

CLEAR MIND



Abhayagiri Monks to Lead April Retreat

Madison Vipassana, Inc., is very happy to welcome two monks, Ajahn Yatiko and Ajahn Karunadhammo, from Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in Redwood Valley, California, for its April residential retreat. Abhayagiri is the first American branch monastery in the Thai lineage of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho. We are extremely fortunate to have two of the monastery's senior bhikkhus as retreat leaders.



Ajahn Yatiko

Venerable Ajahn Yatiko was born in 1968 and raised in Edmonton, Alberta. He had a strong interest in religion from childhood and after a few years at university decided he needed a spiritual teacher rather than an academic one. He was on his way to Tibet for ordination when the plane stopped in Bangkok en route. While having lunch in a Bangkok restaurant, he was joined by a few

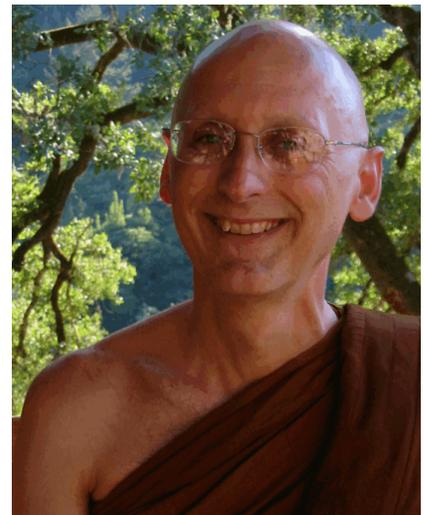
Thai laymen who highly praised Ajahn Chah, founder of Wat Pah Nanachat in Ubon, Thailand, and recommended he visit the monastery. He did, and was ultimately inspired to pursue monastic training there. He lived in the Wat Pah Nanachat community from 1992 to 2008. He arrived at Abhayagiri in January, 2008.

Venerable Ajahn Karunadhammo was born in North Carolina in 1955.

After training as a nurse he moved to Seattle in his early twenties, where he came in contact with the Theravada tradition. He decided to ordain as a monk while in Thailand in December 1995 and requested to be part of Abhayagiri. He was one of the original residents arriving at Abhayagiri on June 1, 1996. He ordained under the preceptorship of Ajahn Pasanno in July 1997 and in 1998 took full ordination to

become the monastery's first American-born monk.

The retreat led by Ajahns Yatiko and Karunadhammo will take place at Pine Lake Retreat Center in Westfield, Wisconsin, from the evening of April 13 until midday on April 17. This retreat will include morning and evening "puja"—chanted recollection of the teachings of the Buddha. To learn more about the monastic retreat experience, see the article on page 2. Registration materials and retreat details are enclosed in this newsletter.



Ajahn Karunadhammo

Monks to Speak on Sunday, April 17

Ajahns Yatiko and Karunadhammo will offer the Dhamma talk at Madison Insight Meditation Group's regular Sunday night sitting from 6 to 8 p.m. at the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Dr., Madison. Mark your calendars so you don't miss this wonderful opportunity to benefit from their teachings.

Why Attend a Monastic-Led Retreat?

(And what is it like, anyway?)

The Buddha taught that for his teachings to be sustained it would require a four-fold assembly composed of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. He said that these groups have much to offer to one another and a complete spiritual community includes them all. For many people in the west, exposure to the devoted practice of monks and nuns is limited. A monastic-led retreat offers the remarkable opportunity to spend time with monastics.

I have found that one of the many benefits of practicing with monks or nuns is hearing the words of the Buddha chanted. Often there are words or phrases that really catch my interest and attention. One such phrase is part of the daily morning-chanting recitation of the homage to the Sangha and it says: "They give occasion for incomparable goodness to arise in the world." The idea of incomparable beauty arising in the world inspired and comforted me.. For me, it expresses the embodied sense of beauty, simplicity, clarity, and wisdom that monks and nuns personify.

I am very happy that Ajahns Yatiko and Karunadhammo have agreed to come to Wisconsin to lead our April retreat so that others can

also experience the remarkable sense of purity and release that comes from practicing with monks (or nuns). This sense is not accidental or due to my personal propensities or preferences, but is the result of the Buddha's wisdom in outlining the precepts and establishing rules for living in spiritual community. On a monastic retreat, we join the community of monks or nuns who have devoted themselves to purifying the mind, through simplicity and the cultivation of kindness, generosity and wisdom. On

retreat (and in daily life) their model encourages us to put forth that same continuity of effort and intention.

For monks and nuns, the process of training the mind is structured by the

rules set down by the Buddha in the *Vinaya*. These rules establish the best conditions for turning inward, where true freedom is found. On retreat, following the eight precepts offers lay practitioners a similar opportunity to establish conditions supportive of turning inward and training the mind.

Although we may think of precepts as limiting and confining, in fact abiding by the eight precepts

actually results in a noticeable sense of relief and release. When the eight precepts become second nature, it is evident how they support a sane and healthy lifestyle—and how the habitual choices and behaviors that arise when we are not living within the framework of the eight precepts contribute to suffering and delusion. The eight precepts build upon the basic five precepts to:

- 1) refrain from destroying living creatures;
- 2) refrain from taking that which is not given;
- 3) refrain from sexual misconduct;
- 4) refrain from incorrect speech; and
- 5) refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs that lead to carelessness.

In the eight precepts, the precept on refraining from sexual misconduct changes to refraining from all sexual activity. The additional three precepts are to:

- 1) refrain from eating after noon;
- 2) refrain from beautification, adornment, or entertainment; and
- 3) refrain from lying in high or luxurious places.

The last precept is usually interpreted to mean refraining from overindulgence in sleep or from using sleep as just another



Ajahn Yatiko on alms rounds.

way to distract the mind. These precepts, in addition to the basic five, simplify daily living so that effort and attention can more easily be directed to the training of the mind.

The precept regarding not eating after noon is the one that usually causes people the most worry. This precept means that the main meal of the day is served and finished by noon. After that, only clear liquids are eaten or drunk. On my first several retreats, I was worried about how I would handle not eating after noon, but in fact on each retreat I have found that it is pleasant and conducive to greater ease of well-being. Many friends also report this same response and were also surprised that it was so. For most of us, our bodies are well nourished, and hunger doesn't actually become a major issue. In fact, not eating after noon has helped me realize that what I thought was hunger has little to do with a need for food, but is usually thirst, sleepiness or boredom. By late afternoon, the habit to expect food will arise for me, but I find that the clear fruit juice that is put out

around 5 p.m. is completely sufficient as it tastes wonderful, is incredibly satisfying, and gives a welcome energy boost. I feel better and sleep better because I am light and comfortable.

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

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

“Blamelessly and at ease” — yet another beautiful phrase that helps me redirect the trajectory of my intentions in many situations,

not just those involving food. What response or reaction would pave the way for me to feel blameless and at ease right now? Using that reflection to shape my decisions, rather than endlessly weighing what is “right,” justifiable or rational, is usually much more conducive to action that doesn't result in remorse or regret.

We sometimes have strong views about what is necessary for happiness. When we open ourselves to living by the eight precepts while on retreat, it means we are willing to let go of what we thought we needed and discover for ourselves a place in our hearts that is bright, peaceful, and happy. Living in this way, and being with others who are doing the same, “gives occasion for incomparable goodness to arise in the world.” What better gift could we give to ourselves or to the world?

—Jan Sheppard

If you have questions or concerns about a monastic retreat, Jan Sheppard would be happy to talk with you (608-829-0944).

Curious About Chanting?

At the April retreat, Ajahns Yatiko and Karunadhammo will lead practitioners in a twice-daily “puja.” Puja consists of chants, taken directly from the Buddha's discourses, in Pali and English. There will be chanting sheets at the retreat, and everyone will be able to follow along if they wish. However, if you'd like to get a sense of what chanting may be like, you are invited to attend a practice night from 6:30 to 8:15 pm. February 15 at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, WI.

The evening, which is part of Madison Insight Meditation Group's regular Tuesday night practice, is open to anyone, whether or not you plan to attend the retreat. We will meditate for 45 minutes, then discuss the pujas and try some of the chants the monks might recite with us at the retreat. Directions are at www.vipassana.net/weekly under the description for the Tuesday night meditation.

Half-Day Meditation Dates

This winter/spring Madison Insight Meditation Group will host half-day meditations from 9 a.m. to noon on February 12, April 9, and June 25 in the Gabler Living Room, First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Dr., Madison. Meditation is followed by a potluck lunch. (If you can, please bring a food item to share.) The mornings consist of alternating periods of sitting and walking meditation. If you can't attend for the entire session, feel free to come for a portion of it. Plan your arrival just a little before the hour, so you can join the last few minutes of walking and stay for the sitting meditation. No fee or registration is required. Questions? Call Dave or Lori at 608-238-1234.

MIMG Resource List Now Available

Madison Insight Meditation Group has developed a resource list of readings in the Theravada and other traditions. The list provides links to online resources and to books available from the Madison Public Library. It's available at Sunday night meeting and on our website at: <http://madisonmeditation.org/MIMGbooklist.pdf>

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