

It is a tradition in Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos for males to enter the monastery and practise as novices for at least one week. This period may also last for as long as one year. It is believed that the men who undergo this training develop more well-rounded characters than those who do not.

One summer I was given four Thai novices to train for a week. Suwat, Vipa, Sevali, and Anando were in their mid-teens. Their parents confided in me that they were having some disciplinary problems with their sons. They were concerned that they would soon lose control of the boys, if they didn't learn personal responsibility and appropriate social and spiritual values. Because of their cultural background in Buddhist societies, the parents believed that it was only in the temple under the auspices of the Sangha that their sons could develop these important traits.

When they arrived at the temple early in the morning, I gave the boys a pep talk on how to conduct themselves in the monastery, as well as on the importance and significance of the training they were about to undergo. There are also certain rituals that are involved in the ordination ceremony, which must

planetary systems. Paritta chanting is practised all over the world, especially in Theravada Buddhist countries. The first thing I taught the new novices were Paritta chants. The rhythm of the chanting is important, and the vibrant sounds create a pleasant field of energy for the listeners as well as for the chanters. The monks chant the suttas with various intonations to produce vibrations that can calm the mental state of all participants. When devoted and experienced monks chant with compassion and concentration, powerful thought and sound waves emit from their hearts, minds, and voices and touch the core beings of sincere listeners who are open to receiving their blessings.

On one occasion when a child was reported to be under the influence of evil forces, the Buddha advised the monks to recite the suttas to ward off the evil forces. When you learn and chant these suttas, their vibrations will be beneficial to you.

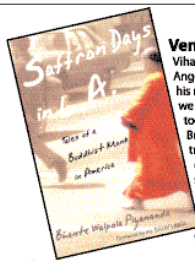
"May I ask you a question, Bhante?" asked Suwat very weakly. "Yes, you may, Suwat," I replied. "Bhante, you related what happened during the days of the Buddha. In your experience, have you or anyone else ever benefited from this chanting?"

plight. I told Todd that we must continue this ritual for seven days. I knew that he needed time for the vibrations of the chanting to enter the center of his being and cause him to be healed. To my joy, when Todd came to the temple on the seventh day, he was a clean-shaven, well-dressed young man, who looked completely different from the depressed, ashen-coloured person of a week before.

When our hour of chanting was over, I gave him the blessed water to drink and tied the blessed thread around his neck, rather than around his wrist, which is the usual custom. I felt that Todd still wasn't completely stable and needed the additional boost of energy and protection. He thanked me profusely, told me he felt much better, and said that he was determined to pull his life back together.

A few days later he returned to the temple and reported to me that he was physically and mentally strong again. He had stopped taking the medications his doctor had prescribed for him and there were tears of gratitude for my help.

Having himself being cured, he asked me if I could help his wife, believing that she was possessed by evil spirits. He couldn't talk to her into coming to the temple, so he asked me to visit her with him



**Ven. Walpola Piyananda Thera**, Founder and Viharadhipati of Dhamma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles, California shares his experience of life in America in his maiden literary work *Saffron Days in L.A.*, which we are privileged to serialise every Saturday beginning today. With calm and compassion characteristic of a Buddha putra he dispassionately unravels the trials and travails of the life of a Buddhist monk in an alien country captivating the hearts and minds of the reader. The stories in the collection reveal the complex, contradictory, joyous, painful, intriguing and inspiring aspects of human condition and the power of true compassion. This story demonstrates with examples the power of Buddhist teachings to develop a positive mental attitude.

## Saffron Days in L.A.

Tales of a Buddhist Monk in America

Thirteen

impression on the young novices, because they seemed to be full of questions. Vipa started by saying, "How can you cure a physical ailment by chanting paritta?" I replied, "According to the teachings of the Buddha, the mind is closely linked with the body. He taught that the mental state of an individual dramatically affects the physical well-being of that person. Modern psycholo-

would rush to his side and comfort him.

"Anando, I am glad you asked me that question. When I was a novice, I had bad dreams, too. My teacher taught me to recite verse 183 from the Dhammapadam seven times. It really worked for me. Why don't you try to learn it and see if it helps you?"

**Sabbapappasa Akaranam,  
Kusalassa upasampadam,  
Saccitta-pariyodapanam.  
Etam buddhana-sasanam.**

**Which means:  
The non-doing of all evil,  
The performance of what is good,  
The cleansing of one's own mind:  
This is the Buddha's teaching.**

Anando was disturbed by his night time episodes and promised me that he would never

sleep without reciting this sutta. I saw him earlier this year and he told me that he has never missed a night, and his bad dreams have never returned.

The week's training period went fast. I noticed that the novices' stay at the Vihara, and the training in mindfulness that they had undergone, seemed to have matured them to some extent.

It was evident to me that they had made progress in the development of a positive mental attitude as well as a desire to cultivate wholesome, productive thoughts. Occasionally they still visit me at the Vihara accompanied by their parents.

Their parents believe that the training was truly beneficial to their sons and have noticed a remarkable change in attitude, which they feel makes them more trustworthy and responsible, no longer in danger of going out of control.

Next week  
**The London Doctor**

# Healing Powers of Chanting

be followed, and I explained these to the young men.

At ten o'clock in the morning the monks of the Vihara assembled in the Shrine Room and sat according to seniority. The parents of the four boys were already in the room, sitting on the floor. The candidates entered the room wearing the simple white robes of the novice and proceeded to offer flowers to the Buddha and to the monks. Then they joined their parents, knelt on the floor in the customary manner and paid their respects to the Buddha and the members of the Sangha by bowing three times to each. The senior monk then asked the boys if they had permission from their parents to become novices. At this point in the traditional ceremony, each young man formally asked permission from his parents to join the Order of Samanera, or novice monks. Afterward, each one bowed down before his parents three times. It was a proud and emotional moment for the parents as well as for the candidates.

The candidates left the Shrine Room accompanied by two monks who shaved their heads. Then they returned, carrying the eight articles necessary for a monk, which are the alms bowl, two robes, one under-robe, one belt, a sewing kit, a water strainer and a razor.

The boys looked completely different with no hair and I watched with amusement the parents' reactions to seeing their sons this way. The boys bowed before the sangha, and the most senior monk, assisted by another monk, began the ordination ceremony, which took approximately thirty minutes, including time for a blessing chant. Then the newly ordained novices took their places next to the sangha members. When they were seated on the dais, their parents came forward, presented gifts to their sons, and bowed before them three times.

The training period, which began immediately after the ceremony, went forward smoothly as planned. I started teaching them Pali chanting, the traditional form, which was originally chanted by the Buddha for the blessing and protection of his disciples and devotees. These suttas, or sermons in chanting form, were originally passed down orally. They were recorded on palm leaves about twenty-one hundred years ago and later compiled into books.

Paritta chanting is specifically for protecting ourselves from evil spirits, misfortune, sickness and the negative influences of the

"Of course, there have been many instances. As a matter of fact, one particularly remarkable story about the results of chanting comes to mind."

Here is what I told Suwat: It was the summer of 1976. I was seated on our lawn reading What the Buddha Taught, by Walpola Rahula, when an unshaven, ragged, young man approached me.

"I am Todd," he said, looking forlorn and almost gray. "I have a lot of problems - mental, physical and personal. I lost my job, my wife is sick and the Department of Social Services took away our children, as they believe we are not mentally stable enough to be parents. Is there any way you can help me?"

I felt sorry for him, and suddenly an idea came to me, which was to explain to him the benefits of chanting in our Buddhist tradition. I told him that there were two keys to make it work.

**Psychologists and Buddhists agree that an optimistic persons has better chances of recovery due to his or her positive attitude, and contrarily, a pessimistic person lessens the chances of recovery due to his or her negative attitude.**

First of all, he must have faith in my chanting and secondly, I must exercise great compassion toward him. Otherwise, there would be no result. Todd said he was willing. I told him to visit me the next day between six and seven in the evening. I wasn't sure if he would show up, but when he did, I was happy to see him.

I took him to the Shrine Room, where I had already made preparations to chant paritta. I had a pot of water covered with a white cloth and a string around the pot. This string was attached to the Buddha statue. Together, we held this string and I chanted paritta for one hour. I noticed during the hour that Todd was uncomfortable and restless, probably wishing he hadn't come, but I could also see that he was determined to have faith in the results that I had told him would be produced. He was very desperate to find a cure for his

at the couple's apartment. I was shocked to see her condition. Barbara lay on the floor, eyes closed, hands clasped as if in a trance. Her body was emaciated, and there were horrible odour in the room. Todd told me that she didn't open her eyes, because spirits troubled her. She was obviously delusional and paranoid.

I told her that the powers of the Buddha and his eternal truths would help her to recover. I further explained that the scientists who discovered atomic energy are no longer living, but that their knowledge of how to use it remains with us.

In the same manner, the Noble Teachings of the Buddha are most effective when chanted with feeling and compassion, bringing blessings to the believer. I said to her, "I will chant paritta to remove all evil forces that are hindering you and making you fearful. Please believe in what I am doing and listen closely to my chanting with a positive attitude. You will soon feel better."

I chanted. Gradually, she seemed to relax. I visited her two more times and chanted paritta in her presence. On the third day I carried a statue of the Buddha with me, which I placed on a stool near her bed. I completed my chanting, lifted up the statue, and called to her.

I said, "Barbara, the suttas that I chanted were originally delivered by the Buddha. He was the embodiment of compassion, love, and all the virtues that he preached. Please open your eyes and look at the compassionate face of the Buddha."

She slowly opened her eyes and gazed at the Perfected One. She screamed with joy, "I am free. I am released," and stood up near her husband. They embraced one another shedding tears of happiness.

A few months later Todd and Barbara visited me. They were very happy to tell me that they had regained custody of their children. I was glad to hear that Todd had obtained a professional position in a well-known university.

We have maintained our friendship over the years. Todd is now following the Buddha's teachings, and remains faithful to me and our temple, never forgetting to support us whenever there is a need. Today Todd was one of the highest positions in the world in his field and has written more than one hundred books.

Sevali, Suwat, Anando, and Vipa were amazed to hear this powerful story. I believe it made an

gists support the Buddha's view, having proved that the body slows down when the mind slows down. Psychologists and Buddhists agree that an optimistic persons has better chances of recovery due to his or her positive attitude, and contrarily, a pessimistic person lessens the chances of recovery due to his or her negative attitude. Chanting contributes the additional benefits of providing emotional comfort to the individual and, at the same time, helps reduce stress. It goes without saying that one must develop the proper attitude of faith and virtue in order to obtain the best results from chanting. And of course, common sense must lead one to seek proper medical attention if one is injured or seriously ill."

Sevali seemed to be restless, so I asked him what was bothering him. "Bhante, I can't sit still even for five minutes. How can I concentrate to listen to you?"

"Sevali, you obviously need to develop your powers of concentration. To do that you must believe in what you are doing, knowing that it is correct. The chanting of suttas can bring material blessings if the listeners maintain the appropriate wholesome state of mind combined with confidence in the outcome. According to the Buddha, right effort is a necessary factor in overcoming suffering. Sevali, while you are here at the Vihara this week, I challenge you to make the effort to learn to sit still. Only then can you begin to increase your ability to concentrate."

I continued by telling the young men that all suttas have intrinsic powers because the Buddha's teachings, as well as his paritta chantings, are assertions or affirmations of truth. At the end of the recital of each sutta, the chanters bless the listeners with the words, "Etena saccha vacchena sohi te hotu sabbada," which means, "By the power of the truth of these words, may you ever be well."

When our talk was over and I was getting ready to leave, Anando stopped me.

"Bhante, I doubt whether I could memorize all those words. Could you teach me a short verse to overcome my dreadful dreams?" Anando had more than once during the week he was at the Vihara awakened in the middle of the night choking and screaming. Each time, one of the monks

