not wrong. When we experience emotional pain, such as disappointment, likewise, it is an important message. Our heart is hurting for a reason and the Buddha pointed out that so long as we ignore such hurt we remain unaware and susceptible to further suffering. Hence his teaching, 'It is through not seeing two things that you remain lost: not seeing suffering and not seeing the cause of suffering.'

Obviously a great many people have been experiencing a lot of suffering lately and my raising this aspect of the Buddha's teaching risks appearing insensitive. On the other hand, if we don't realize now that life is not an endless picnic, then when will we? Thankfully there are times when we can enjoy a nice picnic, however when the picnic is over, are we ready for what comes next? Sooner or later, 'what comes next' will be apparently burdensome bureaucracy, or some other sort of suffering. It is up to us whether we accept responsibility for how we feel and learn from it, or miss the opportunity and fall into blaming. Fortunately we have spiritual teachings that show us in very practical ways how to ready ourselves so as to be able to get this all important message: clinging and getting lost in any experience, joyous or sorrowful, spoils things. The Buddha taught that by understanding just this much, letting go of suffering can happen naturally. So, it is not only to the Buddha image that we bow, suffering also is our teacher.

With well-wishing,  
Luang Por Munindo

# FULL MOON – THE WAY OF WISDOM

Published Thursday, 24 June 2021

*To contemplate life leads to wisdom;  
without contemplation wisdom wanes.  
Recognise how wisdom is cultivated and destroyed,  
and walk the way of increase.*

*Dhammapada v. 282*

It is understandable if we assume that the way to increase ease and contentment is to achieve our goals in life. And to some extent the Buddha wouldn't disagree; however it does depend on the nature of our goals. To aim for fitness and good health is a relatively suitable goal, unless, that is, it means we view the inevitability of old age as something going wrong. The Buddha wanted us to recognize the relative importance of such matters as maintaining physical health. At the same time he wanted us to develop the faculty of wise reflection – or contemplation – to the point where we see that this body is not truly who and what we are. Of course the body is part of our identity and we are responsible for taking care of it. We are also responsible for the state of awareness out of which we live. The most suitable goal in life is the realization of the quality of wisdom that sees beyond the way things merely appear to be, to that which is actually true.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: JULY 2021

Posted on July 09, 2021

Today, Friday 9th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of July 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day will be the **Full Moon** which falls on Saturday 24th July. This will be followed on Sunday 25th July with the beginning of our annual Rains Retreat (*vassa*).

Last month, Monday 21st June, was the fortieth anniversary of the formal beginning of Harnham Buddhist Monastery. That day happened to coincide with the forty-fifth anniversary of my being received into the bhikkhu sangha (*upasampada*) with Ajahn Chah as my Preceptor. It is easy to feel fortunate when I reflect back over the years. It is inspiring to think about the beautiful and daring spirit of the original trustees who were bold enough to initiate this project, and the sincere commitment of all those who have helped build and maintain the fabric of this monastery. Even once the semi-derelict buildings had been made liveable, it took a considerable amount of effort to keep the resident community fed and healthy. That energy and organization was always forthcoming. It is heart-warming to see how in the midst of all the changes that the wider society has been going through, this small traditional Theravada Buddhist monastery has not only survived, it has thrived. For all of this I am deeply grateful.

In an email that I recently received from Luang Por Sumedho he commented, *'Looking back 40 years, it doesn't seem that long ago. I'm very happy to give my blessings and express my gratitude to you, the trustees and supporters of Harnham.'*

On June 17th we marked the hundred and third anniversary of the birth of our teacher, Luang Por Chah. I took the opportunity to offer a talk called Beautiful Emanations which considered the emphasis Luang Por Chah placed on spiritual practice in the context of community. Sometimes the company of others feels supportive. At other times it feels irritating. Such is life. The teachings we have



received encourage us to learn to carefully inhibit the compulsive judging mind and see where, when and how we make things worse by blaming others for our suffering. If we don't like the way someone behaves and that disliking leads on to ill-will, where is the true source of suffering? Is it the behaviour of the other person? Is it the disliking? Or is it the ill-will that we added to the mix? With well-trained attention we can look into these questions for ourselves. The teacher might tell us that it is the clinging to dislike that gives rise to the ill-will and that is where we can find the cause of the problem, however such information alone might not be enough to stop us from generating ill-will. With careful restraint and wise reflection, hopefully we will begin to see the part that we play in creating difficulties. It is this seeing for ourselves that leads to the letting go that Luang Por Chah taught so much about. And it is this letting go that leads to harmonious well-being, inwards and outwards.

As was mentioned in last month's update, after about twenty years some of the wood work surrounding the pond and shrine in the Memorial Garden has deteriorated. Fortunately much of the work of replacing it can be done by Tan Mahesako and Tan Sucinno. Also the front porch to Number Two Cottage was in serious need of repair (see photo above). A significant portion of the structure had become unstable and required attention. Likewise, three of the benches down by the lake have either collapsed or are about to. Twice now I have been sitting outside talking with someone whilst part of the bench they were on collapsed.

Thankfully the sangha here on the hill is more healthy than the rotting woodwork. At last Ajahn Punnyo has been able to return to Harnham after having been away for almost sixteen months. Tan Atthadassi arrived safely from Amaravati to spend the Rains Retreat here. Tan Samacitto is due to arrive shortly from Wat Nanachat. We expect his stay to be considerably longer.

Talking about Rains Retreat and dates, Tan Adicco has been exercising his coding skills and created a smartphone app version of our annual forestsangha calendar. It is not a full-on dynamic app with all the bells and whistles some

users might enjoy, however it does provide easy access to moon days, Dhamma quotes and a catalogue of beautiful photos. If you try it and have difficulty, please do let us know. Or if you try it and appreciate it, you are also welcome to let us know. Similar such apps might be developed if they are found to be useful.

The next Lake Workday is scheduled for Sunday 25th July. Because we are still limiting the number of people who can be here at one time, please either telephone Tan Mahesako on 07943 699 228, or email him at [workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk) if you wish to join us. And note that there might be a last-minute cancellation if it turns out to be rainy on that day, as it did last time.

With well-wishing,  
Luang Por Munindo

# FULL MOON – SHAPING LIFE

Published Saturday, 24 July 2021

*Just as a fletcher shapes an arrow,  
so the wise develop the mind,  
so excitable, uncertain  
and difficult to control.*

*Dhammapada v. 33*

If we wish to develop our minds, sooner or later we need to recognize that we are responsible for the views that we have on life – the views that we hold and how we hold them. It is our views and whether or not we are attached to them that determine our actions. Within us there is a potential to change our views and to change our relationship to them. Perhaps at an early stage of life we assimilated the view that we deserve all the safety and convenience of living in an affluent society, unaware of the many sacrifices others have made so we can enjoy these conditions. Then, if circumstances change and we no longer have all the freedoms that we had grown used to, that unacknowledged view causes us to feel deprived and we become indignant. Without careful, skilful investigation into the views we hold, our life is shaped mainly by external influences. In his teachings the Buddha highlighted the possibility for training our attention so we are not mere victims of external influences. He wanted us to truly take control of our lives by letting go of attachment to views. If we are not attached to views we are in a position to be able to assess whether or not they serve to increase well-being.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: AUGUST 2021

Posted on August 08, 2021

Today, Sunday 8th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of August 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day will be the **Full Moon** which falls on Monday 23rd of August.

Gradually reopening the monastery feels like the sun beginning to emerge after a long winter. It has been wonderful to once again welcome friends and supporters bringing food offerings in the morning. Also it is good to see Kusala House with more than one or two guests. We are still being very cautious and ask that anyone wanting to visit either telephone or email first to let us know so we can make preparations.

We have settled into our annual Rains Retreat with seven bhikkhus and one anagarika (see enlarged photo). Tan Samacitto from Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand arrived as planned and has safely completed his quarantine. The changeable weather hasn't stopped us from attending to various maintenance projects around the monastery. The forecast rain did mean we changed the date for the July Lake Workday. So far it seems the August Lake Workday will take place on Sunday, 29th August but, as usual, please contact us to let us know if you plan to participate. Either telephone Tan Mahesako on 07943 699 228, or email him at [workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk)

In a talk I gave last month called Self Caring and Self Obsessing I attempted to address the tricky topic of selfishness. It isn't only the pressures brought on by the pandemic that have caused the social upheavals that we are witnessing. Blaming the pandemic, or blaming the politicians, or blaming technology for the chaos can be tempting, but if we are honest we will admit that blaming doesn't particularly help. Identifying the causes for the chaos is obviously appropriate - it would be strange if we weren't interested in understanding why so many people are feeling anxious and suffering from a collective identity crisis.

What the Buddha recommended when we are faced with suffering, is to invest in building up our inner resources so we are not overwhelmed by outer conditions. Selfishness is not necessarily a sign that people are bad; it can be a sign they have not received the right sort of education. Education regarding management of material resources and how to improve external comfort and convenience has never been more readily available. However, education regarding the dynamics of consciousness, which has traditionally been the domain of religion, doesn't seem to receive so much attention these days. In that talk I suggested that part of the function of religion has been to help protect people from becoming self-obsessed. In the case of Buddhist teachings, the reason we are encouraged to Go For Refuge to the Buddha is so the unruly tendencies of our unawakened sense of self are contained. Going For Refuge to the Buddha is not merely aligning ourselves with a belief system; it is a whole body-mind training in integrity, mindfulness, skilful restraint and wise-reflection. This training helps us build up a reserve of inner aliveness and self-respect. From this vantage point we can ask ourselves such challenging questions as, 'what is the true cause of self-obsession?' We can investigate in our own case, where, when and how is it that we focus on our own well-being and ignore others? We can ask ourselves why we cling so tightly to our own views and opinions and are quick to reject those of others?

When we bow down to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, we are surrendering our resistance to the suffering of life and instead asking what is the lesson to be learned here? If we stub our toe it is right that we should feel pain. It means we pay attention to the wound and take care of it. Likewise, when our heart is hurting it is a message saying, 'pay attention here': learning how to stop saying it shouldn't be this way and instead offering our heart the caring attention it is calling for. Such intentional caring can help sustain us in the midst of uncertainty, at the same time it might mean we are inspired to pay kindly attention to others.

There is so much more that might be said on this subject but if I continue this newsletter could become an essay.

With well-wishing,  
Luang Por Munindo

# FULL MOON – EMPATHY

Published Monday, 23 August 2021

*Having empathy for others  
one sees that all beings are afraid  
of punishment and death.  
Knowing this, one does not attack or cause attack.*

*Dhammapada v.129*

If we have the misfortune of being on the receiving end of somebody else's ill will, we know how painful that can be. And maybe we find ourselves asking, 'why would anybody want to be so unkind?' In this Dhammapada verse the Buddha says attacking others won't occur when there is empathy. In other words, it is when people are lost in self-obsession that they project their pain outwards. In Buddhist teachings we are encouraged to cultivate empathy in two different ways: karuna is to feel empathy with others in the context of suffering; mudita is to feel empathy in the context of joy. Karuna, or compassion, means being alive and aware enough so that when we witness those who are suffering we are able to meet them there, without judgement, without closing our hearts. Mudita, or empathetic joy, means being mindful and restrained enough so that when we are with those who are doing well, we simply share in their delight.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 2021

Posted on September 06, 2021

Today, Monday 6th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of September 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day will be the **Full Moon** which falls on Tuesday 21st September.

Since we announced that the vestibule is open to receive offerings of cooked food in the morning there seems to have been a stream of friends and supporters taking an opportunity to do just that. Now, since the **Full Moon** day of Tuesday 24th September, the Dhamma Hall has been open between **10am and 1pm each day except Mondays**. Although we are still being careful and continue to observe restrictions, we hope this process of gradually making the monastery more available will prove supportive. Please see the latest Announcement for details. Many people have struggled a great deal over the past year and a half and we would all prefer to be able to return to how things used to be, but the signs suggest it is wise to remain cautious.

Recently I gave a talk titled *The Option Addiction* in which I reflected on a teaching I received many years ago when I was a junior monk living in Thailand. If my memory is correct I met the monk who offered this teaching on only one occasion. What stood out then, and has stayed with me, was the way he spoke about wisdom. The particular point he made was that when there is wisdom we are able to see both sides of the situation we are in. When we lack wisdom, when we see only according to our preferences, we see only a portion of the picture and as a result our actions are partial.

Dhammapada verse 290 says, *It is wisdom that leads to letting go of a lesser happiness in pursuit of a happiness which is greater*. From the perspective of 'my way', I am inclined to settle for the lesser happiness of simply having things the way I want, and not having things the way I don't want. For example, I don't want the summer to disappear so quickly, I want it to last longer. Since I don't have control over the weather it is wise to let go of my preference. But letting go of



'my way', letting go of our preferences, is not so easy. Thankfully we have the wise teachings of the Buddha and his disciples to guide us. This is why we have the encouragement to cultivate the five spiritual faculties – faith, energy, mindfulness, collectedness and discernment. Externally we have the physical faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling and so on, and without them life would be very difficult. Likewise, if the inner spiritual faculties are not functioning, life can be very difficult. So long as these potentials remain undeveloped the idea of letting go of our preferences appears thoroughly unattractive. Once they are even somewhat developed, letting go of 'my way' can begin to appear as the logical and intelligent way to approach life. It is not possible that everyone has things the way they want all the time, so learning to be able to let go is actually essential.

Now back to everyday matters... We recently posted an announcement regarding a kitchen manager for here at Harnham. If you know anyone who might be interested feel free to let them know.

Later this month there will be another Lake Workday. Presently it is planned for Saturday 25th September. If you intend to participate kindly contact us:

e: [workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk)

t: 07943 699 228

With good wishes,

Luang Por Munindo

# FULL MOON – ONE-UPMANSHIP

Published Tuesday, 21 September 2021

*Victory leads to hatred,  
for the defeated suffer.  
The peaceful live happily,  
beyond victory and defeat.*

*Dhammapada v.201*

Is there a way of wanting to win without being devastated when we don't win? Can we strive to achieve our goals without becoming lost in striving? Generally, we tend to think that to succeed we must banish all thoughts of losing, and focus solely on winning. This is to ignore the power of mindfulness and wise reflection. If we train our faculties skillfully, it might be possible to be aware of the impulse to want to win, and also be aware of the awareness itself. There isn't only wanting to win, there is also the knowing that we want to win. Cultivating this conscious knowing is one aspect of going for refuge to the Buddha. Such a perspective has the power to protect us from falling into playing the embarrassing game of one-upmanship.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: 6TH OCTOBER 2021

Posted on October 06, 2021

Today, Wednesday 6th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of October 2021. The next *Uposatha* Day will be the **Full Moon** and falls on Thursday 21st October.

Only two weeks remain until the end of this year's Rains Retreat. The reconstruction work on the Memorial Garden has been finished (see photo of Tan Sucinno). *Anumodana* to all those who contributed. A few other minor projects are gradually being completed as we enter autumn and the rhythm of activity slows down.

We are glad to see old and new friends and supporters taking the opportunity to visit the monastery conservatory around the meal offering time - 10.00am until 10.30am - and that some are taking the opportunity to use the Dhamma Hall between 10.00 and 13.00. Please see the latest Announcement for restrictions and relevant details.

On Thursday 16th September I was happy to have the opportunity to offer a talk to the residents and guests gathered at the monastery called So What Have I Learnt in 70 Years. I enjoyed the chance to reflect on the journey of my life thus far and ponder on how we learn from the ups and downs we encounter. It is natural to hope for positive, agreeable experiences, and when we have them we can rightly feel grateful. However, at some stage we need to learn that in fact the negative and disagreeable experiences have a lot to teach us. Of course it would be unwise to dismiss the moments of joy, however it is wise to remember to not be lost in them. When we allow ourselves to be lost in joy we make it inevitable that we will be lost in sorrow. When we allow ourselves to be lost in happiness we create conditions for ourselves to be lost in unhappiness. The trick is to learn how to meet life as we live it without being lost in it. I am enormously grateful for the opportunities this life has given me to learn to be not quite so lost.

Regarding the Kathina gathering, after consideration it has been decided that it is still too early to open the monastery for such an event. If you would like to receive a copy of our annual Forest Sangha calendar, they are now available to collect from the monastery.

Some of you might be aware that for many years now there has been a group of friends and supporters of the monastery, mostly from the Sri Lankan community, regularly contributing to a Sponsored Breakfast Scheme. This scheme, which covers the costs associated with the daily breakfast cooked at the monastery for the resident community and overnight guests, is now open and available for anyone to participate. If you are interested in being involved please see our Google Form at [bf.ratanagiri.org.uk](http://bf.ratanagiri.org.uk).

Also you might perhaps have noticed that we recently posted an announcement for a new kitchen manager here at Harnham. If you know anyone who might be interested, feel free to let them know. We are also still open to applicants to our winter retreat support team.

Later this month there will be another Lake Workday. Presently it is planned for Saturday 23rd October. If you intend to participate kindly contact us:

e: [workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk](mailto:workmaster@ratanagiri.org.uk)

t: 07943 699 228

With good wishes,

Luang Por Munindo

# FULL MOON – CRITICISING

Published Thursday, 21 October 2021

*Those who always look for  
the faults of others -  
their corruptions increase  
and they are far from freedom.*

*Dhammapada v.253*

Although we don't realise it at the time, when we heedlessly dwell on finding fault with others, we create obstructions within our own field of awareness. Part of us might feel good as we compulsively criticise, but we fail to see that in so doing we distance ourselves from Dhamma. Of course there is a time and place for criticism offered out of concern for the benefit of others, but here we are talking about criticising with malice. If we are keen to develop clarity and understanding, we need to reflect on the consequences of fault-finding and inhibit the impulse. It can feel tempting to scratch an itchy wound that is healing, but we know that following that impulse makes things worse.

## NEW MOON UPDATE: 4TH NOVEMBER 2021

Posted on November 04, 2021

Today, Thursday 4th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of November 2021. The next *Upasatha* Day will be the **Full Moon** and falls on Friday 19th November.

The community recently observed another week of monastic retreat and is now noticeably becoming more active. With increased possibilities for travel come more exchanges between monasteries. Shortly two of Harnham's resident community will travel down to Amaravati and join in the Precept Ceremony (*Upasampada*) of Samanera Jotisaro. The then Bhikkhu Jotisaro will return towards the end of this month. Tan Atthadassi, who has been here for the Rains Retreat, will return to Amaravati. In December Tan Tikkhanyano will travel to Amaravati where he will spend the Winter Retreat and Tan Mahesako will travel to Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand where he will stay for about one year.

For those who wish to bring food and requisites to offer in the morning, please note that in keeping with the clocks going back our mealtime is now 11am, not 11.30am.

Change and Agility was the theme of my talk last Saturday. Change is happening constantly, however if we fail to pay proper attention we can assume that some aspects of life are really stable. It is true, some aspects are apparently stable, or somewhat stable, but they are not truly stable. And when they display their instability we can be caught unawares. Much of the Buddha's teaching is about skillfully exercising our inner faculties so as to not be caught unawares. This can mean developing agility in areas where we might normally have been inflexible. Such as clinging to fixed views about ourselves and about others. As children we held fast to mummy and daddy's hands and it made us feel safe. As adults we inspect our efforts to find safety and security and hopefully see that clinging contradicts reality. We do need to be able to hold firm, just not too tightly. If we develop this kind of skill then we won't limit ourselves with such

beliefs as 'I am just this sort of person and can never change'. Or, 'That person is like that and they will never change'. 'Humanity is like this and will never change'. Such limiting views get in the way of our ability to accord with change. Letting go of fixed views supports freedom from limitations.

With good wishes,

Luang Por Munindo

# FULL MOON – HABITS OF CLINGING

Published Friday, 19 November 2021

*Fostering habits  
such as craving and clinging  
is like fertilizing noxious weeds.*

*Dhammapada v.335*

When, for the first time, small children are dropped off at school, they often feel upset as their parents leave. They don't understand that in a few hours time mum or dad will be back to pick them up again. Eventually those children learn that their parents have not disappeared forever and so are no longer upset. As adults, when we catch ourselves misperceiving a situation and becoming caught in clinging, it is wise to take note and register how clinging causes suffering. On one level it can feel suitable to cling to those things that we hold dear. It is a most natural thing for parents to feel caring towards their children. But what happens when the caring is combined with clinging? The child is over-protected and fails to learn. Or, what happens when we are praised by someone we respect and we cling to the agreeable feelings that arise? It can feel fine at the time, but what we fail to see is how, when we are spoken to rudely and painful feelings arise, we can't help but cling to disagreeable feelings. The two go together.



# NEW MOON NEWSLETTER: DECEMBER 2021

Posted on December 04, 2021

Today, Saturday 4th, is the **New Moon** day for the month of December 2021. The next Uposatha Day will be the **Full Moon** and falls on Sunday 19th December.

On behalf of the community here at Harnham I wish to express gratitude for the many offerings of concern and support over the past few days. Having heard about the damage wrecked by the recent storm that passed through Northumberland many of our friends and supporters were worried. As it happened, we were without electricity for about five and a half days, but other than that we were not too seriously affected. Sadly there was considerable damage to Bolam Lake Park, however our own lake and woodland lost only one tree. Thanks to a petrol-fuelled generator most the food in the freezers and fridges was saved. The enforced simplification provided a useful opportunity to reflect on the struggles that so many human beings suffer and the extraordinary degree of convenience we take for granted.

A few days before the storm Tan Jotisaro Bhikkhu (see photo) returned to Harnham having spent the Rains Retreat at Amaravati. He received his *upasampada* there on Sunday 21st November. On Sunday evening 28th November Ben (see photo) took the eight precepts of an anagarika here (by candle light in the Reception Room where there is a wood-burning stove).

The talk I gave on that occasion is titled **Protected and Strengthened**. It was an attempt to highlight the importance the Buddha placed on the qualities of *Hiri* and *Ottappa*. *Hiri* refers to a wholesome sense of shame and *Ottappa* means a sense of fear of being judged for our wrong-doings. For many of us these are tricky topics to contemplate as they readily trigger self-hatred and self-condemnation. Obviously this is not what the Buddha was aiming at. He referred to these two psychological phenomena as *Lokapala*, or protectors of the

world. And here we should be thinking of both our inner and outer worlds. When these qualities are absent our worlds fall into chaos. If they are well-developed they serve to protect us from disintegration.

In a few weeks the year 2021 will end and 2022 will begin. Regrettably it appears still too risky to open the monastery for general public use. We are taking a limited number of guests. And we do plan to hold our usual midnight Forgiveness and Renewal ceremony. This year the plan is for it to be live-streamed and an announcement confirming this (or otherwise) will be issued shortly. Likewise the traditional taking of the Five Precepts and recitation of the *Parittas* at 3pm on the 1st January will (hopefully) be live-streamed.

With good wishes,

Ajahn Munindo

# FULL MOON – CLEARER PERSPECTIVE

Published Sunday, 19 December 2021

*As a beautiful flower  
without fragrance is disappointing,  
so are wise words  
without right action.*

*Dhammapada v.51*

It is easy to utter wise words, but not always easy to act wisely. Before we can act wisely we need to have our hearts and minds aligned with that which is true, that which is real. If we are honest, we will likely admit that a lot of the time the internal verbiage we have happening in our heads is stories we keep telling ourselves: I am this sort of person, I am that sort of person. To act truly wisely and effectively that compulsive story-telling needs to be undermined. Not necessarily stopped, because such mental phenomena can have momentum that takes time before ceasing. In the meanwhile we can exercise conscious inner listening. We can discipline our attention, so instead of *sort of* listening, we can make an effort to *really* listen. Try sitting alone in a chair, not formally meditate, and simply listen; not take sides for or against anything that arises. When we take sides *for*, then that which we are *against* can be emboldened. Neither taking sides for nor against is not abdication of responsibility, it is a way of expanding our sense of awareness so we have a clearer perspective on habits of conditioned thinking and feeling.