Copper Isle Miles

Ajahn Amaro

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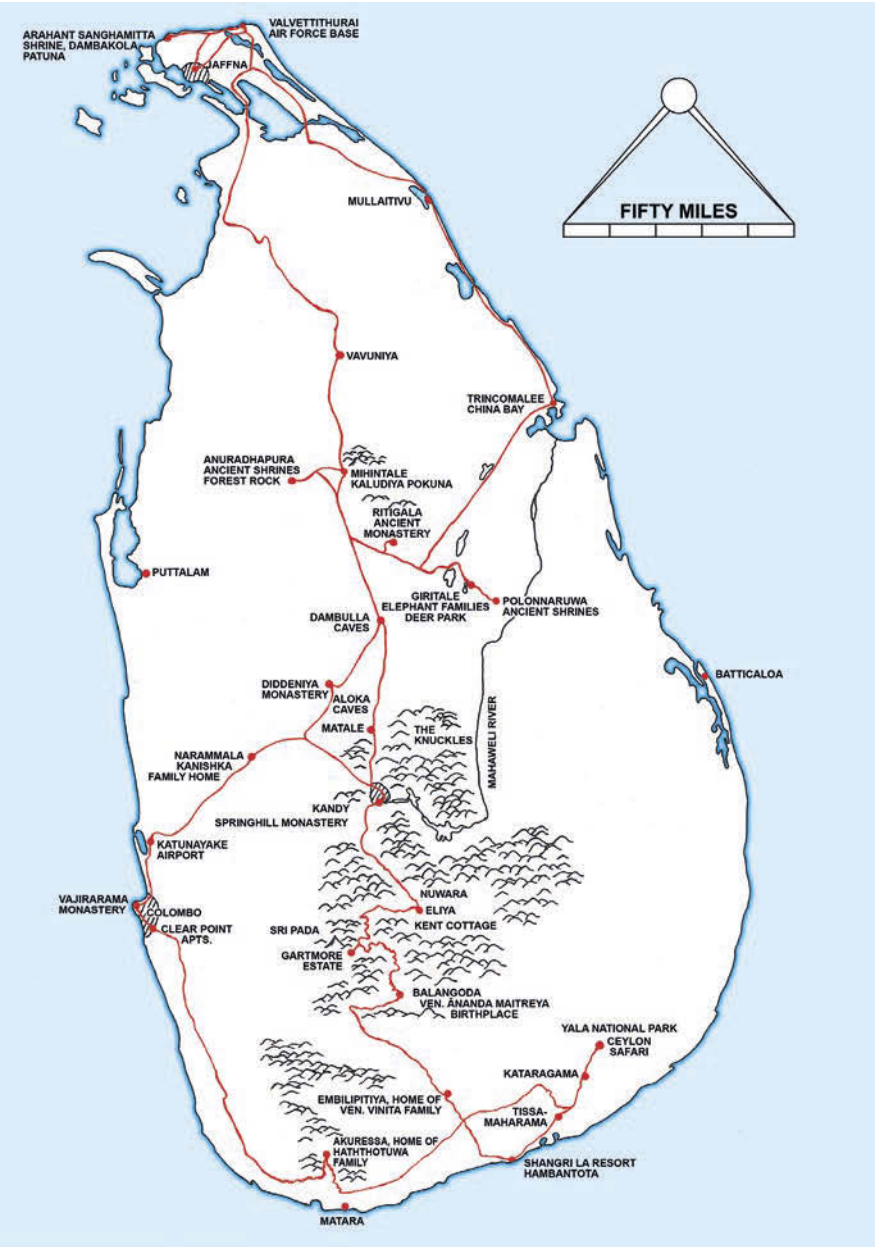
by Ajahn Amaro

A Pilgrimage in Sri Lanka –
Moving Images, Flowing Dhamma

To the Sangha
of Aloka Vihara
who wrote the Pali down
for the first time.

The Copper Isle



Preface

This photo-journal records a pilgrimage made in Sri Lanka in November of 2019. I had been invited numerous times to visit this ancient seedbed of Theravāda Buddhism but, prior to this present occasion, had always declined the offers. The reason for this was not a disinterest in the country, with its ancient Buddhist traditions and numerous holy places, rather it was that, if I was going to go, I wanted to go quietly as a pilgrim and not on a teaching tour or part of a bustling group of devotees. Sometimes I wondered if I was being too fussy or narrow on this score but, in retrospect, I am very glad to have waited for forty years to make the journey.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s I would make brief visits to Amaravati Monastery every year. I was living at Abhayagiri Monastery in California during that time and I would come to the UK once annually to attend Elders' Council meetings with the Sangha in Europe. I first met Ajahn Vinita in 2005 on one of those trips and, subsequently, we crossed paths on many occasions. He had always impressed me as one who was cheerful, unselfish, fully committed to the monastic life and to the practice of the Forest Tradition ways under the guidance of Luang Por Sumedho. When I moved to Amaravati in 2010, to take over as abbot on Luang Por's retirement, Ajahn Vinita had always been helpful and supportive in every way.

Within the first few years after I had arrived and settled in at Amaravati the question arose of whether I would be interested to go to Sri Lanka one day. After all, I had named the monastery in California after a famous Sri Lanka institution, the original Abhayagiri Vihāra having flourished for about 1250 years, between roughly 80 BCE to 1170 CE. I mentioned to Ajahn Vinita the concern that I had, that I would like 'to go quietly as a pilgrim' and he was completely sympathetic with that. It took a few more years for the conditions to come together but eventually, by sometime in 2017, we began to make serious plans.

The account of the journey, and the reflections around it that are gathered here, should be considered the perspective of a single Western bhikkhu, encountering the shrines, forests and lanes of Tambapanni for the first time. It is not intended to be a comprehensive commentary on Buddhist history, or Buddhist practice in the present day – some places were missed, some people have certainly been forgotten along the way – rather, dear reader, it is intended to be a collage of impressions, assembled and arranged to represent one angle of view upon a unique spiritual culture, set among the living jewels of the Copper Isle.

May any blessings that come from these pages be of benefit to all beings and conduce to the peace and well-being of Sri Lanka.

Acknowledgements

This pilgrimage, and thus this present book, could not have come into being without the initiative, patience, generosity and diligence of Ajahn Vinita. My gratitude and appreciation is thus extended to him first and foremost. Not only did he catalyze the opportunity for me to go to Sri Lanka on this first ever visit, but he also drew together every thread necessary for the event to work in a way that was inspiring, highly educational and in accordance with all my wishes – *sādhu anumodanā!*

The practical details of funding all our travels, and for helping to arrange many of the locations visited, were taken care of by many lay friends of Amaravati: Harshini Vitarane, Amila Tromp, Randula Haththotuwa, Nelum Perera and others.

On the ground, assisting with all the logistics of who would host us and where we would stay and where eat, I would like to express my gratitude to Rohan Silva and Sumangala Dias, together with Kanishka Levangama, the Nipuna Gamlath family in Polonnaruwa, Rohana and Chandrika Haththotuwa, Sandamali and Lakshman Hettiarachchi, Indika Nettigama and Arran Sivarajah, and Kushan Perera, who were all unstinting in their generosity and their desire to help us along the path of our pilgrimage.

In this group, I would especially like to thank Lassal Haththotuwa who volunteered to drive us for the whole journey, without fully realizing that it would be about 2000 miles of road travel in less than three weeks. He put his life, and the running of his medical supply factory, on hold for the entirety of this time of the pilgrimage and he was unreserved in his readiness to adapt to circumstances along the way.

In addition, the quiet and ever-helpful presence of Ajahn Appamado was a blessing to us all throughout the journey.

The crystallizing of this photo-journal into the form it is seen here, dear reader, is firstly due to Adam Long's careful transcription of my handwritten diary – scrawled as it was in small letters and with numerous asterisks and arrows for the marginalia. The design and layout of the book was done by the discerning hand and eye of Mark Gatter, who generously offered to work on this project as he had done with other journeys: *Rain on the Nile*, *The Hush at the End of the World* and *Feeding the Cedars*. I am extremely grateful for his generosity as well as the unique skills he brings in rendering these timeless moments of presence, in holy places, into physical form.

The photographs which include me in the picture were mostly taken by Lassal. The high quality close-up pictures, in Yala National Park, were taken by Indika Nettigama; I am grateful that he has generously allowed these to be published here. The other pictures were taken by myself.

To all these good people, to our Buddhist ancestors who shaped the rocks and histories there, and to the other beings of the fourteen biomes of the Copper Isle, I express my deepest gratitude. May any blessings that arise from the words and pictures gathered here benefit them and all beings. *Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā!*

Amaro Bhikkhu
Amaravati
Spring, 2021

Tuesday, November the 12th – Heathrow Airport - Colombo

Brief encounters, fellow travellers recognize a commonality of purpose, destination. We cross paths, sit side by side and breathe the air together unwitting of each other's names and stories. Who are you, the German-speaking Asian-looking fellow to my right? Who the English couple perusing today's Sun? What is your tale, white-bearded man with turquoise turban, transparent as a veil? Crumpled girl, your knees up, feet upon the seat, smiling with phone pressed to your ear, who are you talking to?

We share a life together; a heart, a mind, a field of perception is the world we each know – not *the* world but each of our minds' *representation of* the world.

That which knows the world is not of the world: What is 'the world' in this Dhamma and discipline? The eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind – that is what is called 'the world'. That whereby one is a perceiver and a conceiver of the world – these are the six senses – that is the fabric of this mind's version of the world (S 35.116).

That which know the person is not a person – this hand holding its pen, this vermillion ribbon, slanting across the page – where are they? 'Here' does not really apply as it implies a 'there' some other place but there is only this... but 'this' implies a separate 'that' some other time, some other place... Dhamma is not defined by location, time, identity: 'That material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness whereby one trying to describe the Tathāgata – the element of knowing, *vijjā-dhātu* – would describe him has been cut off at the

root, made like a palm tree stump, deprived of the conditions for existence and rendered incapable of arising in the future. The Tathāgata *[vijjā-dhātu]* is liberated from being reckoned in terms of form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness – he, it, that, this, is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable like the great ocean' (M 72.20).

The mind is not a person – the mind is Dhamma. The Buddha sees the Dhamma, the mind knows itself.

Riding the wave of a November moon – full, warm and benevolent – our vessel lifts and leaves the lights of the surface far below us. Helpful presences pass along the aisles, as if wafted on mild breezes, to adjust lights and seats, to provide balm and benevolence. An Amaravati regular is excited to be in the seat behind me: 'Are you going to Colombo?' 'Well, I'm on the plane.' Like the interested tour operator in the lounge, from Lanka Sport Reizen, who wanted to direct me to a monastery in a special forest in Colombo, there is eagerness to be involved, to help, to know, to comment.

Are troubles left behind? The land vanishes and blackness fills the windows, the struggles and clashes, anguishes and devastations, the warm spreading smiles and anxious decisions now sit in memory but are they less real now? Were they real then, when being processed face to face? There is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, imagining, remembering – where is it? How solid is it?

Then in memory – if the heart clings, prefers, pursues its images, how is it all less real than before? If the heart's attention is born into the form, life begins and rolls on – *jātipi dukkhā*. If there is no birth, no becoming, no conforming to 'that' – *atammayatā* – then, even in the presence of anguished agitation, no troubles began in the first place so there is nothing to be left behind – geography is not the issue, at least not that of *rūpa-khandha*. In Dhamma there is no geo- and no -graphy either; no world and no measurement. Perhaps there is *lokasaññī* – perceiving the

world – but *lokamānī* is not formed; there is no conceiving, no such dis-ease of the heart. No long, no short, no coarse, no fine, no pure and no impure, no here or there, no coming, going or standing still, it is *anidassana*, non-manifestative.

Are the saris of the stewardesses green or blue? How about these packets of Sri Lankan Airlines sugar? It depends on the eyes and the mind alone. They are no colour from their own side. Troubles aren't really troubles, that's why they are called 'troubles'.

Lights in the dark; dozens of orange patches, human habitations, glow below the window. Turkey passes by: Muş, Solhan, Varto, Hınıs, Erzurum... a poem of pulses, the beat of life, written on the land. What are their stories? Their names? Their loves and losses? It's the small hours here – some winter revellers might be looking up as I write hearing the sound of a plane far above, see our lights, white and red, as we sing upon the airs above. Do they wonder who we are? Where we are going?

'Where are they going?' My cousin Richard once asked of a passing ship, seen from the restaurant of our family hotel, the Bellevue Britannia, Ostend, when I was not yet quite two years old. Apparently, allegedly, I spoke in a deep voice, saying, 'They are going wherever the ship is taking them' or somesuch. Which was strangely well-formed grammar for a not-quite-two-year-old, if the story is true, of course. This also (again, as the story has repeatedly been told) nearly gave my aunt, seated at my side, a heart attack.

Where are we going? Who can go anywhere, really? The mind, all our minds are exactly, precisely *here* – a 'here' without a 'there', the place of non-abiding: Şırnak, Lake Van, Cadir Dağı, Muradiye, Ahlat, Bulanık – syllables that indicate memories, perceptions, the feelings of ownership, othership, conventions of 'here and there'. Where is the world? On the map-screen? Outside the window? In this mind?

'In this fathom long body, with its perceptions and thoughts, is the world, the

origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the way leading to the cessation of the world' (S 2.26, A 4.45). A glowing screen, white and lime-yellow words pasted over depictions, depixellations, of mountains and lakes, beside it the window, words encoded in neon puddles of street-lamp alphabets; names written in light, words understood, mysterious.

What is a real language? Who is reading it? To the night-hunters around Hakkâri, Sālmās, Dilezi Gecidi, the gleaming bars and balls spell 'success' and 'a full belly', 'prey found', 'you have reached your destination'. Mosul, Lake Dukan, Arbil, Lake Urmia, Maragheh, Nahr Zab Al Kabir, Tabriz – words that evoke war and crisis, black flags, luminous wisdom of Shams and Rumi, signals and tokens of the human imprint on the earth, on the communal psyche. Lines on the map, borders between nations, fought for with bitter vehemence, are invisible, markless in the bible-black, starless oval framed by the window. Do the owls know the human birders? The humans, do they know the territories of the foxes, quartering their patches, lines written in pungent quatrains of urine, musk and instinct, temptation and threat. Are the borders, demarcations, real or not? Who reads them? What language do they speak? What is it like to be a bat?

Sulaymaniyah, Qara Dagh, Abae Sriram, Samarra, Baghdad, Isfahan, Basrah, Kuwait, the Caspian Sea, Parthia, Armenia, Ashgabat and Georgia – '… always on my my my my my my my my my mind.' Where are we? The world happens exactly *here* 'the place which is no place'; no one ever really goes anywhere as 'place' only applies to *rūpa-khandha*, to the *nāma-khandhas* it has no meaning, like 'the weight of silence' or 'the smell of gravity' 'the colour of peace' or 'the flavour of leftness', 'horse Monday yellow' and Chomsky's 'colourless green ideas sleep furiously'.

No one ever really goes anywhere but, nonetheless, we seem to be turning, to keep out of Iranian air-space, an inclination to the south to keep us, in this metal tube 35,000 feet above solid ground, safe from danger.

> "What will I do, oh friends?
> I do not know myself.
> I am neither Christian nor Jew..."

Despite being baptised in the Church of England and confirmed by Dr Ramsay,

Archbishop of Canterbury; despite my mother being born as Doris Goldschmidt, in Golders Green, to a Catholic mother; despite having IB Horner, the late President of the Pali Text Society, as a cousin of my father.

"...Neither Muslim or Hindu.
I am not of the East or the West..."

Despite being born in Kent as a person, and born in Ubon as a bhikkhu.

"Nor of the circling stars.
My place is the placeless.
My face is the faceless.
Oh Shams of Tabriz,
I have no tale to tell!"

"No dust
Nowhere to fall."

Turkmenistan, Yerevan, Baku, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Qatar, Amarah, Nasiriyah, Al Diwaniyah, Karbala, Abadan, Failakah Island – no landing place.

The Indian Ocean, the Island of Das and its nearby partner Zirku – no lines as morning light brings blueness and warmth to it all.

Curling seashore sand-flats of Abu Dhabi, Abu Al Abyad, give way to wind-washed acres of desert – blue surrenders to pale ochre. A day begins.

Wednesday the 13th – Colombo-Kandy

Muddy rivers wind in the green – clay tile roofs orange in the leafy sea. How are we near a city?

A delegation meets me at the gangway off the plane: the Deputy Inspector General of police, Rohan Silva, who looks after the security of the President, and is married to one of the Three Sisters of Ottawa; a cousin of his is also present. Rohan took care of Luang Por Sumedho's travels when he came here two years ago, with Luang Por Viradhammo and Luang Por Pasanno. Here too is his wife, son and Kanishka, a retired businessman, along with the security staff whose names, of course, I am not given.

Ajahn Vinita is all smiles and, after a cup of tea, we are on the road with Kanishka and his driver: 'The most important person in the vehicle!' I declare to the latter, both a truth and endeavouring to make a nod at the social stratifications that abound. Later, as we made our way along the narrow track to Springhill Monastery, through a steeply-sloping garden in Kandy, I remarked, 'It's very good to be with Sri Lankans who are not doctors, engineers and accountants – it's a very skewed picture in the UK so I'm glad to meet the other 98% of the population.' You never know how such comments are received but it's valuable to at least offer a perspective – a different view in order to rejig the habits of conditioning.

Along the road we roll through the rural south, coconut palms abound, with a

wall of green around us when we're not passing through the little market towns along the way. Beside us stalls of bananas, of a dozen varieties, fly by, coconuts predictably and racks of colourful clothes at the local weekly markets. School-kids out at half past one in the afternoon, finished for the day (or so I was then told) trooping home in their clutches, chatting and ambling in bright white uniforms.

The roads are good: well-maintained and free of potholes, the traffic is more orderly than India – and hardly any horns! There is almost no rubbish either on the roadside; a testimony to a caring council or a natural civic sense that makes people tidy up after themselves. Few people seem to smoke and there are no beggars at the junctions in Narammala. It is very impressive in its easy orderliness.

We pause for a fruit juice at the ninety-year-old house of Kanishka's mother-in-law, Sriyāni Senarath, meeting the place, the family (in person and in pictures) and the ambience of well-worn colonial architecture, the warmth of a well-loved and lived-in home. She had been there since her marriage at eighteen (as in one of the proud line of pictures on the courtyard wall) and she was now a comfortable eighty-two, with six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Warm farewells and we climb steadily into the hills approaching Kandy. The name comes, predictably (possibly) from *'khandha'* meaning lump or a hill, a heap, then mispronounced by the Europeans.

Climbing, climbing, winding through twisted turns to a tea estate where the world's only (so I'm told) tea museum resides. The monastery is on a forested corner of the estate, founded by the uncle of the two monk brothers who lead the community here and whose father, a retired official of the government building authority, oversaw the construction of the buildings and still does so. It shows, as all the paths and steps, buildings are well-made and sturdy.

I'm up in the highest *kuṭī* on the property: 'The highest monk in Kandy' states Ajahn Vinita. Possibly, by geography but that is not what matters. Moonlight snow lies on every surface of the forest canopy.

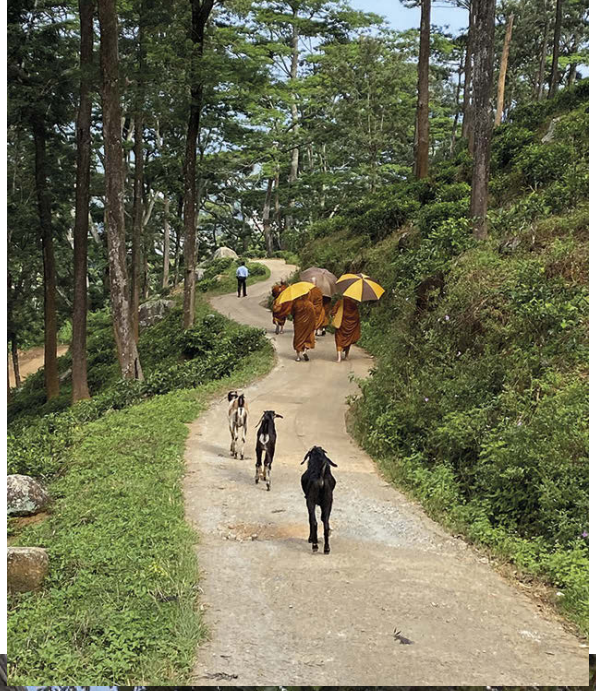
Thursday the 14th – Kandy

Dawn comes to the forest rapidly. Salmon-orange washes in the sky are gone in a blink. Birds waken that are roused by light and colour; owls hoot their last, hunting over for the night. Bright blossoms of the bladder-flower trees ignite, glowing coals revived from the grey ashes of the dark.

Breakfast is a formal affair, for our visit, with alms bowls and a table of food stretching the length of the *dāna-sālā*. The lay folk are silent and reverent in white. It is formal but not... as the brother abbots come in in their own time and have a little, then move on. Ajahn Nyanadassano, who had been staying at Amaravati for the last few years but who has recently been at this monastery, describes how it is this way most days, for breakfast and the main meal – times vary, marked only by the wooden bell, and it varies too who shows up and when. An *anumodanā* is given at some point. All very easy and open – it's a delight to have a new routine to adapt to, to be reminded that there are countless ways of arranging food, time, people, comings and goings.

We stroll down the hill, through the half-worked tea garden, past the tiny Hindu temples: 'Used by Buddhists, bhante, when they pray for babies,' and the humble homes of the tea-garden workers, all of whom I'm told are Indian Tamils.

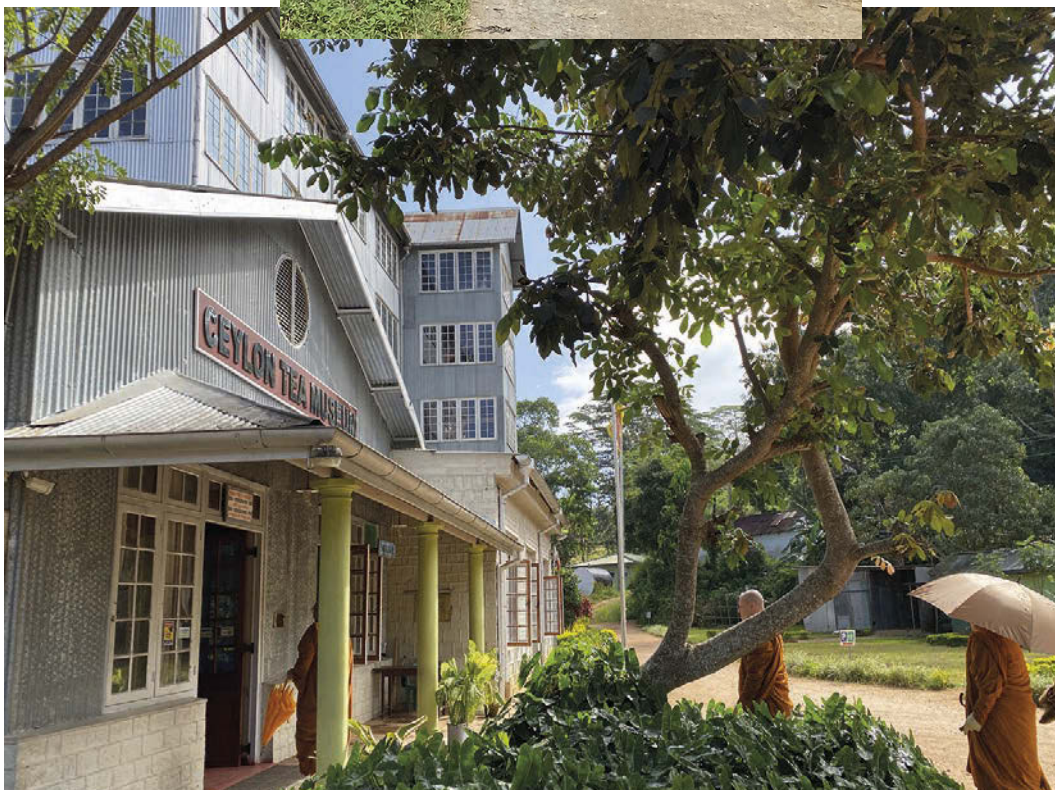
Corrugated iron sheeting, patches of tarpaulin and palm-thatch intermingle, lines of yesterday's laundry colour the eaves and open spaces. The fragrance of turpentine – from a local tree, unlike the low flowers of California that smell the same – decorates the morning air. Dogs warm up in the sun as Ajahn Vinita and Ajahn Nyanadassano offer commentary on the local landscape and customs.



The Tea Museum is a testimony to the British colonial stamp on the land, on the people of Sri Lanka and on the tea-drinkers of the world: James Taylor, an enterprising seventeen-year-old Scot was the pioneer who raised the first successful tea crop on this island in 1857. Long-bearded in the pictures, a true towering patriarch amid his cowering yet proud workers, and their leaf-gathering baskets.

Muscular machines from the 1880s – crafted in Kendal, Cumbria, and Lincoln – stand in the quiet wooden halls of the ex-tea factory. Our well-scripted host, clad in Museum uniform sari, spells out the provenance and function of all the exhibits, now silent and motionless, stilled in the amber of history.

Bold moustaches sprawl, draped over the upper lips of the players in the 1902 upcountry rugby game, as they do on the haughty, jaunty faces of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's hunting party – insignia of another age when 'white man's burden' was construed to be a serious and noble motivation, the Victorian male was considered to be the crown, the *ne plus ultra* of God's creation, and the right to kill others for sport or political dominance was considered to be utterly wholesome and noble. What the bagged and the conquered felt about the arrangement was not considered significant.



We like our tea, and the growers are proud of their work – *camellia sinensis* has brought much refreshment and joy to the world – but with every sip comes a history. There is a chain of causes and effects, as with the roads and train tracks, the *kuṭī* that I sit in on this hill: Who dragged

the steel out of the iron ore, who carried it here? Who broke the rocks? Who hauled and mixed the cement, mined the sand? Who dug the ground, chased away the leopards and mountain foxes and felled the trees to make the space? Who plucked the leaves?

The faces of the picturesque array of tea pickers, dotted across the photographs are written with lines of age and care. They are glad to get some rupees to feed the family, so they work well, but are we told their names, their stories? They are part of us too; they are in this cup, their loves and lives and losses. We drink this all with every sip so we are wise to appreciate their participation in our moments too.

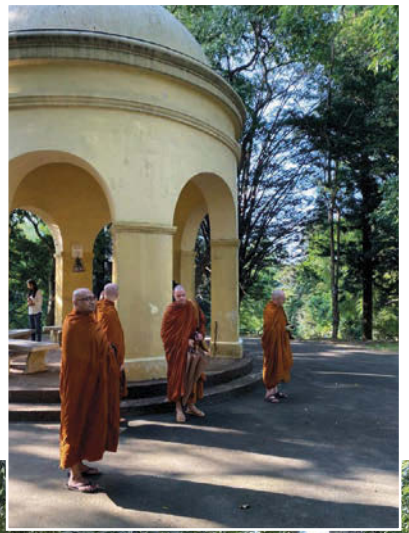
The afternoon is an adventure, via an extravagant shortcut, through the hills of the haves, to avoid the traffic of central Kandy.

We stroll the avenues of great trees, lingering in the space of a 14th Century royal park, then planted and developed with the aid of friends from Kew Gardens in the 19th Century. It's still called 'Royal' even though the Queen of England is no longer a monarch here. The ancient woody presences tell a patient story; still, live, powerful amid the changing seasons, although one is famously not still... the walking tree, a banyan, that strides ever-so-slowly across the lawn on out-reaching aerial roots.

Young couples fill the benches – the gardens arranged like a Bollywood set, suitable for romancing – Western tourist groups are guided, selfie-sticks in hand, clad in the whitest possible clothes to meet the heat.

A 'royal park', a collection of named and labelled botanical specimens – what do the trees know of their role in the human schemes and namings? Our lives intersect, interrelate. We breath each other's airs. The oxygen they release is now

us, our life source; the carbon dioxide we breath out is now their bodies. A final tea is taken at the Sandriana Hotel – the Kandy Lake and the Temple of the Tooth glow in the dark far below us.



Friday the 15th – Kandy-Dambulla-Anuradhapura

We say our farewells to the Springhill community with gifts of vitamins and books signed for the abbot brothers, Ven. Ariyagavesi and Ven. Santamanasa, and others. The morning roadsides are speckled with groups of people, young and old, waiting for their local Lanka Ashok Leyland buses to take them to their workplaces and on their journeys.

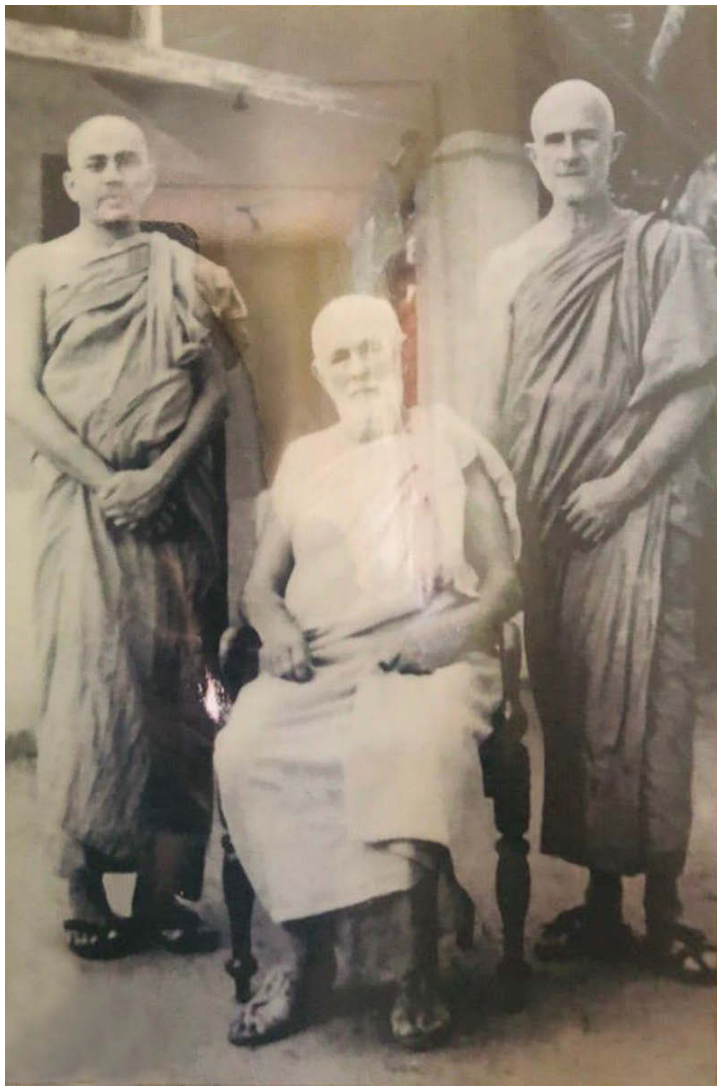
The forest of Udewatta Kele is an old royal preserve, now a protected park of 257 acres but with a rare jewel buried in its folds, The Forest Hermitage, last resting place of Vens. Nyanatiloka and Nyanaponika, former home of Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, is a two-and-a-half acre patch of the great forest, and now lodged in two buildings – the former British construction, given by the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka's family, and the newer *vihāra*, a stone's throw away.

We have crawled, in our fine vehicles, for a mile or so into the heart of this forest. Turning again and again to edge the hillside and then stopping to heave a liana above the pick-up truck and the SUV. We pass through the gnarled tangles of the giant great-grandfather of the forest, a liana complex with a root nearly two feet thick that reaches over four acres of the surrounding area. An aged, all-encompassing, slowly growing presence, like the Theravāda of Sri Lanka itself. Ajahn Vinita had suggested we walk in from the forest gate but I am glad, on account of

the ageing unfit legs and the morning heat, that we did not – a mile in and a mile out would have been a major undertaking.

The group of resident monks is gathered in front of the house to greet us, hands in *añjali*, warm smiles. The familiar face of Ajahn Dhīravaṁso is there. He drops easily into hosting mode and welcomes us in, alive with chatter. The walls are mostly decked with bookshelves, predictably, as this was the heart of the Buddhist Publication Society – founded in 1958 – and where Ven. Nyanaponika wrote *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* and his many other works. The aura of quiet focus and presence fills the air. This very spot was where most English Theravāda literature of the '50s and '60s and much of the '70s emanated from. It is a hive, a nucleus, a motherlode.

We pore over old black and white photographs of the past and passing – white-bearded Venerable Nyanatiloka, posed like Socrates before the front of this house in the mid-1950s, shortly before his death during the Sixth Great Council (28th of May 1957); Vens. Nyanamoli, Nyanavira and Nyanaponika – three great leavers of legacies, as treasured today as back then; stern faced, a grand group photo at Vajirarama, Colombo, where this monastery has its ordinations; Ven. Nyanamoli at his desk, over a ring binder and some stacks of papers – the translator at work... Waves formed decades ago break upon the shore of consciousness. Gratitude and affection, association, fellow-feeling, well up within the heart. There is a power in the written word, containing and conveying truth, that is to be cherished and respected. When the Buddha said things like, 'The miracle of instruction surpasses in value that of psychic power' (e.g. at D 11.1-8), he was not speaking poetically or rhetorically. The word has power to catalyse the liberation of the heart – an irreversible, categorical awakening – and *that* is a great miracle.



I speak of IB Horner and my family connections, and Bhikkhu Bodhi's comment that, 'The Horner genome is alive and well' when he read *The Pilgrim Kamanita*

and its copious notes. So it goes – some of us are prone to giving too much information.

We are offered a meal at a Tamil restaurant in Kandy before we head north; our final farewells to Kanishka, Ajahn Nyanadassano and Ven. Ariyagavesi are taken on the pavement, just beside The Queen's Hotel. Our party is now boiled down to its essence for this pilgrimage: Ajahn Vinita, Ajahn Appamado, Lasal (our trusty attendant and driver) and myself. His vehicle is a hi-tech Mercedes SUV, that responds politely when one asks, 'Mercedes...?' with, 'How can I help you?' The robot apocalypse draws one day closer.

Words can be trivial, mundane and random in their meaning: *Tuk tuks* declare such as: 'Sweet are the uses of adversity', 'You call it sadness, I call it love', 'The first is gold', 'Five Sense', and 'Bullet-proof, Mission Possible."

The word, and its history in the Southern Buddhist world, forms the heart of our next destination. We are heading for Āloka Vihāra, just north of Matale, where the *tipiṭaka pāli* was first written down.

Along the way other messages are read from the landscape and the roadside: as contrasted with India, no women seem to participate in construction crews or road repairs; in the Muslim town of Akurana only males are to be seen on the street, it's Friday afternoon, the mosques are letting out and only one lone woman – a non-Muslim by her sari and the look of her veil – is spotted as we drive through. Half the humans are gone, as in some dystopian fantasy or like the entwives – alive but somewhere else, in some other dimensions, living according to their own dictates, as do Amazons and worker bees.

The treasured presence of great trees, by the roads in town and village, as well as in open country, is a message to us

too. The great trees, some two yards thick, or more for banyans, are loved and lauded and are preserved by all. When roads are to be widened or constructed, the great trees must be circumvented, swerved past; as in Ireland, where a motorway was required to skirt a fairy thorn bush at Latoon in County Clare. Ajahn Vinita recounts how a government minister was forced to resign for having caused a great tree to be cut down. This living woody alphabet writes the account of a people's love and respect for the ancient presences, those older and more stable, who provide shelter and fruit in season, flowers and coolness in the heat. We are touched and blessed by the message, its ancient hermeneutic.

The legends vary but it is said that, in the reign of King Vattagamani, oppressed by invasions from South India and an ensuing famine, there was sincere concern that the Pali Canon would be lost. This because the monks and nuns who had memorized it were dying in large numbers and it had been transmitted only orally up to that point. The writing down of it had been avoided, seemingly out of caution that the texts would become 'owned' by those few who could read and write.

The monks were thus, in circa 73 BCE, ordered by King Vattagamani to write down the Pali Canon before it was lost. There are many extraordinary aspects to this undertaking, which could be the subject for a book on their own. Here are a few observations/speculations:

1) There was a war on so the transcribing had to be done in hiding.

2) There was a famine so the transcribing monks were hungry. In addition the food going to feed starving families and children needed to be diverted to the transcribers instead – how popular would that have been? How would people have been made aware of the necessity when very few could relate to the concept of writing at all?

3) Writing existed – e.g. the Ashokan rock and pillar edicts created some 200 years previously in India – but very few Sangha members would have been skilled in it, rote-learning being the bread-and-butter of their study. Thus, in all probability, the majority of the transcribing monks would have had to learn to read and write from scratch, literally, to get the job done.

4) They had to agree on the precise words of all the memorized texts they needed to transcribe whilst in a war and a state of famine, when mental faculties are not at their best. This alone was a huge feat. The three divisions of the *tipitaka* add up to a total (depending on how you calculate word-length) of between 4,005,000 and 5,850,000 words.

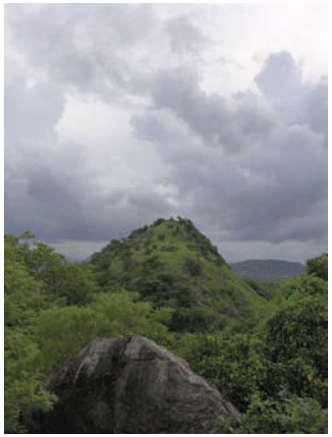
5) All the transcribing would have had to be double- or treble-checked for accuracy as many of the transcribers would have been forming letters by copying shapes rather than having a well-formed visual alphabet in their memories – their relationship to language would have been aural and tonal rather than eye- and form-based. The checkers would have had to know the texts 100% perfectly.

6) It was all a 'message in a bottle' – no one knew if any of the *ola* palm-leaves would be preserved, or if anyone would survive who could read them. 'Is this effort worth it!?' might well have been frequently asked.

7) They worked day and night (hence the name 'The Caves of Light') to get it all down before the Dhamma-Vinaya was lost or destroyed.

8) They knew that their forebears had never written it down so they had to be pioneers in this regard. They had no mentors for this monumental and unique task.

Altogether it was an incredible effort and, without it, this bhikkhu would not be sitting here, in Anuradhapura, writing these words in a notebook in 2019. That recension of the word of the Buddha, and the whole of the Southern School of Buddha-Dhamma, would almost certainly have been lost to the world and thus would have had no presence or effect for the subsequent 2000 years. The world, it seems fair to say, would have been a much poorer place as the lives of countless people would have never felt the touch of the Pali teachings, only its residues and fading resonances from fireside tales and enfabulated evocations, archetypes passed on bereft of their origins, like ancient *stūpas* swallowed by the jungle and turned into conical hills, or broken Ashokan pillars transformed into votive lingams, as at the Eastern Park monastery in Sāvatthī, or the life of the Buddha transmogrified into the story of Barlaam and Josaphat in the Bible.



We pause at Dambulla, where the Āloka Vihāra monks apparently came from, and climb to the cave at the top. Layers of paint, *pūjā* smoke and devotion filled the chambers. Still, silent *rūpas* in the gloom. Lotus blossoms, chequerboards, wrap the ceiling while foot-polished stones meet our feet, our knees.

Outside a rock mimics a hill, mimics a rain-filled cumulus – the *rūpas* mimic the idea of the Buddha, which mimics the quality of awakenedness itself.

White-clad devotees stride by the roadside with flags, flowers, devotion: 'It's probably for a *bodhi-pūjā*' Ajahn Vinita tells us; a *bodhi-pūjā* – the act of revering the quality of *bodhi* itself; Being Awake, Being Awakenedness, Being Buddha, Being Dhamma, Being Sangha.

The mind is not a person; the mind is Dhamma. Its activity is Knowing, its manifestation is the *guṇadhamma* of goodness – the lovely. The *pūjā* mimics the principle as a word, an idea; the idea mimics the reality.

Words when written capture the spirit of a quality and imprison it, crystallize it in an alphabet, like a diamond seed or a genie in a bottle, to release the meaning as a wish-fulfilling sprite or a full-grown precious jewel when the shape meets the eye and the eye sends its message to the mind. Alphabets are dream catchers, nets to ensnare meaning; the trick is to enable the meaning to stay alive and not end up pinned to a cork-board – admirable, labelled but dead.

Words, at their best, are convenient fictions that can awaken the heart to truth for 'we are lured into the eternal reality through well-timed illusion,' and how does that luring end? The lured too is revealed to be an unconscious conception and only the reality, the Wonderful, remains. Knowing knowing itself.

Saturday the 16th – Anuradhapura (presidential election day in Sri Lanka)

We arrived at the Forest Rock Garden Resort after dark – built on the model of an ancient palace with pools and stone pillars, sculptures to match – and settled in for a comfortable night. The area is hotter than Kandy, despite occasional sprinkles of rain. A rainbow arced to our east before nightfall and there were clouds and a few drops in the morning.

We are staying about ten miles from ancient Anuradhapura. As we approach the environs of the ruins the atmosphere changes palpably – we're out of the present day village zone and into the echoes of the stone-built past.

Broad spreading trees offer copious shade over the grassy sward. Families picnic. Staff are off work for the election day. The place is still and quiet.

We come to the great *stūpa* of Jetavana; we circumambulate and pay our respects. Lasal tells us how his mother came here three years ago on a rainy day. The roof of the little shrine hall leaked and the place was run down, depressed. She sponsored a renovation and a repainting, in a bright and jaunty style, so Lasal and family are well known and appreciated here.

A mile or two away is the Abhayagiri *stūpa*, home and origin of the name we gave to the monastery in California. It gives more cause for pause.

In ancient times (it is said) the strictly orthodox Theravāda Mahāvihāra, of which Jetavana is a part, grew into a state of contention with the more eclectic (so they say) Abhayagiri Vihāra, founded by the same King Vattagamani (perhaps) who had caused the Pali Canon to be written down.

I chose the name Abhayagiri for the California monastery to reflect that eclectic spirit – the spirit of free enquiry – and because half the land at Abhayagiri in California had been given by Ven. Master Hsüan Hua, a Chinese bhikshu, a great teacher and mentor of Luang Por Sumedho. In addition, the bhikshuni order in China, according to the histories, was launched by the invitation of the Chinese Emperor for the King of Tambapanni (Sri Lanka) to send nuns to China to begin the women's order properly there. A group of nuns from a branch of Abhayagiri, the Lalita Vihāra, led by the Therī Devasārā, set off in 432 CE and arrived in Nanjing, China, ten years after the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien left Sri Lanka. They held a grand ordination ceremony, for about 300 nuns, and thus the bhikshuni community in northern Asia was founded.

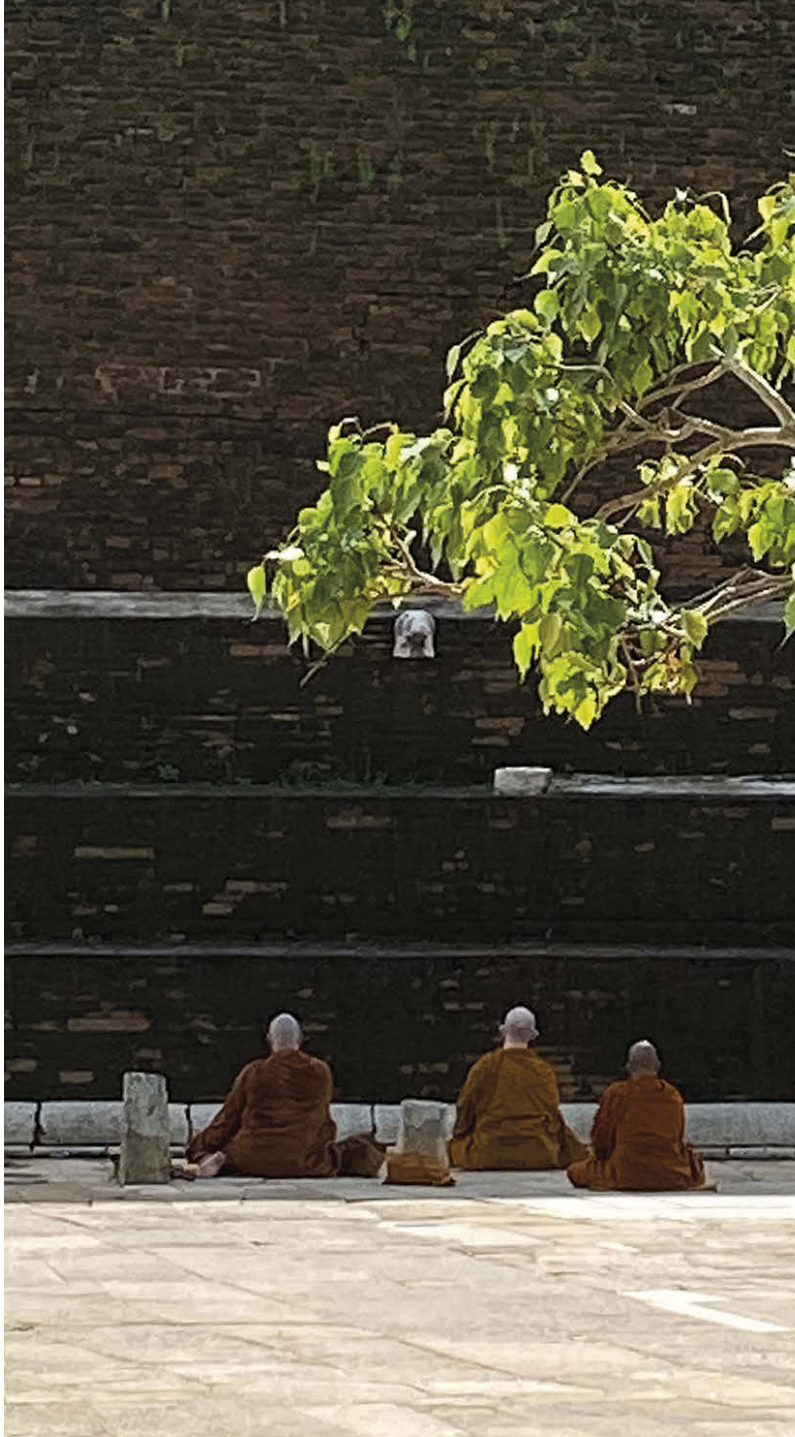
The nuns form the largest proportion of the monastic community in modern Taiwan, Hong Kong and at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the nearby monastery founded by Master Hua, so taking that name also served to make a nod of acknowledgement that the bhikshuni order in China had had its roots in Sri Lanka; this naming thereby paid respect to another link between our two lineages and communities.

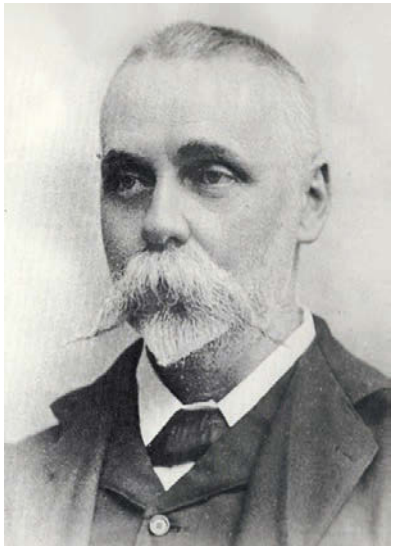
We find a patch of shadow and bow, to sit beside the restored *stūpa*, with a broad Bodhi Tree behind us and the curving wall, inverted bowl of bricks before us.

Locals chant their *pūjās* nearby; a laywoman *pūjārī* loudly declaims prayers, for good health and well-being of all kinds, for a white-clad woman beside her, stopping at every quarter (or sixteenth) of the *stūpa's* circumference to repeat the appeals '*Sabba roga*...'. Part of the Buddha's genius was to know and respect how superstitions work and to make sure nothing got killed or stolen in order to observe them. *Für Elise* plays on the PA of a bread deliverer's *tuk tuk*.

The restoration work over decades has brought this and the other *stūpas*, tanks, *kuṭīs* and *vihāras* back from their fate as humps in the jungle. A British officer called Mr Harry Charles Purvis Bell was largely responsible for initiating this restoration; now it is a perfect bell once more.

However, the life spirit of the jungle never misses a beat and across the curved sweep of its rising surfaces, in copious niches and crannies, new plants have seeded themselves and sprung up so the fresh-shaved look after the renovation was





HCP Bell *circa* 1890

complete now has the five o'clock shadow of green growth.

Life relentlessly seeking life.

Who circled this *stūpa* before?

Why did the name Abhayagiri strike such a cord when it was first seen, in Conze's history – or was it in the *Mahāvaṁsa*? Broken phrases under our soles, fragments of inscription, now like the poems of e.e. cummings or Emily Dickinson – brief, incised shots of presence.

Did I carve the inscription? Chant on its inauguration? Did I lay flowers for my lost child before it? Whose feet pressed on what stones? The same or different? Does it matter?

We can make a story out of threads of memory and dream, convenient fictions that get taken to be realities. Destiny, karma, fate, predisposition, *pāramī*, unfinished business, old scars – visible but without an ache…

We can make a story but we can forget how flexible it all is. The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism says that the Jetavana and Abhayagiri were partners and that the Jetavana was distinct from the Mahāvihāra.

Today Lasal told us that when he came here as a child the *stūpa* currently named as 'Jetavana' was then called the 'Abhayagiri' *stūpa*, and vice versa. They swapped designations ten years ago.

So: were the Jetavana and Abhayagiri one unit or separate?

Was this *stūpa* part of the orthodoxy or the opposition? A heresy?

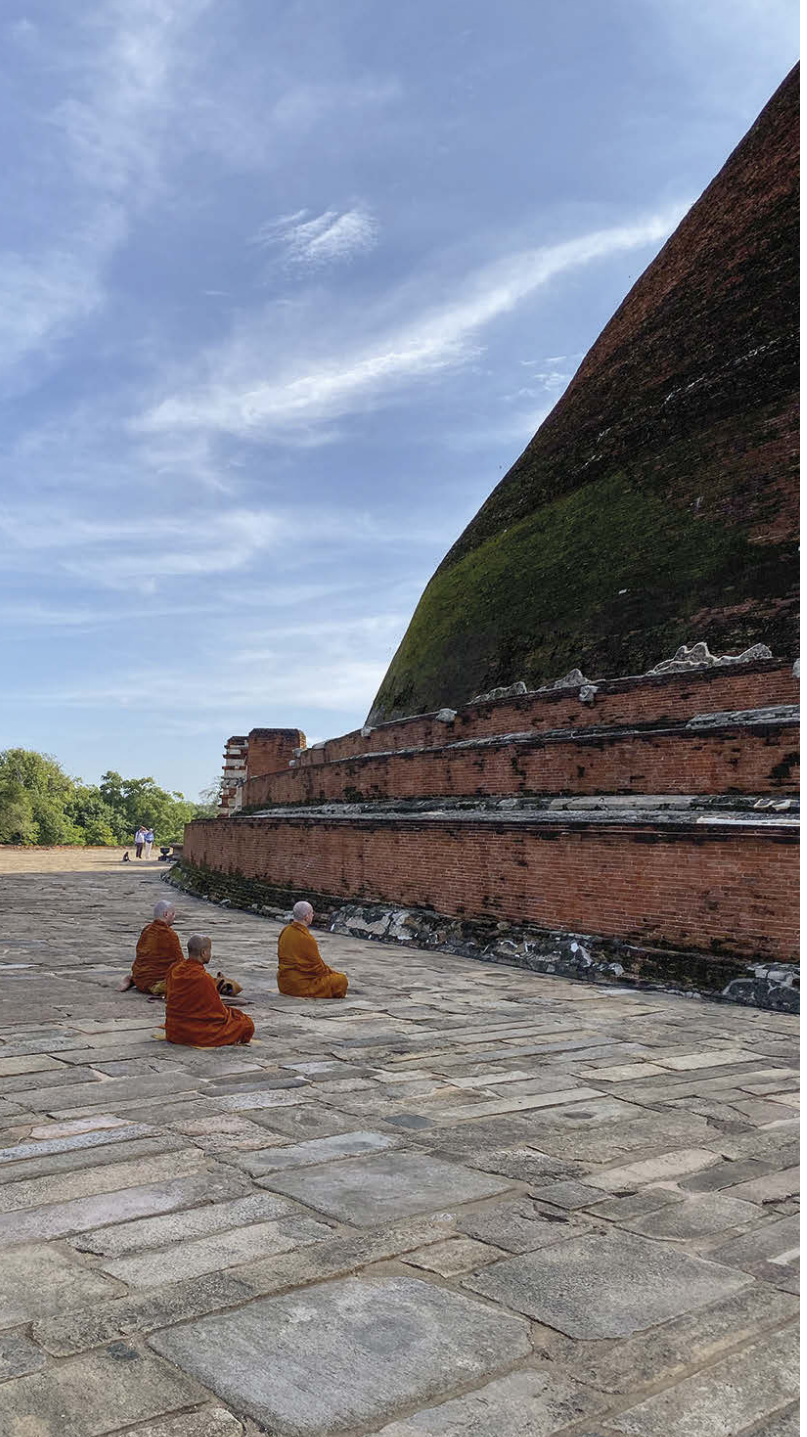
Who is orthodox?

Who is not?

The mind takes a perception and determines its value – true, good, right, wrong – in the town of Akurana 'goodness' is preserved by keeping women off the streets on a Friday; in Matale, a woman drives a *tuk tuk*. We determine right and wrong into being and then get lost in our determinations 'giving rise to all sorts of trouble and confusion' as Luang Por Chah put it.

We have the Precepts as our guiding principles, and the means of developing wisdom, wakefulness, is ever present. That wisdom tells us how the great issue we are defending, or attacking, could easily be indistinguishable from its opposite in the flow of time: Jetavana/Abhayagiri/Mahāvihāra – ink on paper, piles of bricks upon the ground, an idea, a story, a word – is it really worth shedding each other's blood for? Is it worth creating entrenched enmity when the years will cause us to forget what the fight was for in the first place?

The meal offering is made by one of the wealthiest families in Sri Lanka. The



Gamlaths, owners of Nipuna Rice. They are sponsoring our stay here at Forest Rock and at Polonnaruwa. The daughter of the family, Rangela, caught dengue fever and died nearly two years ago. Today, the sixteenth of November, would have been her thirty-sixth birthday.

I spoke of the two arrows, and the *dukkha* of the Four Noble Truths as being in reference to Arrow #2 only; I mentioned the chronic back-pain of the Buddha and his feelings of hollowness when Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Moggallana had passed away.

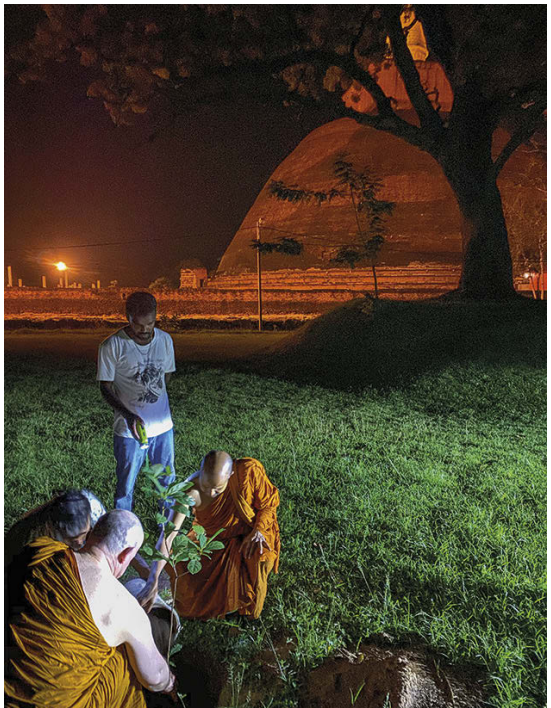
The exchange is formal, no chats (with me at least) but their attention is keen. Nature in death as well as in life is relentless.

Sunday the 17th – Anuradhapura

The temple displays, beside the reclining Buddha shrines, often depict the kings of the time – broad moustachioed, sideburns like ramparts, bestride gnarly-browed elephants draped in vari-coloured and gilded tackle. These were the rulers who built these *stūpas* and monasteries, like Dutthagamani of the Ratnamāli (the Ruwanweli *stūpa*), Vattagamani of Abhayagiri, and around them must have been a sea, a forest of servants and courtiers. The Suttas describe the five *khandhas* as being like the perfect servant to such a one but who is secretly an assassin, waiting for his (or her) day – the moment to strike (S 22.85). It's like that. Feelings of admiration, attraction, deliciousness, trigger a relishing, a trusting of that faithful retainer, apparently doing their innocent duty; and regret too, impatience, complaint, the mind can relish these also with equal if not greater ease.

How sweet it is to nurse a pet peeve, to clutch an unforgivable wrong done to oneself or another, to vow revenge for honour or justice. But the Buddha pointed out: 'One who relishes the six senses relishes *dukkha*, I say' (S 35.19); regardless of its object being pleasant, painful or neutral, the relishing itself necessitates the result of *dukkha*. So simple, so penetrative and totally liberating: if it's of the conditioned realm, don't let the mind grasp; if it has grasped, let go.

Over breakfast at the Forest Rock Garden Resort we muse on the unreliability of histories, of the British and Spanish stories of the Armada, the film *Rashomon* by Kurasawa, the Buddha's visits to Sri Lanka, the rewriting of ancestral family trees to boost one's status, and the Oxford University history text book that stated how how Ponce de León's crew were 'the first people to set foot upon the American



mainland...' forgetting, or more accurately ignoring, the humans who had been resident there for 12,000 years or more.

It's election day's aftermath. Firecrackers burst from time to time and news trickles in about the voting. One person's glory is another's disaster – who writes the history? Was it a fair result or a fix? What *really* happened? The Buddha's wisdom points to the only measure that can be trusted, in essence: 'I teach one thing – *dukkha* and the ending of *dukkha*' (S 22.86).

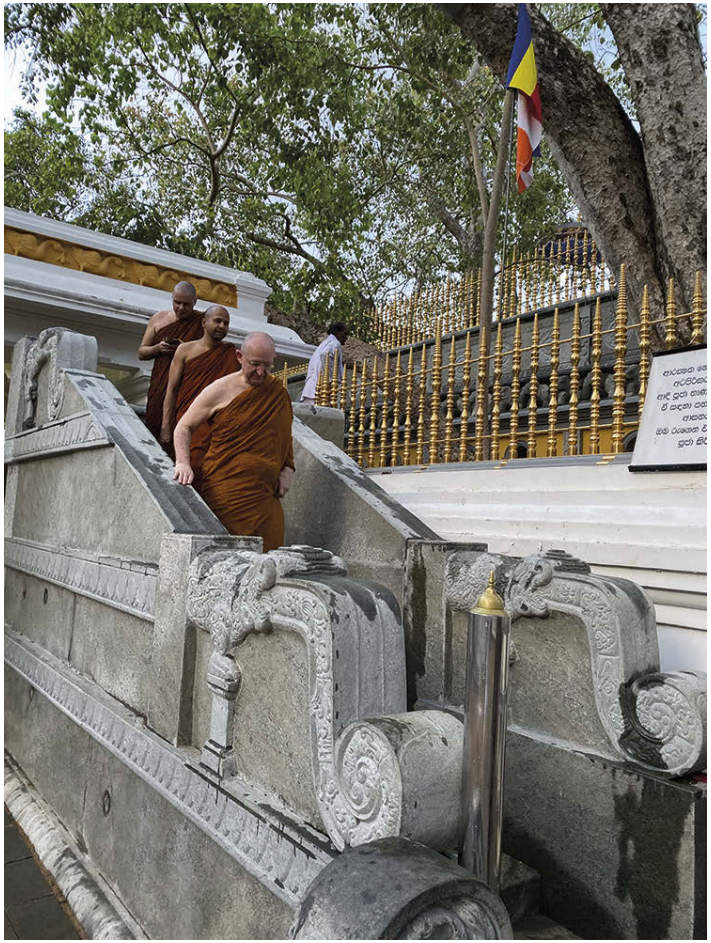
The parents of Lasal and Randula, Mrs and Dr Haththotuwa have driven up from Colombo,

over three hours on the road, to have the opportunity to offer us a meal. We meet them at the former Governor's Bungalow, in Anuradhapura. Along the way the roads are quiet, shops are still shuttered. Black cormorants perch in a crowd on a snaggled tree at the edge of the Tissa Wewa Reservoir, built by one of the ancient kings. They sit, black on black, like notes on a stave, waiting to be ignited into the music of flight and fish-catching. White egrets speckle the paddies on the other side of the road, pacing the mud of the pools and the promising shallows.

The family are joyous in their generosity. They are supposedly retired – their hospital in Colombo having been purchased from them – but the loss of that has now enabled Mr to take up the role of Director General of the Asia and Oceania Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (AOFOG). They had just returned from a conference in the Philippines which was attended by 4000 delegates. Mrs used to be the Managing Director of the hospital but now she's seemingly full time on the Dhamma support circuit – they know her everywhere – at the Jetavana, at the Ratnamāli, the gates are opened for us and we are met with welcoming smiles, in no small part due to the *vipāka-kamma* of the *mahā-upāsikā's* generosity.

Was the loss of their hospital a true loss or was it rather a gain? A gain of time, or reshaped priorities, of the opportunities now opened before them – the truth speaks for itself in the language of well-being and through peace in the heart.

By the late afternoon the day has cooled so we set out for Anuradhapura for a final visit to the shrines.



The roads are now starting to swell with soldiers and well-wishers heading toward the Ruwanweli *stūpa* (aka Ratnamāli) where the new President (Mr Rajapaksa, brother of a previous president) will be sworn in on the eighteenth of this month. The military presence intensifies as we get closer but we are waved through at every stop, all the way to the processional avenue, flag-lined with the six-coloured Buddhist banner designed by Colonel Olcott in 1880.

'That was very nice of them... very thoughtful to deck the way for our arrival,' I joked.

'That was my mother,' Lasal responds, perhaps half-joking, perhaps not joking at all, given his mother's unstinting munificence.

We are conducted through, to park in a private spot right beside the main residence building. Mrs Haththotuwa really has made a lot of friends here. She is all smiles as she follows us closely, guiding our way to the Bodhi Tree. This very tree is a last surviving limb of the original Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, brought to Sri Lanka in 288 BCE in a golden pot by the Arahant Saṅghamittā, daughter of King Asoka, after her brother, the Arahant Mahinda had first brought the *Buddha-sāsana*, the Buddhist religion, to Tambapanni (The Copper Island) as this country was known then.

They have arranged for us to have access to the Tree, circled as it is by layers of protective walls. An auspicious shower of rain arrives and we shelter for a moment; then we are led to the Tree itself. The original is down to one last live, well-worn trunk, surprisingly thin, the rest of the original tree here having died away. That said, like the green furze on the Abhayagiri *stūpa*, new shoots have appeared around it and they now stand as full-blown protective presences, far larger than the gold-propped limb, reaching out alone.

We pause and bow – Buddha bows to the Buddha, Dhamma bows to the Dhamma, Sangha bows to the Sangha. I am invited to touch the tree by our hosting monk and thoughts well up of Ven. Sanghamittā, her journey from Sanchi (where she resided) to Bodh Gaya, thence by ship to the northernmost point of this island. The presence of the Tree evokes the succession of devoted protectors, through more than 2000 years, that have kept this spot and this ancient woody being remembered and revered by our human family. The monk offers us two

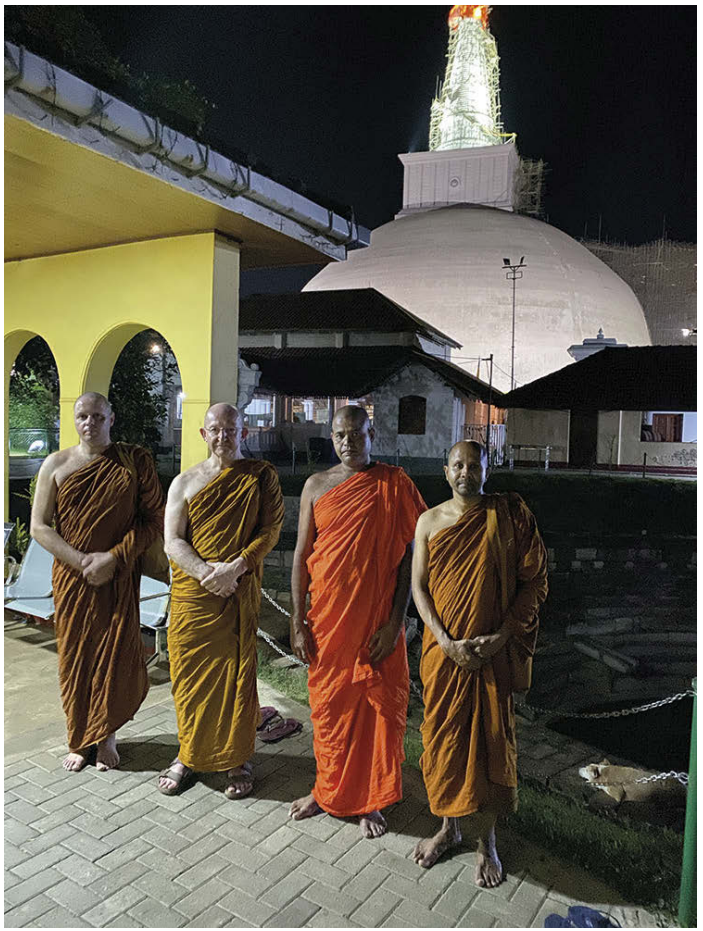
leaves to keep. We place them between the pages of a book and move on, another faint ripple in the life of the tree passes from its sphere.

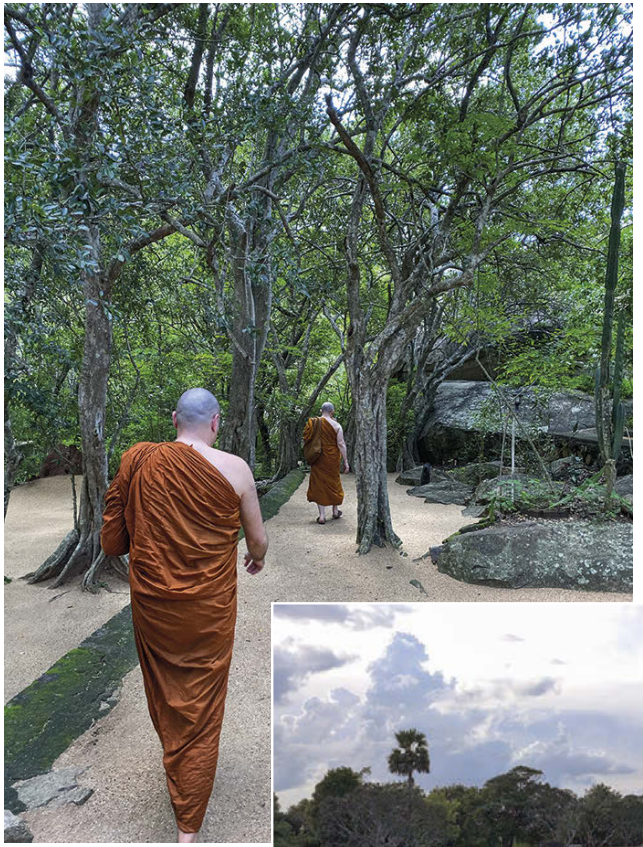
The Ruwanweli *stūpa* is brightly lit and its approaches are flag-clad and fragrant, billows of incense flow from the shrines and censers all around. We sit in a corner as dusk gathers, hundreds of white-clad devotees recite their chants, offer flowers and move around the great domed presence; a golden band circles the white belly of it; its pinnacle is wrapped in cloth and scaffolding as its renewal is nearly complete.

Night comes and we move on, circling the *stūpa* through a sea of faith. Warm stones beneath our feet; snoozing dogs gathered near the devotees – enjoying their company, their chanting and its soothing rhythms, and the comfort of the sun's heat, coming back to them to make the night's rest more easeful.

We plunge further into the dark to pay a last visit to Abhayagiri. It's quiet here, only a couple of families are present, with many sleeping dogs lying in the roadway. The latter are very surprised at the arrival of a car and its assaulting lights. Some deign to rise and get out of the way and some do not, at rest after the hard day of a dog's life.

At the *stūpa* we are quite alone; there is the knowing, the silence and the warm darkness. A soft wind brushes through our robes. Murmurs come from villagers in the distance; a dog barks but the sound disappears, swallowed by the stars, the night and the presence of the Dhamma.





Monday the 18th – Anuradhapura–Kaludiya Pokuna–Mihintale

Myth and history mingle in our conversations, in the stone and brick, the waterways of the land – 'mythistory' would perhaps be a better word. James Joyce called one of his passages in Finnegans Wake a 'probapossible prolegomena to ideareal history' – 'ideareal' being the operative word. It is an idea, an ideal, it is real and all three. Just as with the protagonists of *The Story of the Stone*, by Cao Xueqin (also titled *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) – one family is called the Zhen and the other is the Jia, 'the true' and 'the false', opposite and yet intermingling.

The myth of the *Ramayana* is formed around the tale of Ravana, the (supposed) demon king of Lanka, abducting Sita and then her rescue and return to her husband Rama, but what is the Sri Lankan side of the story? Was Ravana *actually* a king of Tambapanni who invaded India and captured Sita to avenge the cruel humiliation and mutilation of his sister Shurpanakha by Rama and his brother Lakshman? And was Rama's 'monkey army' an ordinary military force, rather than a host of extraordinary animals? The Indian tale smacks of mythic defamation, like King Richard the Third's role in English history as told by the Tudors who overthrew him – he is cast as a twisted evil villain, rather than an effective lawmaker and reformer who unfortunately lost a battle to a usurping cousin... 'Ideareal history'...

It is also in play with the tales of Ācariya Buddhaghosa – great hero and purifier of Theravāda Buddhism? Or a mole planted by brahmin plotters to destroy the Buddhist scriptures and replace them with an impressive dummy

– the *Visuddhimagga*. Ācariya Buddhaghosa famously took all the Ancient Commentaries, 'systematized them' to a coherent compendium, then destroyed every copy, so it is said, of the occasionally inconsistent but multifarious Ancient Commentaries that had accumulated in the 1000 years since the Buddha's time. He and/or his patrons were book-burners of staggering proportions.

So... a hero and a purifier of the Teachings? Or a villain, an assassin of the *sāsana*, planted by an enemy? Lama Tsongkapa revived scholarship and Vinaya in Tibet but he didn't, couldn't, destroy the Nyingma, Sakya and Kagyu texts of the earlier lineages; Martin Luther put the Bible into German but he didn't, couldn't, destroy the Latin.

Who is to say if it was a rescue or an assassination? What's the real history?

We muse on the animated film *Sita Sings the Blues* – her story and his story – Nina Paley's experiences, with her partner moving to India, and then her endeavour to make Annette Hanshaw's music of the 1930s part of the resulting animated film, riffing on her personal anguish and feelings of betrayal and its echoes in the archetype of Sita and Rama's travails. Sita and Nina both experienced abandonment then, subsequently, Sita gets rejected by Rama after she's been rescued, whilst Nina (along with the *dukkha* of her partner rejecting her) also meets the *dukkha* of the extensive legal wrangles involved in telling the story as she needed to. Nina now has a new career giving talks, such as at TED, on copyright challenges, whilst Sita summarily turned her back on the hopeless Rama and cheerfully united with the Great Goddess instead.

Is Nina right to advocate for open sources or are the copyright holders right to protect their belongings? Who has the right to control Annette Hanshaw's voice, nearly one hundred years later? Who owns? What really belongs? Did Sita do the right thing? What is a right thing?

All is fluid and probapossible.

Mrs and Dr Haththotuwa bid farewell and we head for nearby Mihintale, the place where the Arahant Mahinda and his three monk companions, plus a novice

and a layman, landed when they flew in from India. The king of the time – Devanampiyatissa – was on a royal hunting expedition and met the group in the forest. He became a disciple and invited Ven. Mahinda to stay. In short order a *sīma* boundary was established and sixty-four local men were given *upasampadā*. The caves around Kaludiya Pokuna, 'Black Water Pond', were their residences for that first Rains Retreat in Sri Lanka, about 2300 years ago.

After being greeted by Ajahn Vinita's old friend Ven. Saddhajīva, the abbot, I am shown to one of the nearby cave-*kuṭīs* to reside for the day. The raw sloping rock forms the ceiling but a wall and a bathroom have been added in more recent times, mostly for monkey protection it seems as the local *vānara* are avid and skilled thieves. A bag of sweets and coffee was snatched from the back of our vehicle less than five seconds after the hatchdoor was opened. I'm afraid that that long-tailed dacoit will be suffering from sugar-shock if it eats all the contents of its loot in one go.

That group of sixty-eight bhikkhus spent their first *vassa* here and the place has been in use since then; according to the history that is so but the serene and bright atmosphere confirms it. The paths are swept with care and precision, leaving spotless sandy swathes, ready to receive the next falling leaf. When meditating in the cave, opening the heart to the place, the generations that have lived here... so light! The rock resounds with the presence of the good that has been done here over these twenty-three centuries. Karma rebounds, the good and the bad and the neutral, and so the heart resonates with those and that which moved and lived and worked here, around these hills, over this broad acreage of time.

We met the whole sangha at the mealtime, held in a simple *sālā* in silence, but it is just Ven. Saddhajīva who gives us the tour of the environs, him and an accompanying dog that faithfully follows us for the entire circuit.

We climb to the eponymous Black Water Pond, pausing at the old abbot's stone-framed cave-*kuṭī*, surrounded by the remnants of those of his four attendant Elder bhikkhus – the administrative team of the monastery – in this regard things have not changed a lot over the centuries. We walk beneath stone doorways that have

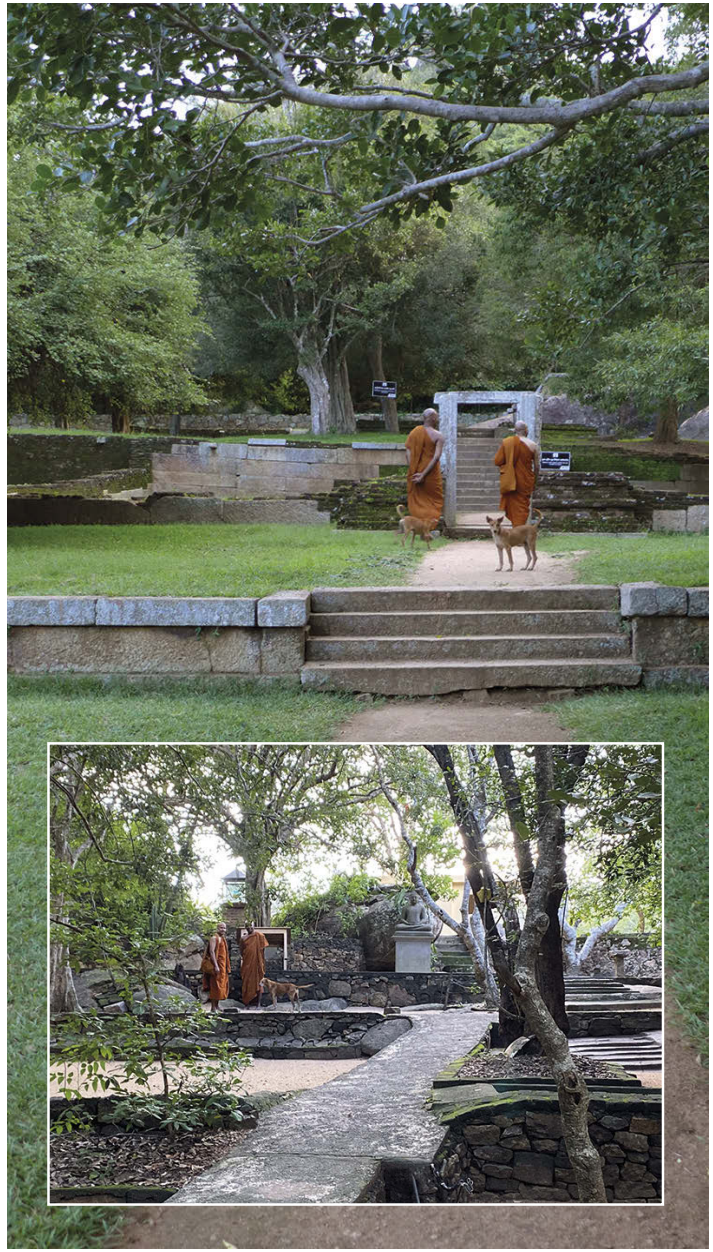
lost their associated buildings, at least most of their walls and roofs. A path traces the edge of the pond, our barefoot guide's steps along the way show that, in its familiarity, it's like breathing to him. The far shore of the pond is where the very first *sīmā* of the islanders was established and it remains a solid presence here. Built in the form of the prow of a ship – headed for that Further Shore – the brick surround of the central square seems the same size as the first *sīmā* at Cittaviveka Monastery in West Sussex, laid out by Ven. Ānanda Maitreya in 1981. Perhaps he consciously used the same dimensions – I was there when we marked it out in oblongs and performed the ceremonies to install it – or perhaps it was coincidence – now no one can say.

It is a good fit for about thirty monks to sit at forearm's length from each other: two lines of seven down either side and the Elder in the middle, plus the candidates for ordination or the reciter of the Rule at the centre. It's an eerie resonance, between the *sīmā* here, laid out around 300 BCE and the one I gathered the stones for, from the ruined wall of the pigsty at Chithurst, in June of 1981; same size, same shape, all of us gathered there and here in the same clothing, now and 2,300 years ago – echoes, a new-seeded generation, a mirage like all *saññā* – shimmering oscillations from earlier times, across the desert of the real.

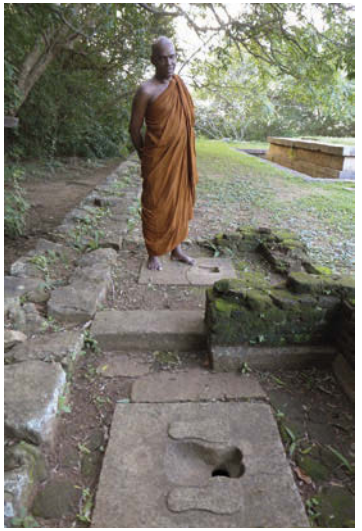
Our faithful dog companion dozes on the warm rock of the steps while we sit and reflect on the *sīmā* wall. Monkeys clamber up and down the rocks at the water's edge, as their own ancestors almost certainly did, whilst the first bhikkhus here recited their Rule on the lunar nights.

The tour takes us to the stone seat, the *Dhamma-āsana*, where the Arahant Kālabuddharakkhita expounded on the *Kālakārāma Sutta*, ages after his life as the weaselly brahmin pandit Saccaka, the 'Honest John' of debaters confounded by the Buddha in earlier times. He's a famous alumnus here but one I'd never heard of before.

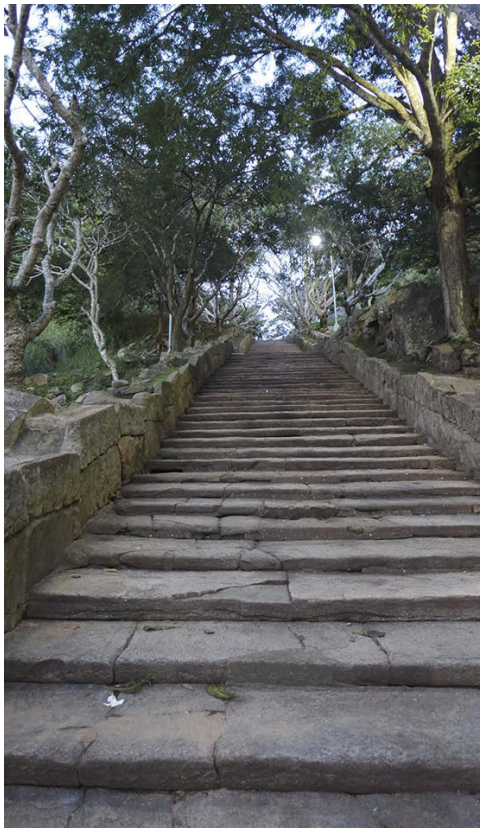
We visit the meditation hall's foundation with its *vacca-kuṭī* still



in place outside. Nothing much changes there either as the stone toilet and urinal would fit and work for anyone today as well as they did for their users when the hall was constructed.



Down again to the pristine pathways of pale sand, we bid farewell and I confess to having taken the monastery with me in my camera – ones and zeroes, pixels, lodged on a memory card, to return as dots on a screen, sparks of eye-consciousness, evoking memory, recollection of events and places – all empty as a mirage but formed as well and, like the 'miracle of instruction', the forms can evoke a change of heart, of attitude, that is an irreversible shift of view. A view that is the Dhamma knowing itself.



We pause at Mihintale proper and climb the ancient steps to the top of the rocky pinnacle, where Arahant Mahinda is said to have landed when he arrived by psychic power from India. Dusk is falling as we ascend. Pale anglo-tourists descend, avid local guides in tow, as we rise and find some more visitors on the top.

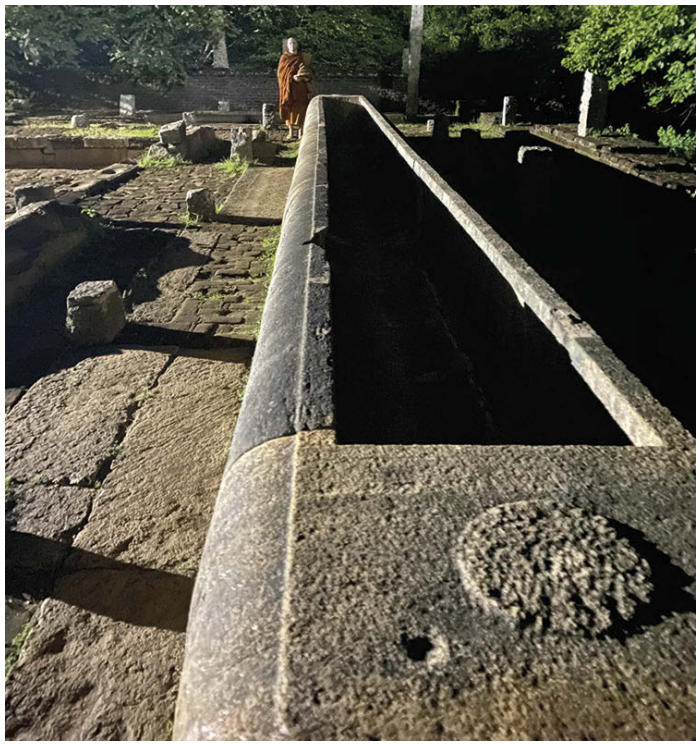
An English couple 'from between Portsmouth and Southampton' are astonished to meet a monk from Kent up here. Sri Lankan families are gathered on the sacred summit too and there is much chatter and picture-taking. It's thus not the moment for profound contemplation upon the Arahant Mahinda's arrival and the pivotal events that have resonated down through this land and the world on account of that. It's more: 'I was born in Woolwich…'; 'I'm from the Weald, born in Tenterden…'; and 'Fancy meeting up here... of all places.' Like the young couple I met at Mount Kailash, on their lamp-clad, PA-touting motorbike at 'The Place to Greet the Mountain', it could be all taken as 'ruining the moment' but it *is* the

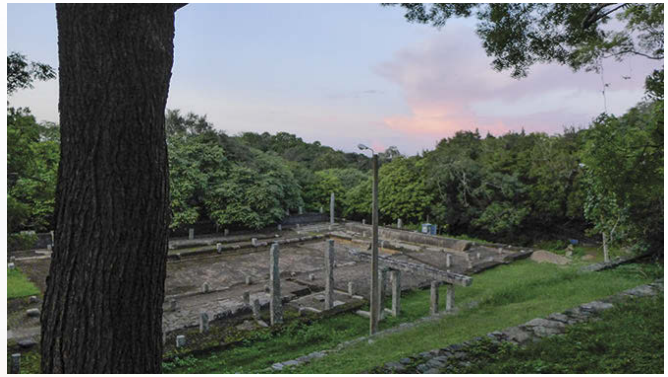
moment, so the only thing being ruined is an expectation. And whose was that?

The mind is not a person – that which knows the person is not a person – or perhaps it can be said that that knowing is the essence of what a person does not realize that they are. We assume 'ugly duckling' without a clue of the swan-like reality of Dhamma which is all that was ever truly here. Awareness knows the array of personal qualities that come and go but, on account of ignorance, not seeing clearly, it mistakes those things like the body and the personality to be me and mine: '*I* was expecting… This was to be *my* big experience…'.

Inside is Dhamma, outside is Dhamma, everything is Dhamma. Mind is everything, everything is mind.

We pause for a photo-op at the remains of the Mihintale *dāna-sālā*, the monastic refectory. I take pictures both as a memento and to inform the design of the *sālā* we are planning at Amaravati. The most notable features are that it's about the size we are thinking of BUT it has a massive servery/food-trough of stone, designed to keep the rice and curries warm and to be used by several hundred people at a serving. The stone is six inches thick, thirty yards long and two feet wide. Thus the rice would still be hot for the youngest novices when they walked through at the end of the line of a few hundred monastics. The rice and curries were divided (by some lost clever devices, possibly woven palm leaves) so the *mahā*-trough served to efficiently contain all the food on offer each day. A work of genius.





Tuesday the 19th – Polonnaruwa–Gal Vihāra

The layers of matter forming the rock settle as the ages flow; currents of water and wind, sand and sun do their work; the rock forms in striated liquid levels; the flow of faith and a king's vanities run through and coax these images from the living rock; standing Buddha, sitting Buddha, reclining Buddha – but who is the fourth, his knee and hip cocked at that jaunty, easy angle, or are those Ānanda's tears running from the eyes, dropping on the crossed arms?

The flow of carved robes crosses the rippled colours of the rock, the flow of kingdoms – from the rise of Polonarawa in the 11th Century to its fall in the 15th – crosses the land, a five mile stretch of palaces and shops, *stūpas* and temples, then swallowed by the jungle for 600 years, revered only by locals, until some British Army officers started to uncover it; now it is a World Heritage site.

Kings competing, rising, falling, each Temple of the Tooth in their respective sacred quadrangles bigger, better and built faster than the one before, the sixty-day one being trumped by the final eight-day one. Ripples of wind and currents, splashes, criss-crossing on a lake of time.

Perceptions flow – sitting on the warm rock, before the *Parinibbāna rūpa* and Ānanda, or is it the Relaxed Buddha, or who? Questions flow, histories flow, forests of faith flow, gathering and dispersing – open groves of grassy comfort under spreading leaves that offer coolth, (with the occasional strangling fig, as in Kandy's Royal Gardens and at Anuradhapura, of course), or forests of piety expanded to an efflorescing tangle of superstition, of fear of hells, hope for heavens and the propitiation of capricious deities.

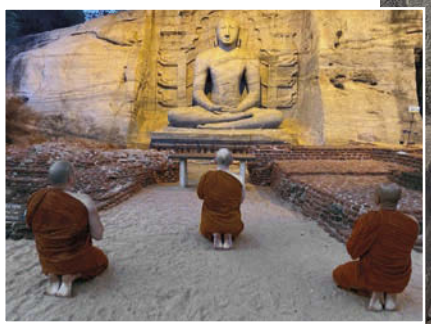
Stories flow – the tale told by Father Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, of his

transformative epiphany here shortly before he died mysteriously in Bangkok, at an interfaith conference; that other Tom, Mr Hancock, the architect who came here to trace the Reclining Buddha which he gave to Maechee Rehnu, who carved it into glass plates, then sent it to Amaravati where it resides, presides, in the Chapel of Rest, in the Temple.

The flow of perception and effort; the king has an idea or is proffered one; the artists are hired; the workers dig and prepare the land; the iron workers fashion the chisels, wedges and hammers; the rock is marked with what will go where; the first blow is struck and the images flow forth from the stone by a process of 'that which is not the image simply being removed'; day flows into night; electricity flows along wires and lights the lamps; 'warm' says the rock; 'soft' says the light of the evening; that light meets the eyes; the forms have their impacts; thoughts flow; memories flow; associations flow; ink flows onto paper; every 'it' is an event – '*Panta rhei,*' as Heraclitus observed, 'All is flowing.'

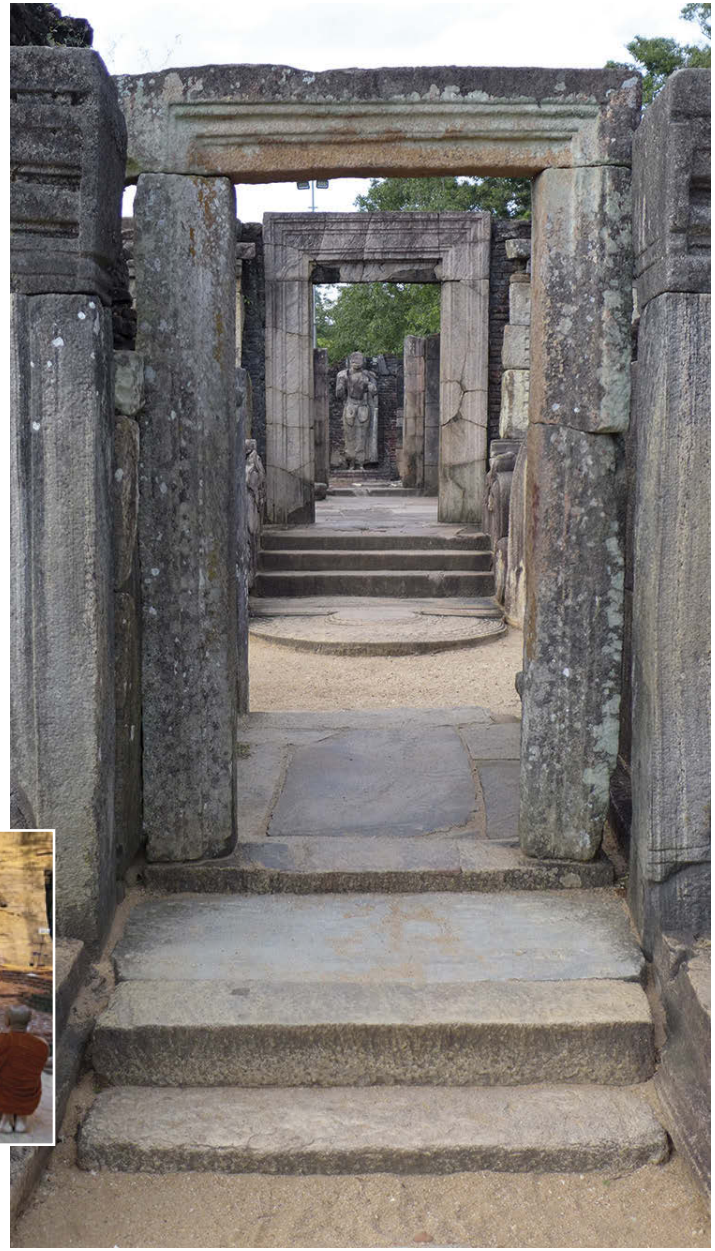
Yet epiphany – the moment of Thomas Merton, that moment which is not a moment in time, that meeting point, that excursion from time to timelessness, and even 'thatness' – 'flow' does not apply here, or there… The words strain, groan and crack to refer to the reality at least in part but they can never fully embody that reality; there are not enough dimensions:

> "For, Citta, these are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in the world, which the Tathāgata uses without misapprehension; uses to conform to common prejudice without clinging to them."
>
> D 9.52-3



> "Those who live by names and concepts,
> Confident in names and concepts,
> Discerning not the naming process,
> Are subject to the realm of Death.
> Who labels not, holds no concepts,
> Has cut off lust for name and form."
>
> S 1.1.20

The Dhamma cannot be reckoned, measured in terms of time, place, identity – such words do not apply. That which knows the flow is free from flowing.



The Buddha was unrepresented in human form for centuries until, so it is said, King Menander (known as Milinda in Pali) came from Greece and Bactria, and caused the first Buddha images to be made in human, albeit Apollonian, form. Prior to this arrival the timeless presence/absence, not-a-thing-ness, the non-manifestative quality of the Buddha, was rigorously suggested by the empty chair, the footprints, the symbol of the Triple Gem, a Bodhi Tree leaf, the Dhamma Wheel or a *stūpa*.

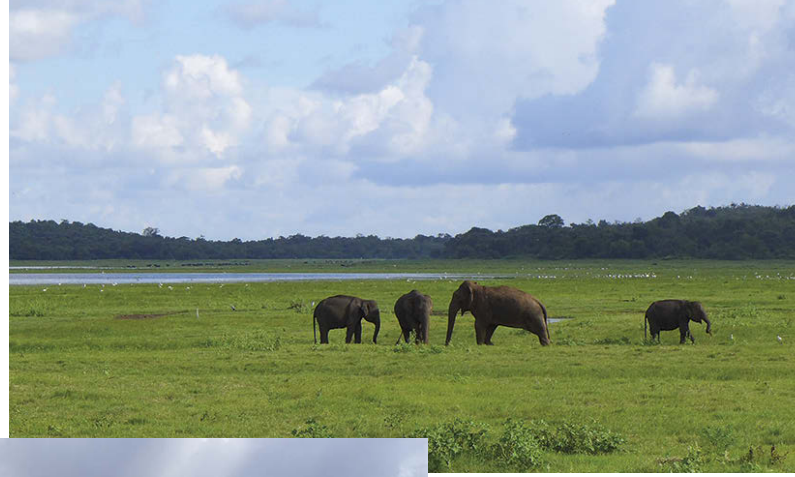
Here, embodied in these ruins, nature has made present those same meaningful absences in the east-facing broken *rūpa* of the *vatta-sālā* (the Round Temple) and the empty plinth at the heart of a tall brick-roofed temple, with its Hindu-style exterior; standing *rūpas* are posed on all sides there but at the centre, no thing. It is a space the poetics of which ring loudly with the roaring silence of the diamond of wisdom.

Wednesday the 20th– Polonnaruwa– Kaudulla National Park

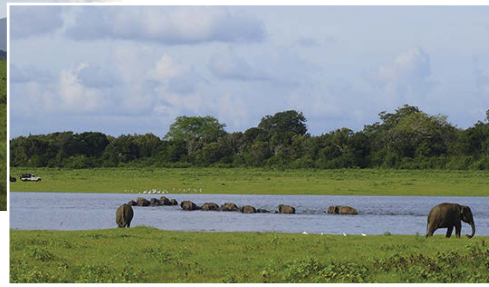
The early birds that came to the hotel restaurant caught the worms of the buffet breakfast – a couple of coach-loads who arrived last night, plus a big wedding party – they have left lone pieces of toast and warmers bereft of everything but a label and an aroma of what had been there – more meaningful absences for us to contemplate. We accept what's present gratefully and, before too long, freshly prepared reinforcements appear.

The wedding party members pose for photos on the lawn – rajinis jewel-draped and rajahs with their flat round headgear, sceptres in hand. Arc-lights, excited relatives and chairs are arranged and re-arranged. Then rain! And it's all swept indoors, the entire stage dressing – dissolved into air, into thin air – the sturdy Sri Lankan burghers, the actors disappear too. The downpour patterns the surface of the lake. Cormorants are unmoved.

Worlds intersect and overlap: one hundred Chinese travellers sweep out before we've finished breakfast, and are gone. Earlier, troops of jogging soldiers thumped by on the road below our chalets: 'Who's the best!?' 'We're the best!' they roar. Women soldiers form their own running block after the squad of men. Spotless white tee-shirts and purpose, intent, evoking the marine exercises of *Full Metal Jacket*. The leader calls and the squaddies respond, as in a church, a temple or an ashram anywhere. Worlds intersect and overlap.



The afternoon brings a visit to the elephant world of Kaudulla National Park. I have never seen an elephant in the wild before and here are dozens, grazing in a small group, one far off, alone, enjoying solitude or for some other cause. Who's to say?



The parade of jeeps, a parallel herd, brings us to a bigger group, at first wading across the shallows, the spot seemingly chosen to allow just enough depth for the calves to walk and breath through their upraised trunklets. There are many youngsters in the group; our pack of jeeps, camera-toting tourists and drivers come quite close. There seems to be a common understanding between elephants and people, that as long as the chattering bright-clad two-leggeds stay in their noisy moving boxes all will be peaceful. Us two-leggeds are not allowed to leave the vehicles so that the two worlds are enabled to intersect in peace.

Great beings, so rare and so familiar at the same time. The adults swat the bunches of grass to knock off dirt and bugs, stones. The little ones copy and cluster close to their mothers. An adolescent and a baby suckle at the same mother's milk together. 'I've never seen that before!' Ajahn Vinita exclaims, while a big drip of elephant milk slops out of the teen's mouth as it finishes.

What a quiet delight it is to share the presence of these fine beings. It feels as though we humans are the impulsive wild creatures, the exotic reactive exhibits, and it is the dignified pachyderms who are encountering the inmates of the zoo with passing interest. They are more concerned with family and food as they saunter along, but they will deign to cast an eye at the creatures caged in their wheeled boxes, as they stroll through acres of their park.

It is a sanctuary for birds as well and there are all sorts gathered, mostly by the water – gaily coloured, orange-billed painted storks, herons, egrets. Inland there are green bee-eaters perched on mounds watching; many peacocks roam the grasses. The land is vigorously alive, protected by humans from the humans.

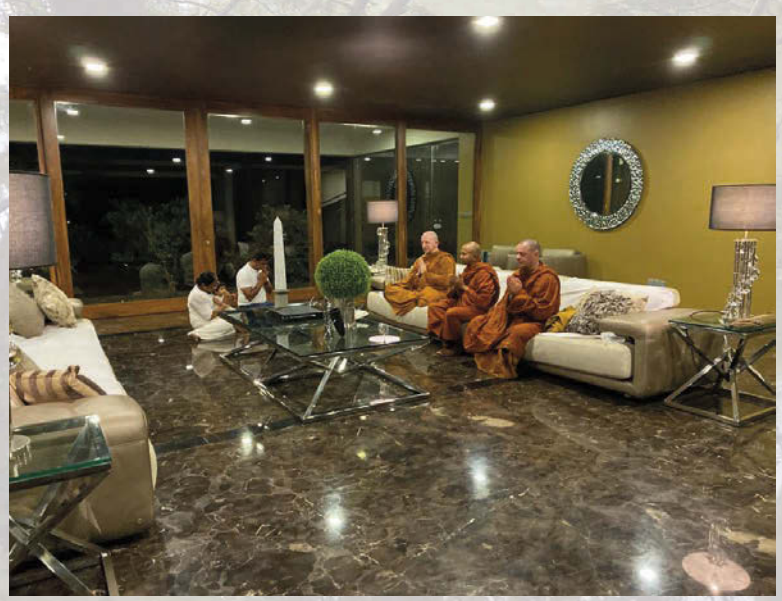
The lake is fed by a long canal, dug on the orders of King Mahasena (ruled 277-304 CE). We follow it out through the forest where its churning, bowling, rushing waters wash the roots of the forest trees, and provide a bath for the local farmers. It goes for miles – a feat of extraordinary vision, application and ingenuity. These folks were skilled water engineers indeed, our road and passage now following the line the king's designers chose – our lives thus intersecting this way too so that now we travel this line, see *these* waters, just like *this*.

Our final stop for the day is at the palatial home of the Gamlath family, about a mile away from the Deer Park Hotel. Mrs Gamlath greets us, with her son Nipuna; Dad is away at Parliament as he's an MP and the new government is just getting settled in.

A huge pond of koi carp is the first thing we come to in the sitting room area. The wall behind us opens onto a broad swathe of lawn – open for 150 yards until it reaches a stand of trees and then the lakeshore. The Nipuna Rice company must be doing well but the family are humble and unaffected in their manner. It is also impressive how the death of the daughter from dengue fever, at the age of thirty-six, has not been the sole subject of discussion. In truth, they do not dwell on that at all and seem to have developed a skilful and serene attitude to it. The Dhamma is close to their hearts and the effects of that have brought many blessings.

We share a few words and offer our *anumodanā* for their generous gift of accommodation in this their hotel, Deer Park, and for sponsoring our stay at Forest Rock, near Anuradhapura. They in turn present us with a palm-leaf book of the *Dhammapada*, in Sinhala and English.

It's an ancient process we are a part of here; despite being amongst the high and mighty of this society, powerful women and men are still very human and have loves and losses like everyone else. The Sangha provides a source of balance and integration when the lurches of success and failure, gain and loss, come into the picture. Whether it is a poor person at last getting a job with a little money, which we express *muditā* for, or if it's a *mahā-seṭṭhi* that loses one of their own to a mosquito bite, which brings *karuṇā*, the presence of the Sangha is a focus, a reminder, of how it is all *Dhamma-jāti*, 'born of the Dhamma' and *Dhamma-niyamatā*, 'following the laws of Dhamma'.

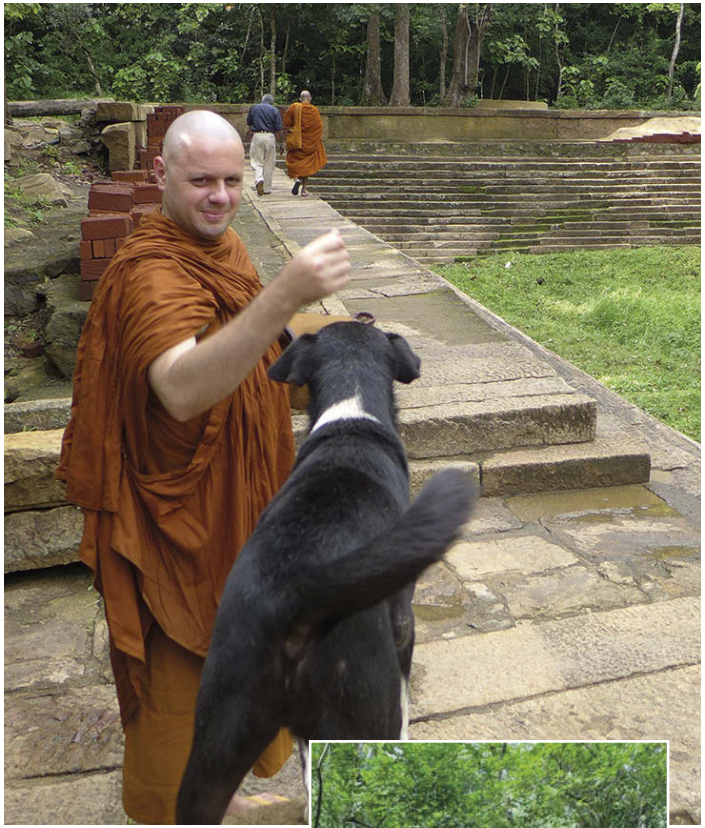


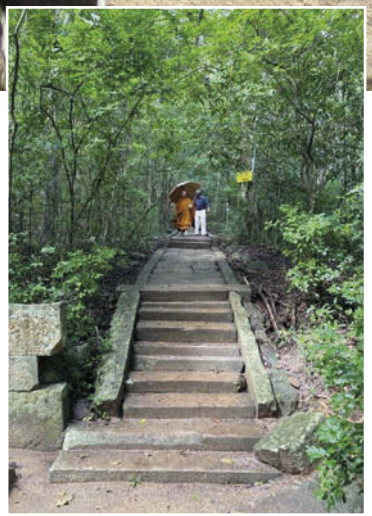
A mirror shows us our own face; the Sangha's blessing is to be a mirror that reveals that face to be the face of nature. It is not personal, in essence, this is a shared reality, a relational field not an isolated individual. Insofar as we exist (from the Latin *ex sistere*, 'to cause to stand out'), and thus 'stand out' from the reality of Dhamma, those waves that each rise up, stand out, are in an intrinsic state of relationship with all the waves around them.

The waves of China Bay lap onto the beach, a few yards from where this is being written. Waves, tides, currents all inter-mingle to create this set of moving, liquid shapes. In this moment this ripple is exactly *this* way, how could it not be affected

by, related to, connected with every other ripple around it?

Our lives intersect interpenetrate in organic, intricately interwoven patterns – so how could words like ‘individual’ be anything other than convenient fictions: ‘Merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in the world that the Tathāgata uses without misapprehension.’





Thursday the 21st – Ritigala–Trincomalee

The morning conversations between us three bhikkhus are often rich and illuminating. Histories get explored – Ajahn Vinita recounts how it was seeing a few seconds of the opening of *Kung Fu*, with David Carradine, the image of a lone hermit striding through the mountains, that wakened the *samaṇa-saññā* in his heart as a child. He got the bug.

Then, at seventeen, he spoke with a local abbot who, afraid of Ajahn Vinita's father's disappointment, deflected the lad's monastic interests by suggesting that he go on a meditation retreat instead. He went, and never returned to the home life again. The tale unfolded with various layers of transformation; being given the book of Luang Por Chah's teachings *Living Dhamma* and needing a friend to help him translate the English; that eventually leading him to learn the language in order to be able to read the book himself. Then other Ajahn Chah books, then his adoption of the Thai Forest robe colours, and then to be brought in to translate when Luang Por Sumedho came to Sri Lanka to participate in an ordination ceremony, thence to England and now here we are.

Other histories are here too – the legend of Tambapanni and how it got its name 'Copper Hand Island'. Back in the mists of time the King of Vanga (Bengal) married a princess of Kalinga (Orissa). They had a daughter, Suppadevi, who left home 'to seek an independent life'.

Princess Suppadevi was on a caravan to Magadha when she was attacked and abducted by a lion called Sinha – either a real lion or a lion-like bandit, stories and

interpretations differ.

Suppadevi being kept in a cave by him, they cohabited and produced two children, a son, Sinhabahu ('Lion-armed') and a daughter named Sinhasivali. These two grew up and escaped with their mother. Later the brother and sister married each other. Sinhabahu killed their father, Sinha, along the way and, over the years, the two siblings produced thirty-two children. These children appeared in the form of sixteen pairs of twins, with the eldest son being called Vijaya.

Prince Vijaya turned out to be badly behaved as he grew up so he was banished, with 700 followers. They set off south and, eventually, fetched up on this very island; the ship of Vijaya landing at Supparaka. When they set foot on land and touched it, their hands and feet became reddened by the local dust, thus 'Tamba', meaning 'copper' to describe the unusual colour.

Vijaya and his group were then attacked by a *yakkhinī* called Kuveni but he beat her in the fight, then, true to family form, married her. She in turn helped Vijaya defeat the other *yakkhas* of the region.

So, in short, the usual mytho-magical pot-pourri of independence, bestiality, abduction, imprisonment, escape, incest, banishment, deophilia (or anthropophilia, depending on which way one looks at it) and city-founding, dynasty-hatching that goes with many ancient cultures.

By way of comparison I wax lyrically (with the help of Wikipedia) on Rome and its founders, the twins Romulus and Remus. They were the children of a Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, who had been impregnated by Mars in a grove sacred to the God of War. She was the daughter of a former king, Numitor, who had been supplanted by his brother Aurelius. Aurelius was afraid the twins (Romulus and Remus) might threaten his rule so he had ordered them to be left on the riverbank to die. The river god, Tiberinus, took pity on them so a she-wolf was caused to adopt them, and cared for them in the cave now known as Luperod... thus arose Rome with its name, its empire, its mythopoeic saga.

Other histories: how easily, as children, Ajahn Appamado and I were moved to tears – me by *Heidi* as a black-and-white TV programme, he by *Lassie* and *Bambi*.

The latter I was not even allowed to see as a youngster, the family knowing how it would have rendered me inconsolable for days or weeks, or scarred for life as I was by the film of the H Rider Haggard story *She*, at the age of eight, and the dunking of sacrificial victims into a pit of lava.

And yet more: the Deer Park Hotel's marrying couple and the grand, day-long process of photos and feasting, costumery and florals, leads us into the subject of marriage and how we three monks contrived to avoid it. Fantasies of 'the woman with golden hair', the goose-girl revealed as a princess or the brave little tailor – 'seven at a blow!' – who receives the hand of the princess, half the kingdom and becomes a prince... then 'happily ever after'.

Then how the years of discernment revealed or coaxed into being the realization that: 'Between the idea and the reality… falls the shadow'. How the beloved's mother was ogrelike, so what did that imply about how the princess-to-be might evolve? How the riders on our fantasies come with flags proclaiming the ecstasy of fascination yet bring with them the agony of life on stony ground.

The wedding is one thing but the marriage is another; and to a teenaged mind looking around, even at happy marriages, how have the 'happily-ever-after' possibilities fared in the face of nature's implacable, unstoppable rolling wheel? Not good:

~ In my own childhood domain, apparently, everyone in the local villages loves and gets along with everyone – mums and dads, daughters and sons – then a dad, even though he is the nicest bloke, is getting thinner, dying of cancer.

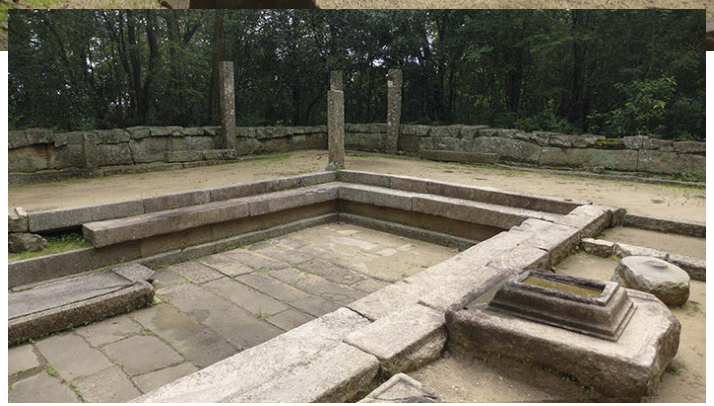
~ Or a mum hints at being ready to throw herself in the lake, and (it turns out) was not joking.

~ Another dad (approaching sixty) abandons two teenaged daughters to elope with a twenty-two-year-old and leaving his sister, 'the maiden aunt', to pick up the pieces.

~ A sweet lanky daughter gets pregnant at sixteen and then is given £10 by her boyfriend as a fare-thee-well, as that's all the money he's got: 'Thank you very much.'

~ And nobody will ever talk about what Celia got up to…

So, we three all inclined away from matrimony but wedded ourselves to the Sangha instead – history is now and Sri Lanka, Tambapanni being discovered by a new arrival.

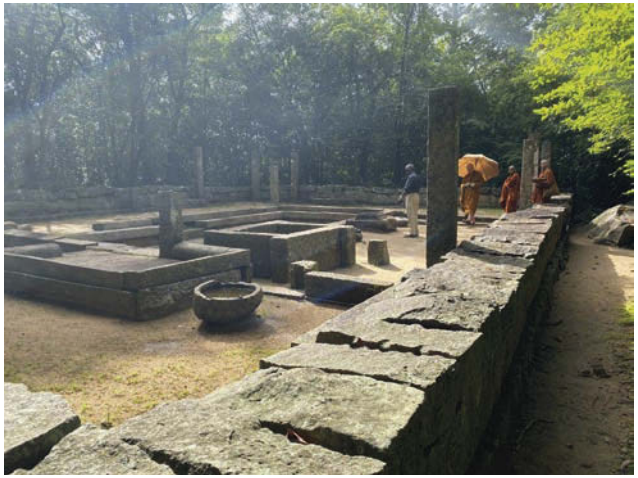


Ritigala, the ancient monastery, sits on the slopes of a mountain reputed to have been brought by Hanuman from the Himalayas in order to provide the ailing army of Rama and his brother Lakshman with healing herbs during the Rama-Ravana War. The trees and plants, as well as the rocks and soil here are distinct from the land around them. This is similar to how Point Reyes and the land to the west of Tomales Bay, in Northern California, compares to the coast of Mexico some 400 miles to the south but not at all to the land east of the San Andreas fault-line. It's an arrival, an intrusion, or extrusion, a remainder or an uplift, like Mount Kailash in the Himalayas of Tibet.

The place was first settled shortly after the arrival of Arahant Mahinda in the 3rd Century BCE, and its first abbot was the nephew of King Devanampiyatissa, Mahinda's patron.

Morning sun paints the stone pathway climbing through the forest, the slopes steep and creek-cut like Abhayagiri Monastery in California. Well-shaped flag stones, hardly any of them square, fit neatly into each other and pave the track smoothly underfoot. The steps, however, are all perfectly edged and rectangular, this even thirteen centuries after the place was last active as a monastery.

It was the diligent and indefatigable Mr HCP Bell who uncovered these stones and caused the excavations that now reveal the fabric and spirit of the place. It is a wonder. A well-made path through the forest; circular spots to pause and rest in the climb and to be a hub for other paths. Levellish spots are co-opted for group residences and a meditation hall, an infirmary complete with a *jantāghara*, a 'fire-



house', the monastic sauna used for herbal steam-baths and for easing the aching joints of those who sit and meditate and who work to maintain the paths and dwellings of the community. It is so like home it is almost eerie. Even the slopes and the shapes of the greenery evoke Abhayagiri, or the sparser forest and paths of Wat Pah Nanachat. Forest monastic life has not changed very much in 2300 years.

The differences are the humidity – we are in soaked robes by the end of our descent – and the elephants that live here and occasionally wander through. Ajahn Vinita tells us how he had tried to get permission to reside in this forest some years ago but the officials were extremely clear – no monks or villagers can stay in the bounds of the park!

The guide, Samantha, who is showing us around, however, delights to let us know he's recently been contracted to come back and live here again. He's plainly

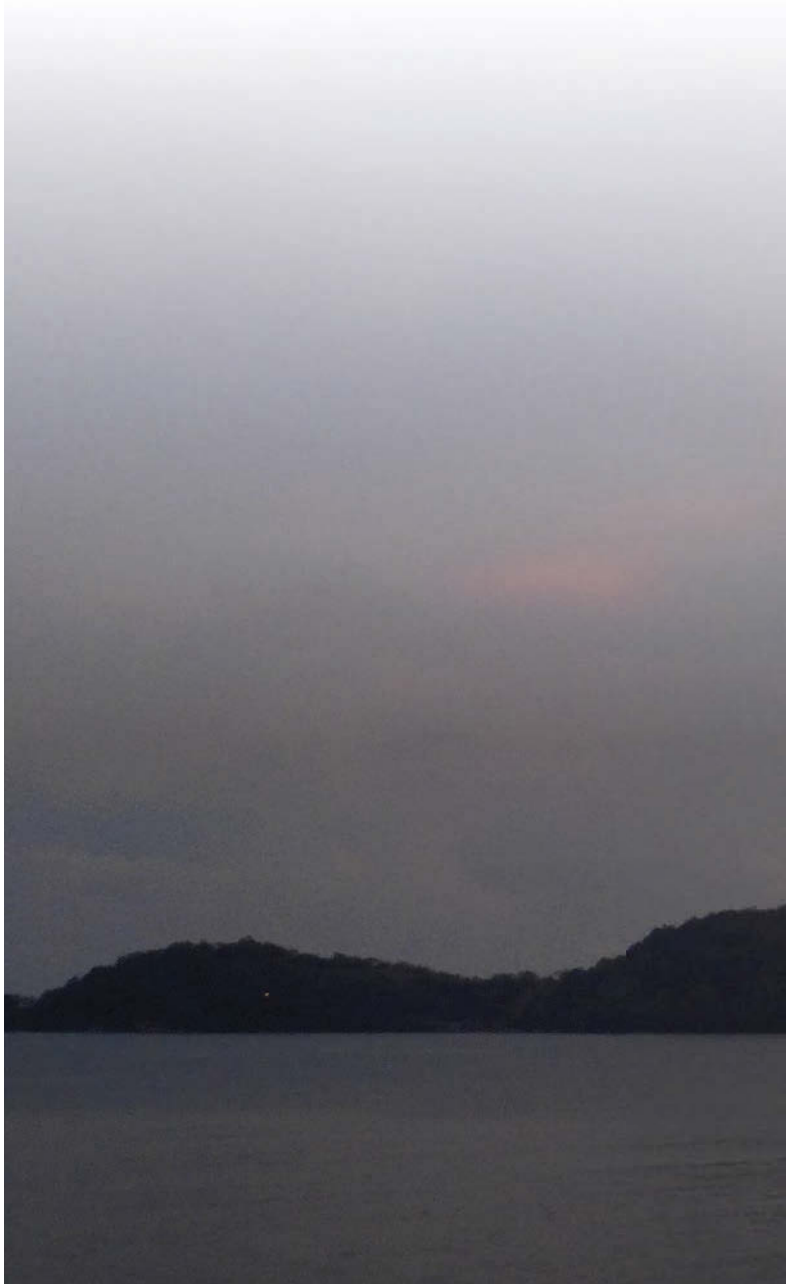
gleeful at the idea as he truly loves the place, not only because of its archaeological possibilities: 'Only a fraction has been covered!' But more because, as he says repeatedly, 'Here you are away from *Everything!*' He also tells us how, even for those who do come to visit or work here, there is such superstition that everyone will be gone by two or three o'clock in the afternoon so that he has the place to himself every evening and night. He's clearly not worried about spooks and *yakkhas*, even though he casually mentions that the mountain was indeed dropped here by Hanuman, NOT *said to be* dropped but *actually*.

After a meal-stop in Habarana, which was the north/south dividing line in the recent civil war, we set off for Trincomalee, a port on the east coast, fifty miles to the north-east of Ritigala.

The resonances of that war get louder, in our conversations and in the world around us. There are more military checkpoints on the road and, indeed, our hosts are the Sri Lankan Air Force who have invited us, via Air Marshal Sumangala Dias and Rohan Silva (the presidential protection chief), to stay in a lodge on China Bay, at their Eagles' Golf Links. As with the Buddha's connections to King Pasenadi and King Bimbisara there is a mysterious and ancient, as well as ironic, relationship between the monastic community and the military. They seek for spiritual advice and guidance, and (the logic goes) if you are going to have a military force, better for it to have some moral values being encouraged and imbued rather than not. Thus we have accepted this invitation to stay here.

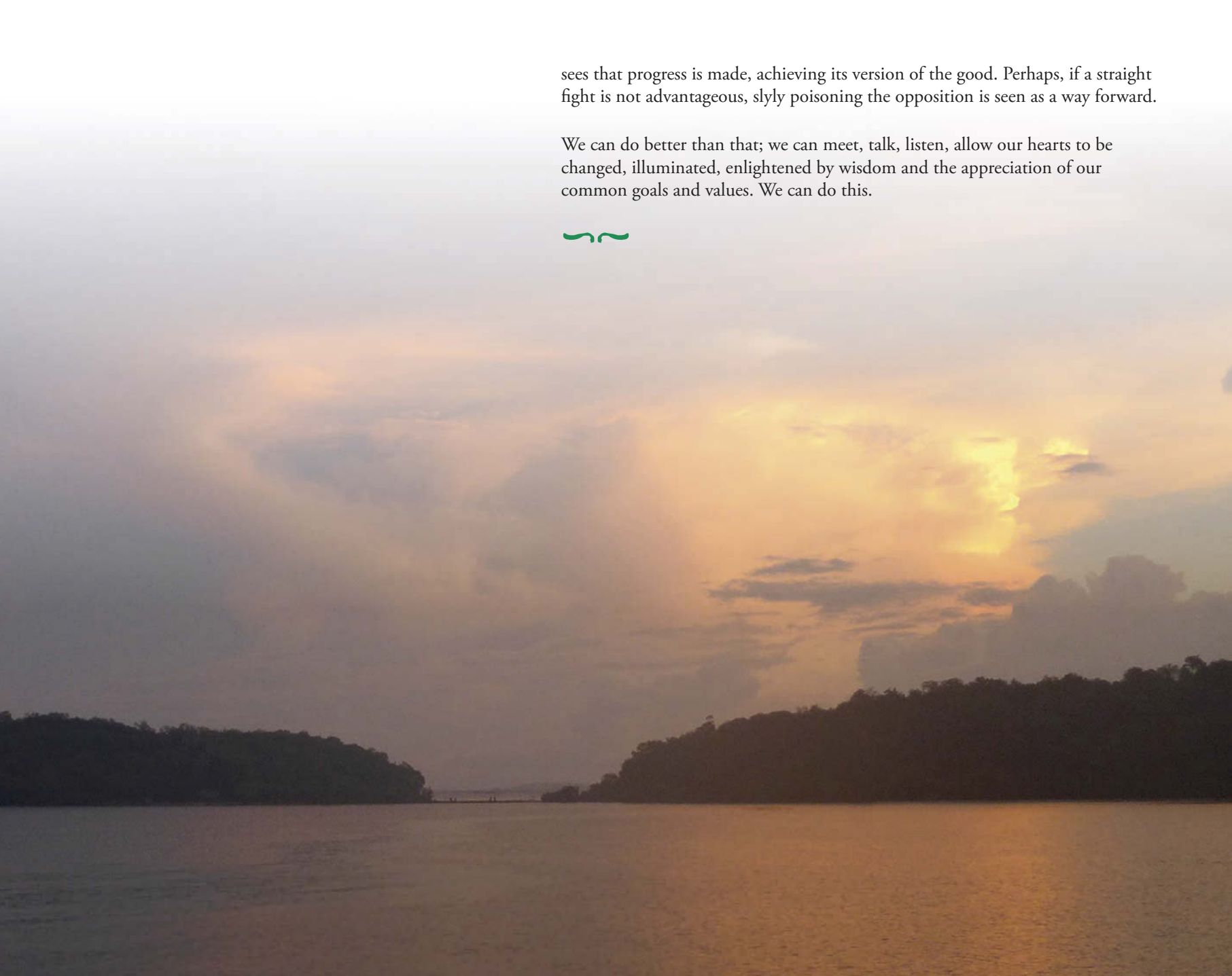
The smell of the salt sea and ozone meets us as we step out of the car. Gunboats mingle with Tamil fishing vessels, small and large, that speckle the lagoon. The war is over but the Sri Lankan military still shows its teeth clearly in this eastern area. Sun and blue skies interplay with downpours and thunderstorms, lightning ignites the night; then the dawn comes, placid and clear once more; then rain again. War and peace, tranquillity and ferocity, Sinhalese and Tamil speakers live side by side. It might be an awkward truce but truce it is, to the benefit and blessing of all.

We might feel that we want a fight, that 'peace' means being stuck in an oppressed state, but war is not the best way to work out our differences. The Buddha spent much time counselling ways for us to solve our differences without resorting to violence. The beast within us is looking for a fight, a *casus belli*, as that's the way it



sees that progress is made, achieving its version of the good. Perhaps, if a straight fight is not advantageous, slyly poisoning the opposition is seen as a way forward.

We can do better than that; we can meet, talk, listen, allow our hearts to be changed, illuminated, enlightened by wisdom and the appreciation of our common goals and values. We can do this.



Friday the 22nd – Trincomalee

Wing Commander Ananda Kumarasiri, our host, bows to the ground, head fully onto our feet, as he bids farewell. We weave our way out of Trincomalee, a city loved as a port by the Romans, the Chinese, by Admiral Nelson and others, as well as a home and a book setting of Arthur C Clarke who lived here, and his namesake, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who placed some Sherlock Holmes stories here – it is a treasured spot on this Isle of Copper.

We leave the sea behind us, with its schools of tiny silver fish that burst the surface of the lagoon – Hopping? Running? Chasing? Escaping? Playing? – and we enter the rural north. The roads are more bumpy, the villages visibly poorer, the money from the south and Colombo, the capital, seemingly less forthcoming for this former war zone. Sheets of aged corrugated iron form walls and roofs and fences everywhere at the roadside as we head towards Jaffna.

The land is often wide open, with scrubby trees and stretches of grass between the road and the seashore, it mutates into salt marshes and mangrove swamps, the curling roots of the low trees hungrily reaching into the brackish waters. More often there are acres, hundreds, thousands of acres of rich green rice, glowing with young life in the paddies. Sugar palms, palmyras, line the banks between the rectangular fields while white egrets keep their watch below them, always alert to movements in the mud, especially where the rice is yet to sprout.

To Ajahn Vinita these Tamil dominated areas are completely different to the Sinhalese regions he knows so well: ‘Different trees, different architecture, different clothes. The girls wear their hair in two plaits here, the ends looped up to join their roots...’. To him these contrasts are vividly apparent, to the untrained eye the differences are indiscernible. The script on the signs is Tamil too and he tells us that folks in this area might know Tamil and English but not Sinhala.

He also tells us, ‘I’ve never been in this place before; it’s like a different country.’

'It's all a different country to me,' I respond, 'It's the first time I've seen any of it.'

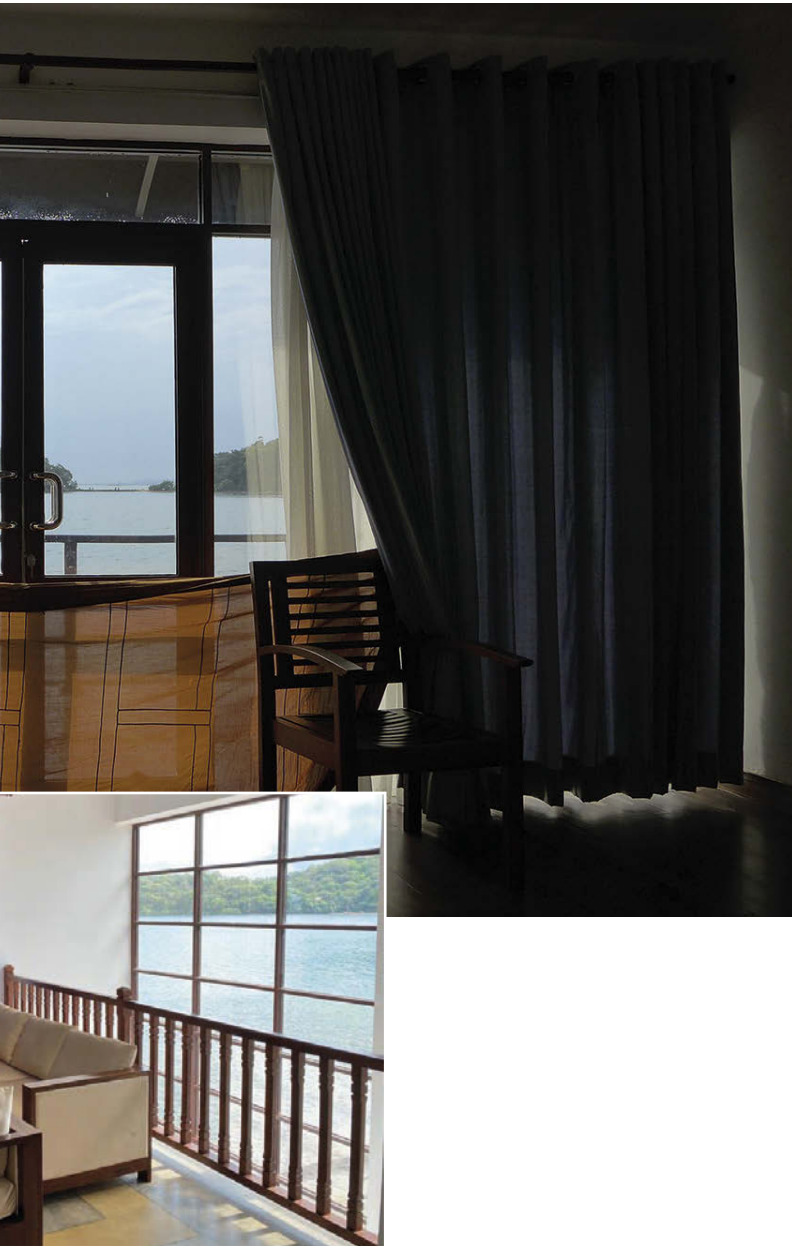
The disparities that are most striking are the poverty and the sense of scarring. The memories of the civil war are strong here. Along the small country roads we travel there are signs of war-damage and regular military camps. This region had been the main stronghold of the LTTE, (The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) more usually known just as the Tamil Tigers and, as we stop for a cold drink at a stall on a back-country lane, they tell us, 'This is the last Buddhist village in this area. North

of here there are no more.' There is a *stūpa* in the village and a white, standing Buddha *rūpa*, so the signs are that now they can live more peaceably here.

It's a quiet place. There are so many resting dogs along the way that it's dubbed the 'Dog-in-the-Road' province. People are at work in their paddies, tending small shops and kiosks in the villages; tiny shanties have been popped into place, built of a few sticks and a sheet of iron or two. As we rejoin the coast road we pass the shrine of Girihandu Seya, at Thiriyaya, where (according to the Sri Lankan legends at least) Tapussa and Bhallika, the merchants who met and paid respects to the Buddha shortly after his enlightenment, and who were given some of his hair as a memento, enshrined that hair-relic in a *stūpa* that has survived here to this day. This would predate Arahant Mahinda's arrival on the island by about 250 years.

The Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar, is said, in a similar fashion, to contain some of the same hair-relic, also brought there by Tapussa and Bhallika on their mercantile wanderings. Perhaps they divided it and installed some hair in each place; perhaps one is the 'real' shrine and the other an 'unreal', false one; or perhaps it was somewhere else altogether... What we know we have is a story, a place, the faith of twenty-five centuries and what is a 'real' shrine anyway? Even if it turns out that the Wizard of Oz is a fake, somehow his magic can work on us anyway, as in the Tibetan story of the dog's tooth a forgetful son brought back to his village when he had promised his mother he'd bring her a tooth of the Buddha. The tale tells how she had such faith and devotion that the very substance of the dog's tooth was transformed and began to emit a fragrance of heavenly aromas, and to radiate rainbow-coloured light.

We pass through a village where they recently had to campaign to be allowed to cremate the body of the aged Buddhist abbot who had died there. A little further on there is more grimness in the air as we reach Mullaitivu. This is where the Tamil Tigers' leader, Prabhakaran, met his end. With his death the war came to an abrupt close on May the 19th, 2009. 'When he was shown on the television to be dead, the war stopped right then,' Ajahn Vinita tells us. 'One day war; the next day peace, just like that.'



It was an end, of sorts, but memories and scars linger on. It is unclear exactly what was the specific cause for armed conflict originally – certainly there was social injustice coupled with ignorance, greed, hatred and delusion – but the spark that lit up the conflagration was the killing of twelve army personnel in Jaffna, then putting their bodies on a train to Colombo. This created the *casus belli*, resulting in the burning of the Tamil Library in Jaffna in 1981, when nearly 100,000 Tamil books and manuscripts, many of them irreplaceable, were destroyed. The war erupted and continued for nearly thirty years.

The Sri Lankan government of 2001 had helpfully acknowledged that the 1981 event had been carried out by 'goon squads let loose by the then-government'. This public statement was supportive of reconciliation and the restoration of justice and peace in the area.

Now there is a big roadside shrine at the spot where Prabhakaran was killed and an exhausted peace is here. The army and other military bases are very active and visible but no signs of protest – no blazoned anti-government graffiti or suchlike – are to be seen. Despite some overseas encouragements to further rebellion and violence, and despite any depredations carried out by the Sinhalese or Tamil sides, the people here are glad not to be at war anymore and are thus able to get on with their lives – their shops, their schooling, their farms and their offices.

On the roofs of buildings we pass, RED CROSS is writ large on the brick tiles; the white paint now faded. Broken concrete walls and shells of smashed houses are weathering, overgrown with rambling vines self-seeded greenery, and are rain-stained by the passing years. Old wars disappear into the land – Rama-Ravana in the ancient past, the Indian invasions that made King Vattagamini go into hiding, and all his successors, wave after wave, now swallowed by the land and water, echoing in lines of rock and canals, stone foundations, the names of the fighters and why they fought almost forgotten – what was it all for? Do we have a lesson to be learned?

There is the hunt for security, food, resources; the persistence of memory, the urges to forgive or for revenge, it is all in the mix. If we learn from the past we can avoid repeating the causes of terror and violence, and can bring the wholesome, the integrative into being if we want it.

One of the effects of war is the military presence of the Sri Lankan government in Jaffna. We are here as the guests of that military, in the form of Wing Commander Jayarathna Amarasinghe, via Sumangala Dias and Rohan Silva again, and we are ensconced in a private nook by the sea – Pebble Beach (despite there being no pebbles), Palaly, close to the airport and next door to Prabhakaran's home village of Valvettithurai. An armed guard is on the beach for our protection, just in case, as in Svalbard with unpredictable polar bears nearby. It's a strange mix but so it goes; as in the frozen wastes of Svalbard in 2003, we accepted this invitation to come to a zone of amplified uncertainty so this is what comes with it.

The sea itself gives the same signal – calm on the surface at the moment but it can do anything at any time. Its depths can be holding any kind of dangers to people as well as all kinds of treasures; its storms can flip a boat with ease and its surface can be a liquid support for far and easy travels. Blessings and curses live side by side – the fish's death is a shark's delight and the fish's escape is a shark's frustration. If we learn from this dynamic then that which is beyond blessings and curses can be realized.

Warm wind
Roaring sea
silence
profound, immeasureable, unfathomable,
like the great ocean

Saturday the 23rd – Jaffna-City Library-Nallur Kandaswamy Temple-Sanghamitta Shrine

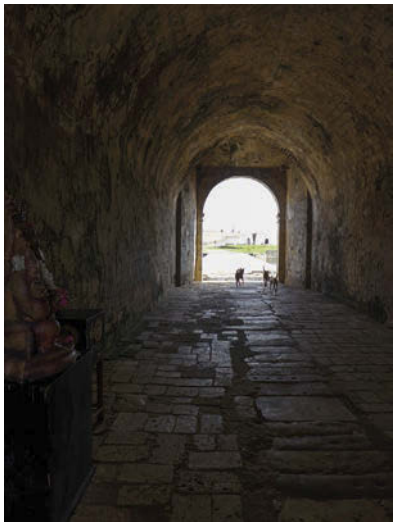
Jaffna bustles. The roads might be bumpy, the older buildings shabby, but there are smiles, artless and easy, rows of busy shops, thick waistlines and a flood of motorbikes, *tuk-tuks*, cars and bicycles. The city is well and truly alive, and now flourishing even, only ten years after the war ended.

We visit the Jaffna Library, the very place that was torched and the 97,000 books destroyed; it has a unique place in the history of the conflict, like the Dublin Post Office in the Easter Rising, but it has grown back into full and comfortable fertility. It now has 200,000 books, the building is in active use daily and the shelves are densely packed with Tamil and English titles and a big variety of others. Unlike the library of Alexandria, which was lost forever, it has risen from the ashes so completely that, apart from a couple of photographs of the incinerated structure set high on the library walls, you'd never know it had ever been anything but a city library, visited by students at their work (as they are this day), and random members of the public looking for something to read.

At the edge of the military camp where we are staying a large notice beside the road proclaims 'No future without forgiveness'. Wise words indeed. They could be modified to explain 'No future of peace and plenty without forgiveness' but the original is more succinct and carries the meaning.

The British need to request forgiveness for this war as well. Even though the 'Indian invasions' (to use the Sinhalese term) have happened here for millennia, the British colonizers deliberately used a policy of 'divide and rule' in imposing their regime. They are said to have given a majority of senior administrative posts to Tamil-speaking people – promotions they could little hope to be given otherwise – so the Sinhalese speakers were an overlooked and slighted majority. The Tamils, grateful to the British for their preferments, thus became loyal citizens of the Empire. The preferential treatment brought the desired rifts and resentments so, when the British relinquished the island as a colony and handed over rule in 1948, the Sinhalese majority were keen, so it seems, to redress the balance and thus gave the bias of high-profile jobs and educational opportunities to their own. *Kamma* and *vipāka* – action and its results – have a remorseless dynamic, thus more of the seeds of the 1981-2009 conflict were sown and bore their fruit.

Forgiveness is the art of non-grasping, not defining others solely by their acts and letting go of the past, hopefully having learned from it. It is seeing things in terms of Dhamma, nature, rather than in personal, slanted and unclear ways. Revenge is sweet but sweetness rots your teeth and brings on many ailments.



There is a little spare time before we can visit the Hindu temple of Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil so Wing Commander Amarasinghe takes us to the old Portuguese and Dutch fortifications.

'Why are we here?' I ask myself at first, since old castles are not high on my list of places I'd like to visit, but soon the vast, pentacular array of walls, guard towers and the broad moat – still in remarkably good repair – tells us why. It's all an amazing feat of engineering, originally by the Portuguese in a quadrangular form, but then extended and strengthened by the Dutch in 1619 and made five-sided;

completed exactly 400 years ago.

We walk the walls and explore the now roofless armoury, look down into the opened prison cells as broken as vacant crab-shells on the beach. Time and effort, intent possessiveness brought this all into being, a tool of power and control, now we weekenders stroll its ramparts: What was so precious to protect? What can be owned and who is there to own it? How long will this body be *my* fortress? How secure is the ownership? It is all spirits:

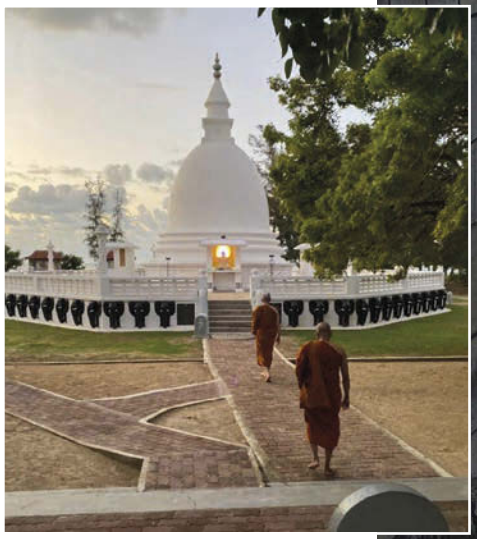
> "The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."
>
> *The Tempest,* Act IV, Scene i

The Hindu Temple is large and well-appointed with a huge processional walkway, leading past shrines for the various members of the Vedic pantheon: Vishnu, Shiva, Rama and Sita, Durga – is that her, buried there in the dark recesses? – we follow a troop of priests and a few devotees, with drums and horns, incense and purpose, and make the loop around the vast quadrangle.

Our guide tells us that it's big but not one of the four classical Great Hindu Temples of the island, and it's relatively new, having been built in 948 CE. It is also notably welcoming to those of other paths so we are received very warmly here and, unlike all other male visitors who have to remove their shirts, us bhikkhus are allowed to keep our robes on. It's an open friendship, as far as it's possible to tell, and a sign that there have been kindly and respectful connections between the Tamil and Sinhalese peoples over time, as well as the rhythm of frictions.

Ajahn Vinita points out the one Buddhist temple in Jaffna, as we drive by, and mentions that this is where he aims to start from for his planned *tudong* walk next year. It's a brave undertaking: 'My family would think I am signing my own death warrant, so I am not telling them when I'm going.' But he is determined, and his good heart and humble ways will be better protection than the armed guard we have today.

As evening begins to fall we head out to the northernmost tip of Sri Lanka, to the shrine where the Arahant Saṅghamittā landed, with her ten nun companions, and brought the Bodhi Tree sapling that still grows in Anuradhapura. This spot is called Dambakola Patuna, there is a young member of the Bodhi Tree family here and a small white *stūpa* set in immaculately tended grounds.



It's Saturday but we are the only pilgrims here. The two men (from the Navy) who look after the shrine come over with cool drinks for us and

flower and incense offerings for the tree and the *stūpa*. It's a serene place, right at the water's edge, so the wave-surge of the tideless equatorial sea fills our ears as we pay our respects and sit for a good amount of time.

Appreciation, gratefulness, a warm sense of family arises as night arrives and the *stūpa* becomes illuminated. The heart too – illuminated by the great Arahant Saṅghamittā's journey, her faith and her bringing of the nuns' community to this land. If she had not come, if Sri Lanka had not, 700 years later, had nuns to send to China in 432 CE, then the women's lineage would have never made it to the Northern Buddhist world.

How was their sea-voyage? She began inland at Sanchi, now in Madhya Pradesh, but went to Bodh Gaya to receive the branch of the Bodhi Tree. Thence to Patna, 'Pāṭaliputta' as it was then, thence to the east coast of India and finally to here, the port of Jambu-Kola. Ten other nuns came with her, to plant the seed of her order here, and we even have their names: Uttarā, Hemā, Pasadpālā, Aggimittā, Dasikā, Pheggū, Pabbatā, Mattā, Mallā and Dhammadasiyā.

The nuns at Amaravati and our other branches are not bhikkhuṇīs, like Saṅghamittā and her companions, but sīladhārā.

In the early 1980s, when our community was newly-formed in the West, Ajahn Sumedho realized he needed to establish a form for women's monastic training that paralleled the men's. The bhikkhuṇī order had faded from the Theravāda world about 1000 years before (the last historical records of them are in Sri Lanka in 1073 CE) and the Eight-Precept *maechee* form prevalent in Thailand was too far away in substance from the men's training; the *maechee* being able to use money, grow food, to cook and to drive. Thus, in 1983, the Ten Precept Sīladhārā form was developed, after much consultation, and the first four ordinands 'went forth' in July that year.

There are two forms of lineage for ordination in the Buddhist tradition, as affirmed by the great Thai scholar monk Venerable Somdhet Payutto: 'Ordination by Dhamma and ordination by Vinaya'. He spoke with five senior nuns of

our community and myself one time in an extended discussion on this point, emphasizing that both lines are equally valid and encouraging the style of practice and the form of the sīladhārā as suitable for widespread use in Thailand.

The nuns of our community might thus not have the 'Vinaya' connection with Arahant Saṅghamittā and the line she brought to Sri Lanka, and thence China and beyond, but they most certainly have the 'Dhamma' connection. There is a root relatedness, deep in the ground of Dhamma. It is felt here, by this bright little *stūpa* on the sea-shore, this shrine to the actuality of women's full enlightenment. The Arahant Saṅghamittā is one of the great matriarchs of this *sāsana* and we are privileged to be here, at the spot where she stepped ashore, where she fulfilled her aim to bring the nuns' order to Sri Lanka.

Did she know this would be a life-raft for the nuns? That 700 years hence a delegation would go from here to China at the behest of the Emperor, and that that would be a life-line for the women's order? The branches in India and Sri Lanka, in later years, were all seemingly lost to war, famine and religious competition. We do not know and the scriptures do not say, but the flow of history tells us the women's order flourished in Sri Lanka for about 1300 years before they faded here. Their torch continues to burn however, keeping the flame of faith alive all around the world today.

Sunday the 24th – Kilinochchi-Dambulla-Diddeniya Monastery

We bid our farewells to Jayarathna Amarasinghe and his team in the early afternoon. Ajahn Appamado has had a bit of the runs – probably from something we ate – and I have lost my appetite too but we are OK to travel so we take to the road and head south, making sure to choose a route that brings us onto the long bridge and causeway between the reaching prongs of this north end of the island. It's very like Florida around Clearwater and Saint Petersburg – long stretches of bright water on both sides of the road, arching bridges, although Florida doesn't have the military posts and roadblocks that pepper the way for us.

Along the road through this northern peninsular we pass close by the other great Buddhist shrine of the area. This is the Kadurugoda Vihāra – a place where the small memorial *stūpas* of sixty Arahants are gathered. The legends of their provenance vary, of course. One story tells how, in the 16th Century CE, the Jaffna peninsula was ruled by a king named Sangili. There were sixty enlightened monks, all living in this area. King Sangili was opposed to Buddha-Dhamma and thus made life difficult for the monastic community in various ways. The sixty Arahants decided to leave and to go to India. On their way to the coast they stayed at Kadurugoda and, as they would daily, accepted alms food from the local residents. A poisonous mushroom curry was served to them and all sixty of the bhikkhus died. Sixty *stūpas* were duly constructed to enshrine the relics of those monks. A few of the *stūpas* remain today, a cluster fully-formed in their classical dome-shapes.

A different legend recounts that the sixty Arahant monks died due to a local famine, which had beset the area for a long time. Who knows what the true history is? Who wrote the records? Who edited them over the centuries? We know we hear the stories, of that we can be sure. We don't have the time to stop and

make a visit so, in this case, the stories are all we have.

The long road south – we are struck by the huge war memorial in Kilinochchi, where the LTTE had their administrative centre. The body of the memorial is a bullet lodged in a vast concrete block with a lotus flower growing from the cracks. We pause for a cold drink in Vavuniya and then pass through Mihintale again.

Along the long road, as we are leaving the former war zone, the conversation turns to killing and self-sacrifice: There is a memorial, of an armoured car packed with explosives, at the entrance to an army camp. Apparently, as the vehicle driven by LTTE soldiers burst into the densely populated camp, a single Sinhalese soldier, Gamini, climbed onto the top and blew himself and the occupants up before they could enter the camp proper. From the Sinhalese side he is therefore a much loved and lauded hero. Lasal asks, 'What was his karma for doing that, good or bad? He gave his own life and saved the lives of possibly hundreds of others but he killed the LTTE soldiers in the armoured car and he committed suicide himself.'

'The short answer,' I respond, 'is "mixed", both dark and bright. He had a noble intention, to save the lives of his fellow soldiers, but he also intended to kill, both himself and the bombers, so that inevitably brings negative consequences with it. This is not a popular perspective in wartime – when the fight is on, the opposition is being demonized and all of one's own actions are deemed as good and necessary – but the Buddha-Dhamma makes it perfectly clear: a willed act of killing any being will bring painful consequences.'

I ask Ajahn Vinita if he has any thoughts on this area, to which he replies, 'It's a very touchy subject! I do my best not to speak about it.' This is very understandable and I can sympathize.

Just as in the European myths of the Elysian fields, (where the deceased great heroes of the Greek conflicts are held to dwell and enjoy peace) and Valhalla

(where Norse warriors slain in battle feast eternally in the halls of the gods) in the Buddha's time such myths were common too. Once a soldier, Yodhājīva (S 42.3), came to the Buddha and asked him if the story is true that a warrior killed in combat will go to 'the heaven of battle-slain devas'. The Buddha, at first says, 'Don't ask me about that,' knowing he'll be giving an answer painful to hear. On being pressed a third time the Buddha tells Yodhājīva that such a one, a warrior killed in battle, will be reborn in hell or as an animal – only those two possibilities exist.

The Suttas of the Southern tradition are very clear on this principle whereas stories from the Northern Buddhist tradition are sometimes blurry. In the Pali, any kind of deliberate killing has a negative consequence and can never be justified in terms of Buddha-Dhamma. In the Northern tradition, sometimes in the name of *upāya* or 'skilful means', a *bodhisattva* figure in an instructive tale will take life to save others, as in killing a pirate captain to protect the lives of his captives. This has been a debate for many centuries and we explore it as the road passes below us and the miles unwind – the karma of 'owning' pets and 'putting them to sleep' i.e. killing them, at a certain point of their lives. We also explore the more telling and compelling issues of assisted suicide and the killing clinics, such as Dignitas, that are legally sanctioned institutions in more and more countries these days.

These are tender issues and not easily resolved, however, the Pali Suttas and our monastic rule make it 100% clear: Condoning or carrying out an act of killing, especially of a human being, is to be avoided at all costs. If a bhikkhu takes, or encourages someone to take, the life of another person, even to the extent of causing an abortion, that bhikkhu's monastic life ends right there, precisely at the death of that being.

It is a long conversation and rich in its own way. It is a necessary conversation and one that our society needs to pursue in order to clarify our human values, as well as the nature of skilful and unskilful, the bright and the dark.

We stop once more to stretch our legs and for a cup of tea in Dambulla, and then arrive here at Diddeniya Monastery well after dark.

The abbot greets us warmly and shows us into the newly-built visiting Elders' dwelling. It is surprisingly modern and bright, and thus a contrast to the cave-*kuṭīs* they also have, being a monastery that is 2100 years old. The sounds of the forest are around us and the sky is dark above.

Monday the 25th – Didenniya Monastery-Kandy-Nuwara Eliya

Ven. Ñāṇasīla, the abbot, greets us again in the morning and takes us for a tour of Didenniya Monastery – now known as the 'Ancient Theravāda Teaching Institute'. It is a pronounced mixture of ancient and modern, that theme repeating itself rhythmically as we make our way around.

The building we stayed in was only completed before the Rains of 2019. Every fixture is bright and shiny, every tile un-chipped, every painted surface unpocked. A path through the forest leads us to a similar building, a little older but still well-appointed and neatly kept. The resident sangha is there to greet us, about twenty-five monks and novices who pay their respects and listen attentively while I say a few words to encourage.

The forms are ancient as well as the monastery, even older, in truth: bowing, making *añjali*, asking for forgiveness, and offering it in return, all in Pali. Asking monastic ages, where a monk is from... these are time-worn, well-travelled paths of connection and communication. I emphasize the need for communal harmony and the work it takes to achieve that.

Most of the sangha here are young in the training, the place being specifically a monastic education centre. It is one of about 200 branches of Galduwa Monastery, founded by Ven. Kadawedduwe Jinavaṁsa and Ven. Mātara Ñāṇārāma in 1951 as a Vinaya-based community and also emphasizing meditation. It feels

like home here too.

We climb the steps and paths through the forest, up to more cave-*kutīs* and the cave meditation hall, and above it the cave shrine room and the cave '*theras*' tea-room' as well. Traces of plaster-work from long-gone previous occupants can be spotted on the cave ceiling, reddish swirls of decoration almost lost but still present as an echo of enduring faith and monastic presence.

When this place was rediscovered around 1984, it was a few caves buried in the rugged jungle of the hillside. The monk who found the place very astutely planted more trees and got the Forestry Department (Aranya Rakshana) to adopt the area. Astute because the Sangha cannot legally reside on property owned by the Archeological Department, whereas it can on official Forestry Department land. So this is one of the very few ancient monastery sites, like Kaludiya Pokuna, where a living monastic community resides, more than 2000 years after those in robes like us first came to dwell here. This is an *upāya*, a skilful means, that seems entirely wholesome.

"The road goes ever on and on,
Down from the door where it began...".

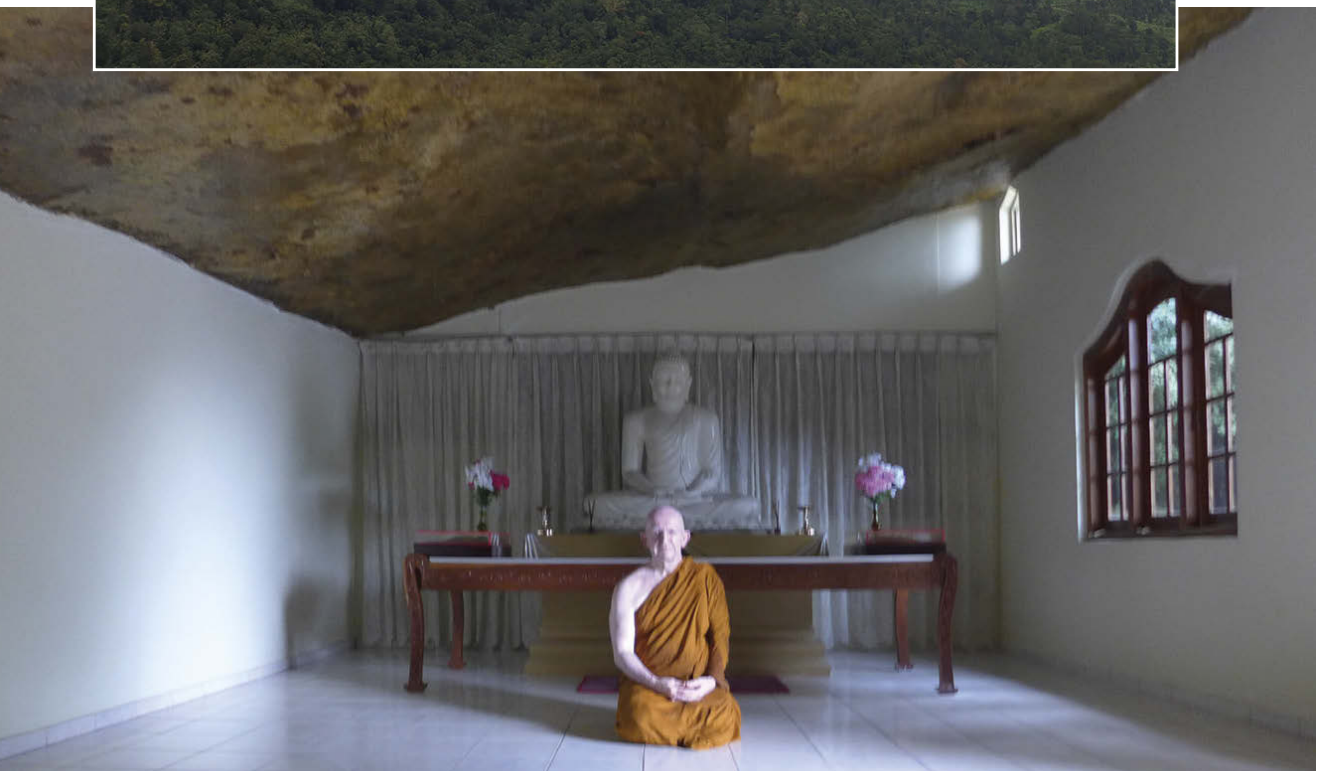
JRR Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

South-east to Kandy and a meal-stop at the hotel of Udeni Serasinghe's extended family. They are relatives of Shanthi de Fonseka in England, a regular visitor and

supporter of Amaravati. All are grateful for our visit to their hotel-cum-art gallery, next door to Shanthi and her siblings' birthplace.

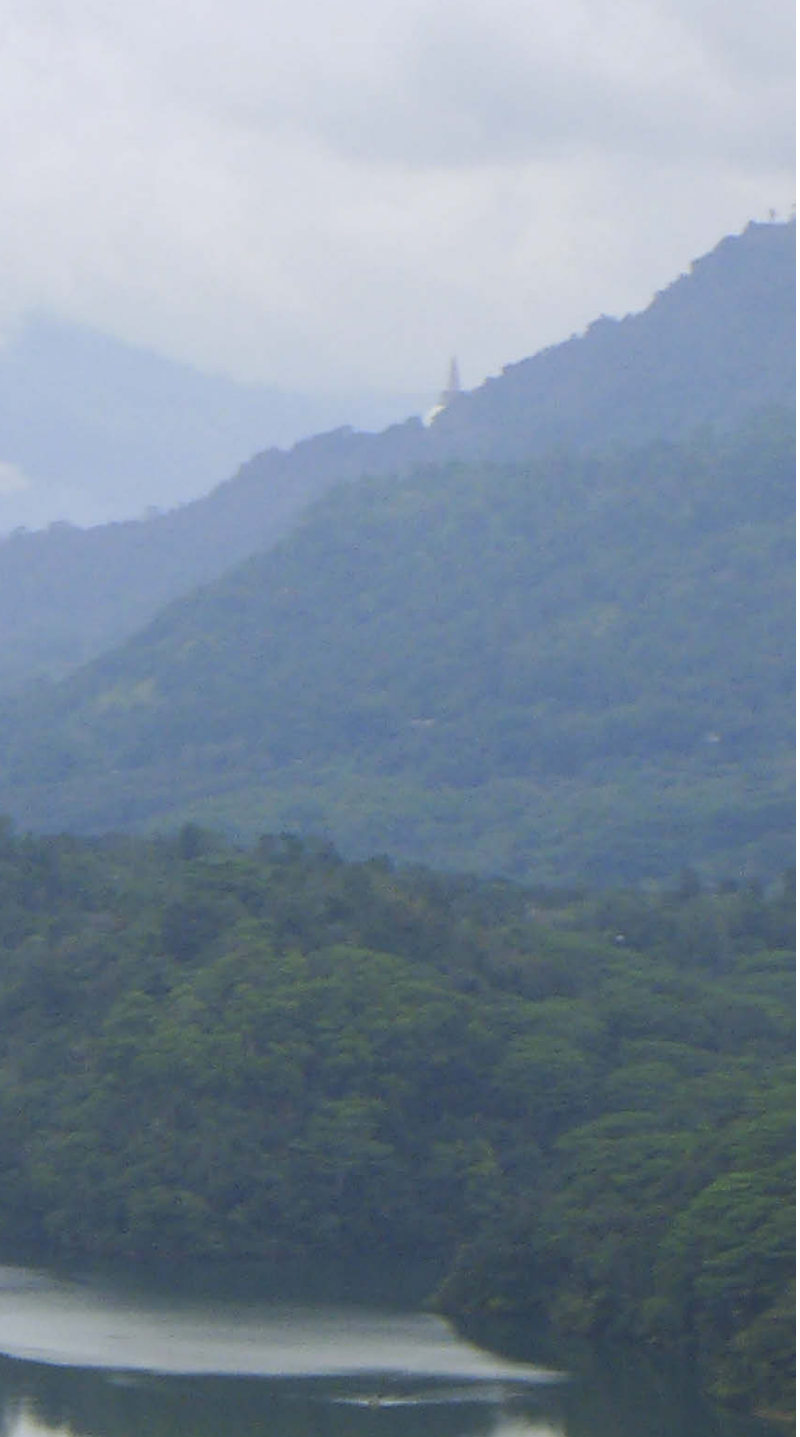
Onwards to Nuwara Eliya: the Tea Kingdom, also known as Little England.

Mist wraps the hills in ever-changing patterns so it reminds me more of Mendocino County, California, in the rains of winter than it does of anywhere I know in England. That said, the roadside stalls of local vegetables – bright carrots and tomatoes, rhubarb, leeks and onions, bulging bags of cabbages, eagerly hawked punnets of strawberries – these all do indeed bring evocations of the old country and the roadside stalls of rural summer.



It's cooler here and the swirling clouds bring a light rain that calls out jackets and umbrellas for those along the roadside. By the time we get into Nuwara Eliya town it is down to sixteen degrees Centigrade and woollen hats are out as well.

The area is a true mountain refuge. Before it was 'discovered' in 1819 by a British officer, John Davy, and turned into this vegetable and tea-growing capital, it had been a shelter for the young King Dutthagamani (commonly known as Dutugemunu and who reigned from 161 to 137 BCE), nurturing his army and regrowing their



strength for decades in hiding, before pressing north and retaking territory lost to Indian incursions.

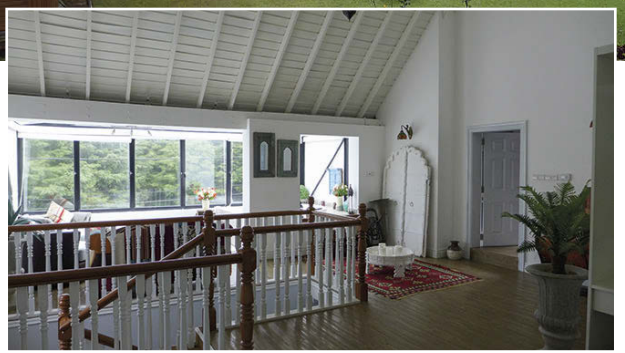
The Ratnamāli (Ruwanweli) *stūpa* was built in Anuradhapura to mark his later victory while a slightly smaller one was built here to show where his community had sheltered, like the mountain fastness of Shirakawa-go in Japan, whilst he and his group were hidden in exile.

The town holds another shrine, but sacred to the Hindu community, as it is where, according to a relatively recent Indian archaeological study, Ravana kept Sita hidden from the searches of Hanuman and Lakshman in the Rama-Ravana war. There is a temple, golden and god-clad, beside the road with a pair of monkey-deity guardians at the gate. Despite it being a shrine to a story that defames the Sri Lankan side of the Rama-Ravana conflict, they are happy for it to be here. Indian pilgrims group around the entrance for photos, and a well-stocked gift shop and religious artefact emporium sits right across the road. It gets a lot of visitors and swells the pockets of the local entrepreneurs as well as the hearts of the Hindu devotees so, everybody receives their appropriate blessings.

Less well-known or appreciated is the remnant of ancient cloud forest that fills the hillside behind Sita's shrine. Ajahn Vinita is keen to show us this as it is all that remains of the forest that filled the area before the tea arrived with the British. Even tree-ferns, like those that are native to New Zealand, abound and flourish here.

It is an ancient presence that puts the *Buddha-sāsana* into perspective. The forests were here long before any people arrived, Buddhists or otherwise; their antiquity and lore should be respected and preserved with all the energy and goodwill we speedy little humans can muster. We are fast and resourceful and can have huge effects so it behoves us to consider those effects carefully.

Tuesday the 26th – Nuwara Eliya -Gartmore Tea Estate



The name *Little England Cottages,* emblazoned on the high wrought iron gates almost worthy of Buckingham Palace, underscores what region we are in, and also announces the selling point of this particular compound. It's a gated community in the midst of tea gardens, with lines of English-styled mansions side by side. All seem to be the same age so it indicates that this is a single entrepreneur's dream project, although the feel of it is more suburban Californian than rural English.

It is a roof over the head for one night, as we are always encouraged to consider any shelter, and has been generously offered for our use by the Gamlath family, who own this Kent Cottage as they did the Deer Park Hotel. Ajahn Vinita and Ajahn Appamado both comment cheerfully at the coincidence of name since Kent is the county of England where I was born and grew up.

The house is kitted out to be a 'home-stay' and I'm up in the well-lit attic. The air is cool and refreshing after the sweaty places we have been, so we wrap up in an extra layer or two.

After the misty mountains and washes of grey rain of the day before, our journey further south is lit by bright sun and clear skies. The land is illuminated as we wind and wind and wind our way through the steep hills and bustling market towns like Hatton and Maskeliya.

"Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can…".

JRR Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

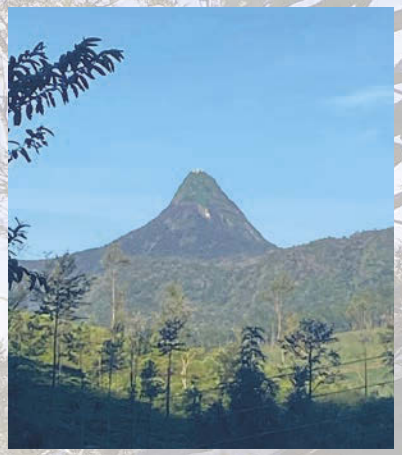
Roadside life is as vital and colourful here as it is everywhere in Sri Lanka. The tea pickers stroll in groups, bags on backs along the rutted lanes and into the lines of the adjacent tea gardens. Their expressions are easy, cheerful mostly, reconnecting with friends at the start of the working day. Many of the pickers are far down along the lines already, their hands darting in familiar assertive motions to gather the ideal 'two leaves and one bud' of each plucking. The pickers are all women; the men carry well-worn curved knives and small saws, to trim the bushes, cutting them back to workable size and tidying the lanes to work in, to clear the paths and the drainage as it's work that demands less nimble fingers.

People wait for the ubiquitous battered local buses, chat with their friends; school children in their sparkly whites stride and amble their way along. Life happens comfortably along these arteries of connection and interaction, they carry and embody the *prāṇa*, the lifeforce of the community. People work, pedal slow bicycles (less in these mountains), carry their goods and sit to watch. It's a big contrast to the West, in the main, where apart from shopping streets in the cities, the roads are where people only drive. It's even more accentuated in the USA – where the police might even stop you to question what you're up to if you are out for a walk. Along country lanes in England the only human or animal life you see are a few pheasants and a dog-walker, or a horse and rider once in a while. Here the flow of life spreads like the giant liana of Udewatta Kele in Kandy, reaching unbroken from the home, the village, along these lanes, onto the town streets with their open shop fronts and myriad stalls. The warmer climate supports this open air engagement, but it's more a spirit of communion and presence that is its most striking quality, as well as the colours of life that it brings.

Purples and pinks shimmer in the clothes and flowers, bright oranges in the tree

blossoms and the shop-fronts, yellow and mauve houses, pale blue and lime green walls of shops, sheets of emerald foliage dripping down a high retaining wall, everyone's laundry – draped on bushes, corrugated iron fences, from lines, over hedges – scarlet and puce, white and golden, turquoise and black... Whether Buddhist or Hindu, Christian or Muslim, everyone seems to rejoice in the many colours of the universe here, it crosses barriers although styles of clothing and architecture might vary.

A Hindu Temple will be covered in statues of deities and protectors, and will be painted red and gold, but the modest Anglican church will be a spiffy pale blue with smart white trim as well. There is a rejoicing in what light and form can do with the human eye.



We roll along through the valleys and over small passes. Sri Pada (or Adam's Peak, depending on whose name you use) comes into view, where the Buddha (or Adam or Muhammad or some other entity) was reputed to have landed and left a giant footprint, to mark it as a place of reverence. Green forests reach to the peaks in this tropical zone. We are high up, around 5000 feet, but a pelt of trees clads every non-vertical surface in view – trees and the omnipresent tea gardens.

Before the British arrived and developed the area it was almost entirely wild rugged forest. King Dutthagamani had successfully hidden here, as had Ravana with Sita before him, but there were no villages, towns or ancient monasteries in the region, not even at the foot of Sri Pada. It was truly a wilderness – the domain of animals and birds, fishes in the running streams, and the billions of insects, snakes and crawling creatures that make up the forest world. A countless variety of plants and trees, mushrooms and epiphytes, vines and flowering bushes once lived here before *camellia sinensis* arrived or the idea of 'tea' was ever formed.

The eye and mind takes it all in as the view changes, ever shifting this way and that. One moment struck by a colourful blossom, then, letting go:

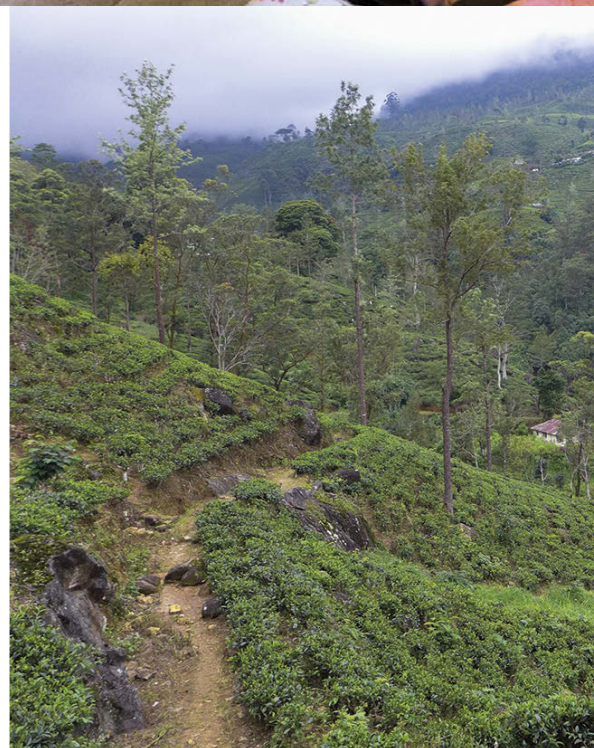
"The eye views forms outside
but inside there is nothing.

The ear hears dusty sounds
but the mind does not know."

Master Hsüan Hua

Seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking... mind objects, sight objects... that which knows them is not an object, has no form, is *anidassana*, 'non-manifestative', invisible, has no location. Or rather 'location' does not apply. That which knows the world is not of the world. That which knows the person is not a person.

We reach Gartmore Tea Estate in time for the meal offering. It is the last tea garden, of some 550 acres, at the end of the valley. It is surrounded on three sides by mountains and the waterfalls at the valley's end are the source of Sri Lanka's longest river, the Mahaweli, which reaches the sea at Trincomalee.



Our friend Kanishka, who met us at the airport, is here to greet but our hosts are Sandamali and Lakshman Hettiarachchi. The place was acquired by their family in 1948, from its Scottish owners, when the British handed over the government of the island to its own people.

Their greetings are warm and sincere. They are delighted and honoured to host us here; they welcome us in and offer a lavish meal, all served on classical English crockery, with English cutlery and the insignia of Forties and Fifties England all around us. A 1929 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (A-Anno) tops the bookshelves. Volumes such as *Eyeless in Gaza, The Street of the Sandalmakers,* and the likes of *Five on Finniston Farm* and *Five on a Secret Trail,* by Enid Blyton are gathered here too, echoing the well-worn hardbacks of the schoolchildren's classics *What Katy Did* and *The Naughtiest Girl* on the shelves at Kent Cottage in Nuwara Eliya.

The light switches are all dark brown bakelite and the electric wires to the lamp

over the table are the type of twisted, cord-covered cables that I last saw in Kent in the 1960s. In our rooms the furniture, and the door handles and window latches, are similarly out of the far past. I feel like I'm back in School House Farm of the 1950s or at Homefield or Farthing Green Farm, my family homes in the '60s. It is a time capsule that has lasted into the autumn of Sandamali and Lakshman's lives.

Sandamali tells us how she and her siblings and cousins would all come here as children – each with a different section of the bungalow – and how fond the memories are, how cherished the place is but how they now fear, owing to falling tea sales, the estate might need to be sold.

Gartmore currently employs 500 people, almost all being Tamil families who have worked here for generations, so there are deep fears of what might be lost if the estate leaves their family. 'But everything goes, eventually' I remark, 'and the Buddha-Dhamma helps us with exactly this.' Without trying to be too preachy, I underscore how none of us are ever really in control but that: 'We have islands of opportunity where we can generate real blessings, and make a difference, so it's up to us to use those opportunities when we can but, when they are gone, we do not view that as a loss but rather just nature taking its course.'

When we go to take the tour of the Gartmore tea factory, Kanishka is surprised to find that one of his nephews is the manager here. The nephew walks us through the lengthy, multipartite process that goes to make a cup of tea. And we offer a blessing for the factory.

It is still doing OK but, as Sandamali tells us, their tea has fallen in quality and popularity today, hence the dropping income.

The greatest glory of Gartmore was the tea auction of 1896 in Mincing Lane, in the City of London, when their tea was sold at twenty-five pounds and ten shillings (£25/10/-) a pound – a small fortune in those days – and we are proudly shown a photo of that occasion; an excited crowd of top-hatted, moustachioed gentlemen gathered at the auctioneer's podium, caught in the decisive moment of that peak.

We end the day with a short but precarious drive to see the waterfalls, and 'the famous black hole' of the river, of which it is said that the pool has no measurable bottom. Sandamali also points out her favourite swimming hole, just up from the bridge, where they like to swim and cool off on hot summer days.

Her husband, Lakshman, is with us but, like the ageing effects of the market on the Gartmore Estate, the years have had their impact on his usual 'dashing about, looking after everything', as Sandamali tells us. He has Parkinson's disease now and, just the day before, he had taken a tumble and had needed several stitches in his face.

'Old age and sickness have no manners,' Luang Por Chah once said, 'they just arrive and push the door in without asking.' This is the way of nature – implacable, remorseless, productive and destructive of all life.

Wednesday the 27th – Gartmore Estate-Balangoda-Embilipitiya-Kataragama

We bid our farewells in the sitting room, with its Maxfield Parrish prints on the walls, its yellowing, mellowing books and its view out to Sri Pada. It's a poignant departure, even after our brief stay. There are various pieces of advice I offer: 'Adapting to new times, thinking broadly, if they chose to sell water rather than tea "Gartmore Falls Water" could be a catchy name' – 'Outside the box!' Sandamali helpfully adds in – but it seems they have already tried all sorts of approaches and have been made offers along the way. However, she tells us, the repeated stumbling block is getting all twenty-six partners to agree. I point out how: 'Sometimes a person ends up defending an opinion that they don't even feel very strongly about but they hang onto it because they don't want to be seen to back down.'

'It's their ego,' agrees Sandamali.

'Exactly! So then you need to work out ways to focus on the practical issues while people's ego-needs are also attended to…'.

'Not easy.'

'No, not at all easy but often that's the only way forward,' I reply, 'then, if someone is determined to get their own way and ruin things for everybody – let them do it. Everyone loses – so be it. Life is too short to focus on such things so sometimes it's better just to let go.' This said with the caveat that I never make anyone's decisions for them but that I'm happy to offer perspectives to help individuals decide for themselves.

‘That’s what we’ve done,’ she tells us, as it seems that she and Lakshman have spent the last five years following all the approaches I just spoke about. So... let go, none of it really belonged in the first place.

It’s another bright morning, the tea rows gleam emerald in the early light, the datura flowers glowing rose and yellow with the sun shining through their hanging blossoms.

The Camellia Deva reigns supreme here. One hundred and fifty years ago this might all have been cloud forest but *camellia sinensis* wraps every curve of hill and valley for miles and miles and miles as we head south.

It is only when we rise over the pass to Balangoda, following and slowly overtaking the ardent members of an Adventure Bike Tours cycling group, that we leave the universe of tea, at least temporarily. There is a forest reserve that begins at the ridge and spreads in a huge sweep down the hill. We sympathetically anticipate the upcoming joy of the cyclists as the downhill run extends unbroken, through dozens if not hundreds of curves, for ten or fifteen miles into the valley. Eventually the forest ends, a few small villages begin and rows of tea once more clad the lower slopes beside us.

We pause at a small roadside eatery, Shriyani’s Restaurant, which consists of two or three tables and a glorious view over the valley. As time had been tight, to meet our noon limit for eating, Ajahn Vinita had deftly researched the food possibilities along our route, found Shriyani’s on Google, and had requested by phone that they have the food ready for when we arrived. It was a finely tuned operation and she did us all proud; not only was the abundant food all waiting for us but we were offered it as *dāna* by Shriyani and her small team. ‘They said they don’t often

get the opportunity to offer a meal to monks so they have donated it.'

We are as grateful as they are, to meet with their kindness and generosity. The fact that they are in a roadside shed and we are travelling in a new Mercedes SUV is totally irrelevant to the dynamic. They wish to offer and we are blessed to receive – everyone is grateful for the encounter.

Down from the hills the roads begin to smooth out – we are heading for Embilipitiya. On the way we pass through Balangoda, the birth place and home monastery of Ven. Ānanda Maitreya, a distinguished Elder, born in 1896, who had been a significant and helpful mentor to Luang Por Sumedho in the 1980s. He spoke some fourteen languages, including Pali, had been the S*aṅgha Nāyaka* of the Amarapura Nikāya in Sri Lanka and had established the *sīmā* boundary for ordinations at Cittaviveka Monastery in June, 1981.

With Ven. Ajahn Chah's health collapsing in that same year, during the Rains Retreat, Ven. Ānanda Maitreya's friendship, and extraordinarily knowledgeable guidance, was of immense benefit to the fledgling monastic community of Amaravati. When the place had opened, in 1985, he and Luang Por Paññānanda were the presiding Elders over the ceremonies and he had offered much genuine and practical assistance for many years.

In 1986 he came and spent the Rains at Amaravati, with two assistants – Venerables Ānandamurti and Ānandamaṅgala – he had his ninetieth birthday there and it was his seventieth Rains Retreat; in fact the Rains of all the other resident bhikkhus present that year added together did not add up to seventy. Even Luang Por

Sumedho had only nineteen Rains when the Retreat began. Ven. Ānanda Maitreya gave us Pali classes – he regularly stayed up into the wee hours composing his book *Pali Made Easy* in order to better instruct us – with these lessons being keenly attended. He also endeavoured to teach us Abhidhamma, which had been met with less enthusiasm.

Embilipitiya is currently the banana capital of Sri Lanka and it is also famous for being the home, and housing the grave, of King Kavantissa (ruled 205-161 BCE). He had been the father of King Dutthagamani, whose story we had encountered before on this journey, who drove out the Indian forces and who built the Ratnamāli (Ruwanweli) *stūpa* at Anuradhapura.

It is also where Ajahn Vinita grew up and where today most of his family resides: his mother now lives in a nearby temple but his father, his brother, sister-in-law and their four children are all in the family house on Hospital Road.

Naturally we make a stop here. They are all present to greet us and, as we are ushered into the main room, we see the smiling picture of Ajahn Vinita in pride of place on the wall, even above his parents' wedding picture and his father's portrait. He is plainly loved and respected here and all the family, from dad on down to the youngest, kneel to pay their respects sincerely to him and to all of us.

With his parents standing right before us he recounts how his father was bitterly opposed to him going into robes – even saying to him he'd forbid him to come to his funeral if he had robes on. It was his mother who, in a decisive move, hustled him one day into the Land Office jeep and drove him to the three-week Mahāsi meditation retreat that he never returned from. That was twenty-five years ago now, when Ajahn Vinita had been a mere seventeen.

We reflect on King Suddhodana's resistance to his son's Going Forth, even when his boy had become the Buddha, and on the blessings that come when our personal concerns do not define the day. I also share a little of my own story, of Going Forth at twenty-one and of my own parents' misgivings. It's an old story, older probably than written words, and a thread that runs though most human societies; the child

that loves and respects their parents but sees that, as per the old poem:

> "Your children are not your children.
> They are sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself."
>
> Kahlil Gibran, *On Children*

After cold drinks and fine tea we are on our way again, now on eerily straight 'ghost highways' built with Chinese money to little purpose other than to lead to a 'ghost airport' that almost no one uses. For a time we are the sole vehicle on this vast construction of tarmac, concrete and overpasses, street lights and signs that warn of peacocks. It's a spooky feeling.

Soon the road downgrades a little and we join other vehicles and the usual, companionable fellow road-lovers, sleeping and roaming dogs and an occasional herd of buffalo.

After the hi-tech miracle of being able to track a slowly deflating tyre through the luminous dashboard of our car, we receive rescuing-angelic assistance in Kataragama at Ruwan's Tyre Shop, along the way meeting up with Indika, an old friend of Ajahn Vinita. He leads us into a wilderness camp, on the edges of Yala National Park, where we plan to stay for a couple of days. Indika's friend and business partner in this Ceylon Wild Safaris camp, Arran, greets us and gets us settled in. The rain has ceased and the crickets are well underway for their night of activity, merging with the inner sound of silence.

Thursday the 28th – Yala National Park-Kataragama

Glamping in Yala. The raucous clamour of the dawn chorus easily passes through the cloth walls and insect screens of the dwellings here. Technically these are 'tents' (for the purposes of staying within the laws of accommodation so close to the National Park), but the hot and cold running water, the air-conditioning, the plumbed-in shower and toilet, not to mention the jacuzzi on the veranda, all belie this concept. It gives a very five-star tone to the concept of 'camping on safari' but none of us are complaining.

In contrast to the luxurious individual rooms, the gathering places – the 'lounge' and the 'dining room' – are far more traditional forest forms. The roofs are grass and the sides are all open to the air. They are genuine *sālās*, even with a tarantula in the rafters of the dining area. We are in the scrubby wilderness around the edges of the park proper and Arran, our main guide, tells us repeatedly how dry and barren this all was a mere six weeks ago. This is hard to credit as it's currently a sea of green after all the recent and now present rain. It poured in the night and has been chucking it down intermittently during this day.

Our route to Section Five of the 378 square miles of Yala National Park takes us through the town of Kataragama. The name is very familiar as it is often mentioned (usually with a blush or an apology by the Buddhist community) as

a place Sri Lankan people go to receive blessings for a new vehicle, to help pass exams, to launch a business, get a fortune told or suchlike. Even devout and dedicated Buddhists will go to the ancient *devala* here to hedge their bets a little out of the weight of custom, if not superstition.

Arran recounts his well-researched version of the origins of the shrine and how it has become (or perhaps always was) a place of blessings for people of all religious backgrounds: Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian.

We go back to King Kavantissa again. He had been a devout Buddhist and therefore a conciliator. He had retreated from the Hindu King Ellalan, of the North, and was in the refuge of this southern region, the country of Ruhuna. His eldest son Dutthagamani had disagreed with his pacifist policies and had thus been banished, going to what is now the town of Kotmale in the region of Nuwara Eliya that we had visited a few days before. Dutthagamani hid out there and then, when his father had died and his younger brother, Saddhatissa, had assumed the throne, he came out of hiding and took the crown of Ruhuna for himself.

King Dutthagamani was unsure as to whether he had sufficient forces and personal power to conquer King Ellalan so he went to the Gem River and spoke out, appealing to: 'Any deity that could help!' The god Skanda, brother of Ganesha and another son of Lord Shiva, the war-deity, had responded and said he would help Dutthagamani to conquer the north. The king promised to pay the god his dues if he won.

The war went well. Ellalan was defeated, Anuradhapura was restored as the capital and Dutthagamani united all three countries of the island into a single kingdom, which he now ruled. Thus grateful to the powerful deity Skanda, and to fulfil his vow to create a suitable shrine in Skanda's name if the war was won, he went back to the Ruhuna region and spoke once more to the god. Dutthagamani took a bow and arrow and Skanda said to the king that he should build a temple to him at the place where the arrow landed. The shot carried to the place where the Kataragama Temple now sits, as it has done for more than 2000 years.

The king then built the temple and when it was finished he made a public declaration that it was this god of the Hindu pantheon who had enabled him to win the fight and who should thus be revered alongside the Buddha and


Photo by Indika Nettigama

his teachings. This led to the establishment of the long, mutually supportive relationship between the Buddhist and the Vedic cultures on this island and to the custom of keeping a *devala* shrine in most monasteries here, where local deities and spirits can be propitiated.

Arran's account leads me to comment how myth and story are what carry meaning through time and that this myth creates a standard and an encouragement for cooperation between the religions. It also illustrates how religion works like an ecosystem, that various elements need to work in collaboration with each other for the benefit and functionality of the whole.

I give the example of the Buddhist scriptural tale of how the brahma god Sahampati, (Bṛihaspati or Brahmaṇaspati in Vedic myth is Lord of Prayer and Creator of the Word) who, discerning that the newly enlightened Buddha was disinclined to teach – since the task would be 'wearying and troublesome' given the depth of delusion and addiction to becoming apparent in the human world – appeared before him and entreated him to teach since there were some beings: '… with only a little dust in their eyes.'

The Buddha had responded to this by looking around the world and seeing that, indeed, the deity was correct. He thus began to spread the Dhamma teachings that we have in the world today. So the Buddha needed that prompt from an outsider – a brahma god – in order to fulfil his potential as a teacher, just as Dutthagamani had needed the blessing of Skanda to win the victory over Ellalan.

I underscore the point by telling the story of the Buddha's enlightenment and how he needed to invite the Earth Goddess Dharaṇī to be his witness in order for Māra's armies to be dispelled. Māra had been defeated but would not acknowledge it, protesting that all his 700,000 followers would testify to his right to rulership of the universe. He attested to the newly-enlightened Buddha: 'You are just a lone monk with an inflated sense of your own importance. Who do you have to support your claim to so-called enlightenment, out here like you are, languishing in the woods?' The Buddha touched the earth and called the Earth Goddess Dharaṇī to witness. She rose up, declared the Buddha's right to supremacy amongst all beings and Māra's army was washed away by a flood that she unleashed from her unbound hair.

Arran is surprised to hear that there are gods and demons in the Buddhist tradition too – he had thought it was only a process of awakening one's own mind – but I assured him that, even though the principal work of a Buddhist was indeed to liberate their own heart and mind, the scriptures and the world they describe abound with entities in different dimensions. Just as he is adept at naming and categorizing the many birds, animals, insects and plants of this region, I point out how there is a parallel taxonomy of entities and dimensions of being that he could learn about. Since Ajahn Punnadhammo recently published a book on exactly this subject – *The Buddhist Cosmos* – I offer to send him a link to the text.

The old Land Cruiser ('Old body, new parts' assures Indika) serves us well as we weave and churn through the muddy lanes and deep puddles of our route through the forest. We see herds of spotted deer, wild water buffalo, many bright coloured birds and broad-winged eagles – the white bellied fish eagle and the hawk eagle amongst them. It's a rich ecosystem, with termite mounds tall and healthy, and many dead trees left to stand as perches for the bird-life and also the myriad living systems that a 'dead' tree supports.

After an hour or so Indika gets a message that a leopard has been seen today and we take a quick left to follow the path that will take us to be near it. We had seen an elephant on the road who was so well-known that Arran told us it even had a nickname, but the leopard sighting creates an extra level of excitement.

The call has gone out to the small group of safari-goers in Section Five today. There are only six or seven jeeps in this area and all of us have hurried to the spot. We are waved to a halt after Indika slowly eases the Land Cruiser as close as we can go.

And there she is, in the bushes not fifteen yards from the road, lying on her front, watching us half-interestedly. In a few minutes she rises and we see a patch of bare skin on her back: 'It is probably a wound from the hoof of a sambar or a water buffalo.' She moves a little further into the bush and lies down again, a more

comfortable distance from the eager eyes and cameras of us who are so keen to pry into her life.

Arran's camera has a long lens but that of Indika is a bazooka. On the screen of it, as he focuses in, you can see the individual hairs of her fur, the shades of gold and dark brown in her spots. The subtle twitching of her ear as she scans for activity nearby is displayed in minute detail. Every movement raises a chorus of gasps in the vehicles round us but, wanting to leave her alone and to get out of the way generally, the vehicles start to move on.

'That's the first wild leopard I've ever seen,' Ajahn Vinita tells us, which warms the hearts of our guides even more. They are delighted to have been able to give us this unique opportunity.

Photo by Indika Nettigama

Light is falling and so is more rain as we ease our way onward through the park. Indika's sharp eyes spot an orange-headed thrush, a serpent eagle, a fish-eating owl – many birds along the way, even though he's driving and has to watch for the weirdnesses of the potholed and puddled road at every twist and turn.

Rain washes us in a warm balm, since we have no windows, the forest darkening

around us. After a few more turns we emerge onto a rocky shoulder and, there above us upon a rise, is a *stūpa* built in the time of King Mahasena in the 6th Century BCE, the time of the Buddha. There had been a vast city here; now it's mostly under the jungle. Countless fortunes have come and gone; empires have risen and fallen since then.

Mahasena was 400 years before Dutthagamani. In more recent years the LTTE had tried to claim this area too as it had been, at one point, a Tamil stronghold. They had endeavoured to bomb and sabotage the dam that occupies a large area of this forest, so this part of the park had been closed for many of the war years. Now it's invaded daily by the safari travellers. In Section One there are up to 700 people a day; here in Section Five they tell us it's quieter, only a maximum of eighty or ninety.

Invasions, enthusiasms, empires and fashions come and go. Right now the likes of Indika and Arran, and the friends of Ceylon Wild Safaris, are hard at work to protect the rich life of this biosphere and others similar around Sri Lanka. They truly love the wild and have educated both themselves and others as to how to best help it all to flourish. It's a long and hard task but doable.

They plough what part of their profits that they can into acquiring more land to protect it and to keep the wildlife corridors open. The forest of Yala is huge but if its animals are in a hermetically sealed space, ultimately the gene pool and the food and water sources will all suffer. It needs to breathe. These good people have thus made it their mission to acquire as much of these marginal wilderness lands as possible, to keep the corridors open and to allow the flow of life to happen freely. Systems rise and fall, but with careful tending, well-being can be sustained and progressed, and those islands of opportunity can broaden into mainlands, at least for a while.

Friday the 29th – Yala-Tissamaharama-Kamburupitiya-Akuressa-Colombo

Out of Yala and Kataragama we soon reach Tissamaharama to its south-west. The town is famous as one of the places the Buddha reputedly visited in Sri Lanka. It is also famous as a sanctuary for 30,000 monks and lay people fleeing the wars in the north, and as the buffalo curd capital of the country – the products of which industry we had enjoyed the day before.

Its most famous feature is the huge white 'bubble-shaped' stūpa which is reputed to have once housed the front of the Buddha's skull; reports differ as to whether that sacred relic is still contained within it today. Histories differ, as usual, and other locations now claim the honour of housing that ancient treasure.

We arrive by the back gate to make a brief stop only. Ajahn Vinita knows the way as he has spent several days here on his wanderings in the past. It is a vast presence. Its age and fragility are embodied in the ancient form – reminiscent of the great *stūpa* at Sanchi and the oldest *stūpas* of the Ashokan period – as well as in the steel cables that encircle it, holding the bowl's shape in place against the vagaries of weather, gravity and time.

It is a living shrine, however, with clear paths around it, bright flags flapping gaily and with a host of swallows darting in swoops and curls, attending

apsaras dancing in celebration of the Triple Gem's glory.

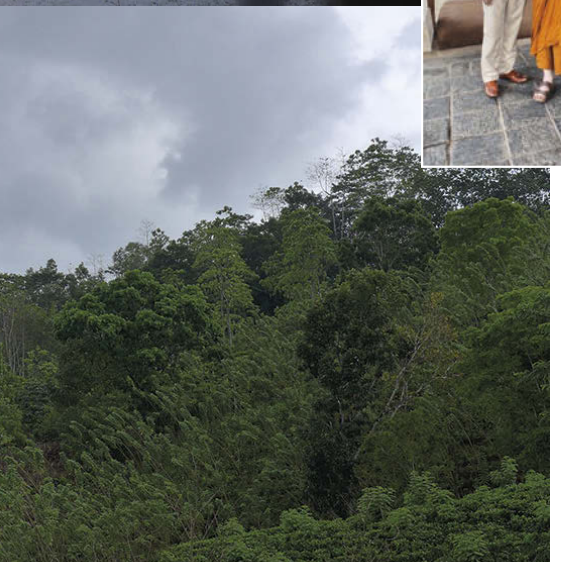
We bow and move on, heading for Hambantota, on the road to the southern tip of the island at Matara. The landscape is radically different in this region – it is flat here in the sea's margins, and the rice fields beside the road are laid out almost like English meadows. There are hedgerows of shrubs and low trees bordering each field but, even though some of these resemble ashes and oaks in profile, the palms and occasional clutches of bananas bring the sharp reminder that we are not in Hertfordshire or Kent.

We pass close by the hermitage of Bundala, where the late British bhikkhu Nyanavira lived. The hermitage is off to the south of the road in the unfarmed scrublands and lagoons of the coast. All this area was swamped by seething waves during the tsunami of 2004 and several thousands of local people and tourists died in that tragedy. The fields took some years to recover from the salty inundation but they seem very healthy now. Similarly, the buildings beside the road and in the few towns and villages look to be in good shape, it having been fifteen years since the great flood.

We find ourselves on another ghost highway, huge and well-built but with few people and their vehicles on it. There are water buffalo and dogs but sparse wheeled traffic: 'They built this highway here because there are so few people in this region. They should build one around Kandy but they don't!' Ajahn Vinita explains, 'Because people complain and want so much compensation, they don't build a big road where they really need one. Instead they put it here, where there is no one to use it.' It is a weird but familiar human logic.

A little further on we see tall cranes and gantries off to the south against the skyline. 'Is that a ghost port?' I ask.

'That is actually a working place… well… almost,' Ajahn Vinita goes on to say, 'they are developing it here – The Port of Hambantota – but there are not many people living nearby. You have to give it a chance, though... with the port there it will hopefully lead to more activity and engagement.' It's a positive outlook, and he compares it to my own encouragement for the need to rebuild Amaravati; you need to seed the ideas and get the momentum going and hopefully things come together as people see the benefits. Whether or not that will happen here is hard



to say. The port was built with a lot of Chinese money, as was the highway, and that foreign government sustains control of a lot of what happens here. It is not a local industry.

We stop for the meal – at the insistence of Lasal's father – at the Hambantota Shangri La Golf Resort. It's newly built, only three years old, and is also strangely isolated out here in the barrens, beside the sea. The clientèle is also 40% Chinese, the other portions being 40% Sri Lankan and 20% everybody else.

We have a warm reception by the staff, who were expecting us, and at the restaurant there is another surprise – the under-sous-chef is Mano Ruwan, who had been at school with Ajahn Vinita. They are all smiles and hugs, not having met for a number of years, and mutually surprised and delighted at this chance meeting here.

Our day's plan had been to stop at any random roadside eatery. But in the flow of numerous phonecalls, Lasal's father had told him he was a regular visitor to the golf resort and that he was friends with the staff and owners. So, under a little duress, we pulled in only to find this old acquaintance of Ajahn Vinita as our cook.

As an aside Ajahn Vinita tells us, in a quiet tone and a few times, that: 'He was a bully. He beat me up a few times and his brother was worse.' People do change however, as time goes by, and it seems that Mano is genuinely excited and inspired to see him and the rest of us. We also hear that he has avoided getting married so far and that, in the longer term, he's looking at monastic life as the way for him. He's a strong, big, bright, communicative fellow so, if he does follow the monastic path, it seems unlikely that he would remain hidden away in the woods for long but who knows?

The subject of bright lights and old friends brings to mind Venerable Nyanamoli – former confrère of Venerable Nyanavira in the British army, and later fellow bhikkhus together here in Sri Lanka – who was also a bright light but of a very different type. Energetic and creative, he spent his ten years as a bhikkhu (before his early death from heart failure) at the Forest Hermitage in Kandy. His light shone out in the form of his published works but he in person was squirreled away under the vines and spreading canopy of the Udewatta Kele forest. His brother monk, Bhikkhu Nyanavira, not such a prolific translator and writer, had lived an

even more quiet and secluded life, devoting his time largely to solitary meditation, here in his hermitage on the south coast at Bundala. Even though both of them lived such eremitic lives, it is notable how both of them have continued to bring their influence to bear over the broader world, so many decades on.

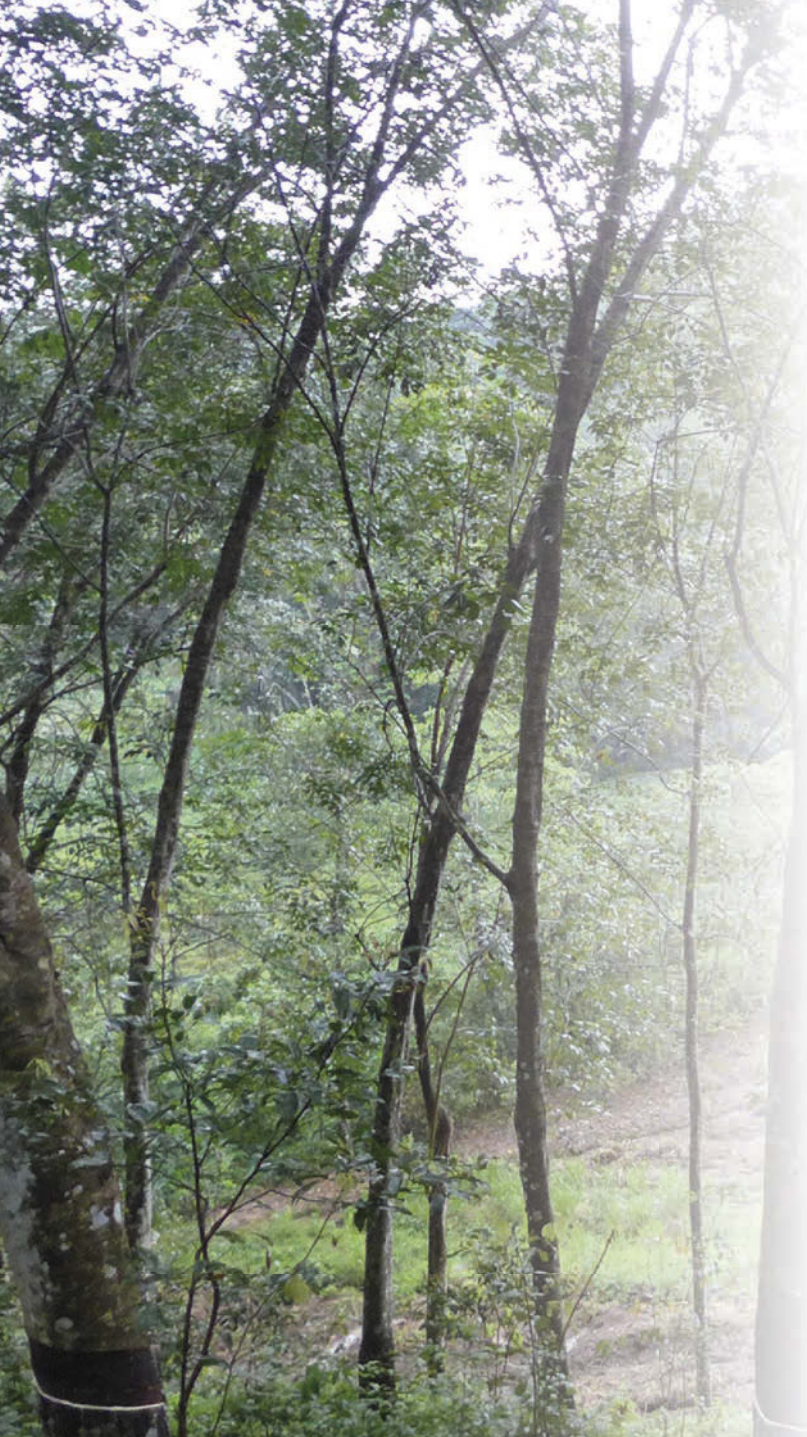
We cut inland and pass through the Kamburupitiya area. Lush green walls of palm and creeper, tall trees and jungle flowers line the road as we wend our way through the moist and glistening lanes. Small steep hills, neat paddies and cinnamon groves are all about us. It is the latter's prime environment and, we are told, 90% of the world's 'real' cinnamon is grown here.

Ajahn Vinita spent much of his childhood right here at the home of his father's parents, his grandfather being: 'The kindest, gentlest, sweetest man you ever met,' while his grandmother was: 'Really tough! Everyone was afraid of her!' He tells of his years here as the best times of his childhood: 'No one would tell me what to do. It was great.'

Short heavy showers fall on us as we make our way, this being the norm for the southern inland part of the country. Broad leaves of roadside plants drip; purple trumpets of local bindweed blare out of the tangles, heedless of the downpour, seeming to relish the refreshment.

A few miles on we come to Akuressa, where Lasal's family has many plots of land, bearing tea, rubber, cinnamon and agar-wood trees. I had never heard of the last of these before but apparently agar-wood is the most expensive ingredient of perfume in the world. Ajahn Vinita tells us, 'It's more expensive than cocaine... more than 1000 Rupees for a gram. People will come and cut the trees to poach them they are so valuable.'

Costs of perfume aside, this is a rich land bursting with fertility and the eruptive surges of living growth. You can almost feel it humming with the *prāṇa* of teeming vitality.



Lasal's parents are here to meet us and to give us a tour of the land that their daughter, Dr Randula, wishes to offer as the possible site of a monastery. It is a twenty acre plot of the estate and one of the local plantation managers takes us along the muddy tracks of the hillside to have a close-up look. There are tea and rubber and cinnamon trees on the land, as well as big boulders and any amount of water. He tells us you can dig anywhere to make a well. It is steep, like Abhayagiri in California, but that is also what provides many nooks and crannies to potentially place secluded *kuṭīs*.

Randula offered this to Ajahn Vinita for his consideration if he wanted to start a place up in Sri Lanka. He is not asking to do this, nor is he hungering for the land (like we all were hungering for the presence of the leopard the day before in a somewhat unseemly or at least un-bhikkhu-like way) but he is open to the possibility in a tentative way: 'If there was a senior monk who came along who could look after it...'. I point out that, at fourteen Rains, *he* is a senior monk, at least more senior than Ajahn Sumedho was when he took over the Hampstead Vihāra. He had only ten Rains when he arrived in London in May of 1977 but Ajahn Vinita seems unconvinced by this argument.

Starting a new monastery is a big undertaking, but it can happen in gentle increments. I point out that Randula could have a bit of the ground cleared and then establish a single *kuṭī*. With a small grass-roofed *sālā* for, say, twenty people to sit in, and a well to bathe at, a resident bhikkhu would have all they needed for a stay of a few weeks or months at a time. It would be a small investment by Randula and the family, with no commitment on either side to begin with, and then it could be seen as to whether it was a going concern or not.

As bhikkhus we are encouraged to live like bees, taking only what is freely offered by a flower and in the amount that is needed today – not to lay up a store or to be manoeuvring and finagling to get specific outcomes.

> "Just as a bee gathers nectar and moves on
> without harming a flower,
> its colour, or its fragrance,
> just so should a wise one pass through each village."
>
> Dhp 49

We live on what is offered, carry the pollen of goodwill as an easy burden, and are ready to go or not, to do or not do, to build or not, as each situation suggests and allows.

We will see what the future brings. I'm almost sure that Mrs and Dr Haththotuwa will have sent pictures to Randula already and will have informed her of the details of our visit. The seed is planted and we will see how it develops, or not, in the rich soil of faith and energy in their noble family.

We had planned to stop for a night at the Tundola Forest Monastery but rain descends upon us with supra-biblical force as we roll along the Colombo highway. It's a roaring inundation, pounding on the car roof and the tarmac so intensely we sometimes seem to be driving in a river. We all begin to have the same thoughts – knowing that our arrival in Tundola would have meant a climb by the waterfall and an off-road *tuk tuk* ride up into the forest, we decide to change plans and to head straight to Colombo instead. Later, the Tundola monks called to thank us for not coming, as the place had indeed been flooded and it would have been very troublesome to try and receive us.

Luckily the place pegged out for Ajahn Appamado to stay in, before his planned journey on to India, was available a day early so here we are, up on the fifteenth floor of an apartment complex close to the Parliament buildings. Below us a waterway winds through a block of forest green. Beyond that, an array of countless houses, outrigger boats, riverside shacks, shops and offices, the purple bud of the new communications tower, and the rising heights of the tallest building in Sri Lanka, are spread in full hazy chaotic urban splendour. Our last day lies ahead.

Saturday the 30th – Colombo

Kushan, the owner, and his little daughter helped us get settled when we arrived and, with Lasal, brought a table-bending breakfast for the three of us bhikkhus in the morning.

It's an easeful day in the white world of the apartment block of Clearpoint Residencies. The Haththotuwas and Kushan's family come around after the meal and we offer our blessings for them all.

The afternoon brings rain again, wafting sheets of grey that hide most of the city below us and before us. The final packing done we launch into the great outdoors and head for the central part of the city: Colombo 7. This area houses numerous embassies, the Sri

Lanka Cricket Club, government offices of various ministries, the Gymkhana Club and Vajirarama Monastery, the place where we are heading.

Established in 1901 as a centre for the focused study of Dhamma and meditation, it flourishes today as a well-reputed beacon of skilful Buddhist practice. It was the place where Venerables Nyanatiloka, Nyanaponika, Nyanamoli and Nyanavira all received *upasampadā* so it has a long history of involvement in the evolution of the Western Sangha.

The current abbot, Ven. Thirikunāmale Ānanda Mahānāyaka Thera, is well-known to Ajahn Vinita and, along with Kanishka who is a regular supporter here, he offers us a respectful and sincerely warm welcome.

The most senior monk present sits next to me and they ask me to offer a short teaching for the assembled bhikkhus and novices. I talk of the many facets of the pilgrimage we have made and how the piece of advice that the Buddha gave in the 'Lesser Discourse on the Destruction of Craving' (M 37) was applicable in all situations: '*Sabbe dhammā nālaṁ abhinivesāya* – nothing whatsoever should be clung to.' This applies to all kinds of situations and all kinds of grasping: at sense pleasure, at views, at conventions, at feelings of selfhood. And when the clinging stops, there is peace.

To my surprise they present me with a jewelled stupa, covered with diamond- and pearl-like stones, and which has a small plaque to mark it as an offering given on the occasion of this visit. It is a touching gift and a true honour to be bestowed on

me by such an esteemed spiritual place of training as this.

We visit the library and are shown more files of the letters and pictures of their notable Western alumni. There are letters in their own hands of Venerables Nyanatiloka, Nyanaponika and Nyanamoli, with copies of newspaper clippings, journal entries and translations, group photos from the 1930s and even earlier – these are, like the albums in the Forest Hermitage in Kandy, a true treasure chest of Dhamma history. I leaf through the letters of Ven. Nyanamoli and comment how I once met a man who had been at Oxford University with him; how he had had no formal schooling prior to arriving at Exeter College and how he had finished a triple major degree in two years: 'He told me that "Bertie" could turn his hand to anything, whether it be learning topiary from a gardener at a wealthy friend's country house over a weekend, or how he had taught himself Turkish in six weeks in order to fully enjoy a holiday there.'

Ven. Nyanasiha, who received *upasampadā* at the age of eighty and has written five books since then, introduces himself and we chat over tea.

Ven. Nyanapola, who had lived at the Island Hermitage with Vens. Nyanamoli and Nyanavira, comes round to my room to chat as well. He too is in his late 80s and is warm and genial in our exchanges.

Photo opportunities at the entrance precede the final car-ride and now it's two o'clock in the morning at Colombo Airport. The ink of this pen is about gone as is my time on Tambapanni – The Copper Isle.

Luang Por Sumedho once said, 'Time is an illusion caused by ignorance.'

The images change but the knowing element – *vijjā-dhātu* – is free of that. May these miles of moving images fully serve their potential to help actualize the realization of this quality.

Copper Isle Miles ~ Glossary

(Unless otherwise stated, non-English words are from the Pali language)

Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery
A forest monastery in Northern California, founded by the author in 1996, with Ajahn Pasanno.

Abhayagiri Vihāra
A monastery in Sri Lanka, with a large *stūpa*, that was founded by King Vattagamani in about 80 BCE.

Ajahn (Thai)
Teacher; from the Pali *ācariya*: in the Amaravati community, a bhikkhu or sīladharā who has completed ten Rains Retreats (*vassa*).

alms bowl
The bowl used by Buddhist monks and nuns in which they receive the food which is offered as alms by the lay community each day. An essential item to be owned by every Buddhist monastic.

Amarapura Nikāya
One of the lineages of the Buddhist monastic community based in Sri Lanka. It was founded in 1800 and was named after the city of Amarapura in Mynamar. The other main lineages in Sri Lanka are the Siam Nikāya (founded in 1753) and the Ramañña Nikāya (founded in 1864).

Anidassana
Non-manifestative; invisible; unformed.

añjali
A gesture of respect, made by placing the palms of the hands together and raised to the heart, or the forehead.

anumodanā
Literally: 'I rejoice in the good that has been done'; a blessing.

apsara
A celestial dancer; the female counterparts of the *gandhabbas* (Skt. *gandharvas*), the celestial musicians, who are customarily male. They are beings that are denizens of the 'Heaven of the Four Great Kings'. Both *apsaras* and *gandhabbas* are regularly featured in temple murals and bas-reliefs in Buddhist countries.

atammayatā
Literally: 'not made of that'; a quality of insightful vision that involves not imputing solidity or independence in the perceptual process. It is a subjectless and objectless awareness; it is somewhat akin as a concept to the 'non-duality' of the Vedic and Upanishadic practice of *Advaita Vedanta*.

bhante
'Venerable sir'; a polite way for a lay person to address any Buddhist monk; also the polite way a junior monk addresses a senior. The equivalent form of address for nuns is 'ayye'.

bhikkhu (Pali)/bhikṣu (Skt.)
A fully ordained Buddhist monk.

bhikkhunī (Pali)/bhikṣunī (Skt.)
A fully ordained Buddhist nun.

Bodhi
Enlightenment.

Bodhi-pūjā
A formal ceremony honouring the realization of Enlightenment.

***Bodhisatta* (Pali)/*Bodhisattva* (Skt.)**
Literally: 'A being who is intent on Buddhahood'; one who has made the vow to realize 'Unsurpassed Full and Complete Enlightenment' in this or a future life. The Pali 'Bodhisatta' most often refers to the previous lives, or the early part of the last life of the Buddha Gotama – the Buddha of this current age.

Bodhi Tree
The tree, in Bodh Gaya, India, under which the Buddha was sitting when he realized enlightenment; a *ficus religiosa*. Also other trees of the same species, growing in different places.

Buddha-sāsana
The Buddha's dispensation; the Buddhist religion.

camellia sinensis (Latin)
The tea plant.

casus belli (Latin)
Literally: 'a cause for war'; an excuse used by rulers or governments to enable them to attack other countries and claim some would-be reasonable justification.

dacoit (Hindi/English)
A member of a class of robbers in India who usually carry out their banditry in armed groups.

dāna
Literally: 'generosity'; often used as a term meaning 'offerings made to a monastery' or, more specifically, the alms food offered each day to Buddhist monastics.

dāna-sālā
The hall in a monastery where food offerings are made and the communal meal is taken by Buddhist monastics.

deva
A heavenly being, an angel; a being that abides in any one of the seven lower heavens in classical Buddhist cosmology.

devala
A shrine, usually in a Buddhist monastery but also sometimes independently, set up for the worship and propitiation of *devas*. These devas often being considered to be protective spirits of a particular locality or capable bestowing certain gifts.

Dhamma
The teaching of the Buddha as contained in the scriptures, not dogmatic in character, but more like a raft or vehicle to convey the disciple to deliverance; also the truth and reality toward which that teaching points; that which is beyond words, concepts, or intellectual understanding.

Dhamma-āsana
A special seat from which a Dhamma talk is given.

Dhamma-jāti
Literally: 'born of the Dhamma'; natural; an aspect of reality.

Dhamma-niyamatā
Literally: 'functioning according to the laws of Dhamma'; the orderliness of the Dhamma; the laws of nature.

Dhamma-Vinaya
Literally: 'the teaching and discipline'; the Buddha's own term for his dispensation; the 'Vinaya' being, specifically, the monastic rule that governs the life of all those who have 'Gone Forth' into Buddhist monastic life.

dukkha
Literally, 'hard to bear' – dis-ease, restlessness of mind, anguish, conflict, unsatisfactoriness, discontent, suffering. One of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena; also the focus of the First Noble Truth.

Entwives
In JRR Tolkien's story *The Lord of the Rings*, and other tales of his mythical Middle Earth, the Entwives were the female counterparts of the Ents, tall tree-like beings who liked to inhabit wild forests. At a certain point, when the gardens of the Entwives were destroyed by the maleficent entity Sauron, they disappeared – gone to places unknown by others. This was to the great sorrow of the Ents, who sorely hoped they would be able to be reunited with them one day.

Four Noble Truths
The core teaching of the Buddha. The Truth of Unsatisfactoriness; the Truth of the Origin of Unsatisfactoriness; the Truth of the Cessation of Unsatisfactoriness; the Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Unsatisfactoriness.

Further Shore
A synonym for Enlightenment, the realization of Nibbāna.

guṇadhamma
Essential spiritual quality; 'virtue', particularly as an attribute of the heart rather than as an agreed behaviour. Most commonly used in combination with the components of the Triple Gem, i.e. *Buddha-guṇa, Dhamma-guṇa, Saṅgha-guṇa*.

jantāghara
Literally: 'fire house'; a sauna or steam-chamber used in monasteries as a support for physical health.

'jātipi dukkha…'
Literally: 'birth is unsatisfactory…'; part of the oft-repeated reflections on '*dukkha*', or 'unsatisfactoriness', in the Buddha's teachings.

kamma
Action or cause which is created by habitual impulses, volitions, intentions. In popular usage, as the word 'karma', its meaning often includes the result or effect of the action, although the proper term for this result is *vipāka*.

kamma-vipāka
The combination of an intentional act and the results that come from it.

karuṇā
Compassion; one of the Sublime Abidings.

khandha
Literally: 'group', 'aggregate', 'heap' or 'lump' – the term the Buddha used to refer to each of the five components of psycho-physical existence (form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness).

kuṭī
A hut; a secluded and simple dwelling for a monk or a nun.

lokamānī
Literally: 'a conceiver of the world'.

lokasaññī
Literally: 'a perceiver of the world'.

maechee
An Eight-Precept, female renunciant in the Thai monastic tradition.

mahā-seṭṭhi
A person of great wealth; a millionaire or tycoon; a descriptive term often used in the Pali Canon to refer to a wealthy supporter of the Sangha, such as Visākhā or Anathapiṇḍika.

Mahāsi meditation
The meditation technique developed and taught by Ven. Mahāsi Sayadaw, one of the pre-eminent Buddhist meditation teachers of the latter part of the 20th Century. He was also the founder of the Mahāsi Yeiktha Meditation Centre in Yangon, Myanmar, one of the first places to provide Buddhist meditation instruction to lay people in modern times.

mahā-upāsikā
Literally: 'Eminent female lay disciple'; a descriptive term often used to refer to notable female lay disciples such as Visākhā.

Mahāvaṁsa
Literally: 'The Great Chronicle'; a historical epic poem, composed at the Abhayagiri Vihāra, in the 5th Century CE.

muditā
sympathetic joy; delight at the good fortune of others; one of the Sublime Abidings.

nāma-khandhas
The four qualities that comprise mind (see '*khandha*', above).

Ola
Ola is a type of long, narrow palm leaf used in Southern India and Sri Lanka, when dried and flattened, for writing traditional manuscripts on. The leaves are from the talipot tree, a type of palm.

Pāṭimokkha
The Buddhist monastic Rule, recited every fortnight, on the full and new moon days.

Pali/*pālibhasa*
The ancient Indian language of the Pali Canon, akin to Sanskrit.

panta rhei (Greek)
'Everything flows' – a famous statement by the classical Greek philosopher Heraclitus.

pāramī/pāramitā
Literally: 'means of going across', perfection. The Ten Perfections in Theravāda Buddhism for realizing Buddhahood are giving, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness and equanimity.

prāṇa (Skt.)/*pāna* (Pali)
Literally: 'breath'; also the life energy, vital force or *chi* (Chinese) that is understood, in many Asian philosophical and yogic systems, to flow through the body and the universe.

Precepts
The guidelines for skilful behaviour described and encouraged by the Buddha. These are codified into various numbers and types of Precepts according to an individual's spiritual commitment or formal adoption of lay discipleship or monastic training.

pūjā
A devotional offering, chanting, bowing, garlands of flowers etc.; technically this is called '*amisa-pūjā*', 'a material offering'. The word '*pūjā*' can also be used, in the term '*paṭipati-pūjā*', as meaning 'dedicating one's whole spiritual practice as an offering'.

pujārī
A person who leads a devotional ceremony.

Rains Retreat
The three month period between the full moon of July and the full moon of October that the Buddha established for his monastics to reside in one place, owing to it being the monsoon season in South and South-east Asia. In the Southern Tradition this retreat period is observed quite strictly and thus forms a pivotal season for the year. The time is ideally spent in devotion to meditation and study.

rūpa
Material form; the body; one of the five *khandhas*. The physical elements that make up the body, i.e. earth, water, fire and wind (solidity, cohesion, temperature and vibration). Also often used as a shorthand term for a Buddha image.

rūpa-khandha
Material form; the body; one of the five *khandhas*.

'Sabba roga...'
Literally: 'All disease…'; the opening words of a blessing chant.

sālā
A hall, usually where the monastics eat their food and where other ceremonies are held.

samaṇa-saññā
Literally: 'the perception of a renunciant'; the quality of attitude, embracing simplicity, fewness of needs and harmlessness, that is encouraged for those who have entered monastic life.

Sangha (Eng.)/***Saṅgha*** (Pali)
The community of those who practise the Buddha's Way. More specifically, those who have formally committed themselves to the lifestyle of mendicant monks and nuns.

Saṅgha Nāyaka
The head of one branch, or *nikāya*, of the monastic community, in the Sri Lankan system of Sangha administrative structures.

saññā
Perception; one of the five *khandhas*.

sīladhārā
Literally: 'one who upholds virtue'; a term used for Buddhist nuns gone-forth under Ajahn Sumedho's guidance.

sīmā
A designated boundary or territory within which formal and legal acts of the Sangha must take place in order to be valid. Often this boundary is established around a hall used for the ceremonies of Going Forth and Full Acceptance that are part of committing to monastic training.

Sinhalese
The ethnic type and language of the largest group of people living in Sri Lanka. This community is predominantly and historically of the Buddhist faith.

strangling fig
This is the common name for a number of tropical and subtropical plant species, including some banyans and unrelated vines, that grow around a 'parent tree' and eventually cause their death. In the scriptures (e.g. at Dhp 162) the Buddha speaks of the *māluvā* creeper, a parasite which slowly destroys the tree on which it has grown.

stūpa
Literally: 'a heap'; this is usually a round, mound-like or hemispherical structure, customarily containing relics of the Buddha or the remains of Buddhist monks or nuns after cremation; it is used as a place of meditation, pilgrimage and devotional practices.

sutta (Pali)/***sūtra*** (Skt.)
Literally: 'a thread'; a discourse given by the Buddha or one of his disciples.

Tamil
The ethnic type and language of the second largest group of people living in Sri Lanka. This community is predominantly and historically of the Hindu faith.

Tathāgata
'Thus gone' or 'Thus come' – one who has gone beyond suffering and mortality; one who experiences things as they are, without delusion. The epithet that the Buddha applied to himself.

Thai Forest Tradition
An informal lineage of monastics, largely originating in North-east Thailand but now spread around the world, committed to the practice of meditation and following the standards of austerity and discipline espoused by Ven. Ajahn Mun Bhuridatto (1870-1949). Ven. Ajahn Chah lived according to these standards, and all the monasteries founded by his disciples endeavour to adhere to these principles too.

Theravāda
Literally: 'The Way of the Elders'; the Buddhism of South and South-east Asia. Also known as 'The Southern Tradition'.

tipiṭaka pāli
Literally: 'the three baskets of Pali texts'; the Pali Canon; the entirety of the teachings of the Buddha understood to have been given during his lifetime. These were committed to memory by his disciples and codified at the First Council, at Rājagaha, during the Rains Retreat immediately after the Buddha's Final Passing Away (*Parinibbāna*). The 'three baskets' are: the Discourses (*Sutta*), the Monastic Discipline (*Vinaya*), and the Analytical Teachings (*Abhidhamma*).

upasampadā
The ceremony of Full Acceptance, or full ordination, as a monk or a nun.

upāya
Skilful means; a method of practice or instruction.

vacca-kuṭī
A toilet.

vānara
A monkey.

vassa
The three month annual retreat (see 'Rains Retreat', above).

vatta-sālā
Literally: 'circular hall'. The somewhat unique Round Temple found at Polonnaruwa.

vijjā-dhātu
Literally: 'the element of knowing'; the awakened awareness of the pure heart; the formless, transcendent wisdom that is aware without delusion; also referred to as 'supramundane wisdom' (*lokuttara-paññā*) and 'the eye of wisdom' (*paññā-cakkhu*), 'the one who knows' and by other terms.

vihāra
A dwelling place.

Vinaya
The Buddhist monastic discipline, or the scriptural collection of its rules and commentaries on them.

vipāka
The results of an action. The effects of a cause, formed by an intentional act. Often this word on its own is used as a shorthand for the fuller expression '*vipāka-kamma*'.

Wat Pah Nanachat
The International Forest Monastery, founded in 1975 by Ajahn Sumedho, as a branch of Ajahn Chah's main monastery, Wat Pah Pong. It was established principally to be a centre for Westerners interested to train under Ajahn Chah's system of Dhamma practice. It is located in Ubon Province, North-east Thailand.

yakkha
A male celestial demon; one of the denizens of realm called 'The Heaven of the Four Great Kings', according to Buddhist cosmology.

yakkhinī
A female celestial demon; one of the denizens of realm called 'The Heaven of the Four Great Kings', according to Buddhist cosmology.

ABBREVIATIONS

D: *Dīgha Nikāya*, The Long Discourses of the Buddha.

M: *Majjhima Nikāya*, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha.

S: *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, The Discourses Related by Subject.

Dhp: *Dhammapada*, A collection of the Buddha's teachings, in verse form.

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