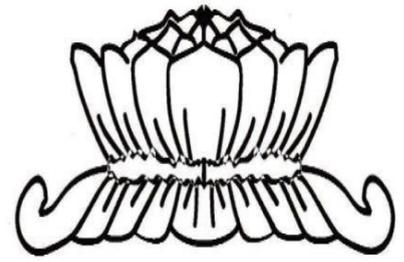


# LOTUS



JOURNAL OF THE BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST VIHARA

ISSUE No.58 December 2023

## KATHINA ROBE OFFERING CEREMONY

In remembrance of and with respect to our grandparents, parents and teachers

Dr Kyaw Htun Aye and Dr Htet Nwe Win

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2023



# Why did you become a monk? (*American Buddhist Monk: Bhante Subhūti*)

By Bhikkhu Subhuti / October 1, 2023

<https://americanmonk.org/why-did-you-become-a-monk/>



Probably the #1 question we get is, “Why did you become a monk?” That question has many factors and answers. However, a better question is, “How did I actually get the nerve to become a monk?” I had a lot to give up. I was a computer programmer and really enjoyed my job. It did not feel like work actually and I was also making more than 15 times what someone on minimum wage was making at that time. I had gone through the “Should I stay or should I go?” routine many many times but never really committed myself to monkhood.

Below is an excerpt from *Going For Broke* which explains the second of three tipping points for me. The first tipping point was to leave my job because of an animal rights issue came to light with the blood analyzer I was working on. The last tipping point was when I came to terms with the “deal” I made below, and knew in my heart that it was the right decision.

While I was in Kauai and Fiji, it was quite evident that I was losing my Buddhist path. You may have questioned my writings and said to yourself, “Is he really going to follow through with this monk thing?” You may have asked this question once or twice, but let me tell you that the question has plagued me throughout the entire trip. So the story...

When in Fiji, I was in the ocean showing these two travelers how to play “Shark Attack” and “Whale Breaching.” “Shark Attack” is a simple game where you pretend that a shark is eating you alive, like a scene from the movie “Jaws.” Each person takes turns trying to perform a more realistic or humorous shark attack. In “Whale Breaching,” you jump out of the water and then flops onto your side just like a whale would do during mating season. These are some of my favorite games to play in the water, and they surely kick butt over the usual “Swim to Nowhere” or “Marco Polo.”

After returning from the water a few hours later, I looked at my wrist to find out how much longer we had to wait until tea time and noticed my watch was missing! It seemed I had lost it while playing “Shark Attack.” A member of my “Shark Attack” audience said they saw something fly off my wrist as I submerged and waved my hands for help during my Oscar performance, “The Fijians Are Not the Only Ones Who Eat Humans.” Unfortunately, that audience member passed off my airborne watch as seaweed and did not mention it to me. OOPS!!!

I immediately got some snorkel gear and started searching. It was not to be found. After dinner, when it was low tide, I decided to take another look... Still no watch. I told some Fijian kids I would give them lots of money if they found it. They looked around for a few minutes and gave up, thinking it was silly to look for a watch after it had been lost in the ocean for four or five hours.

Losing the watch was quite symbolic for me since it was most useful for waking up early at the monasteries and timing my meditations with its countdown timer – that is, whenever I reserved the time to meditate. The frequency of meditation sessions during my trip had quickly dwindled, and so did my Buddhist path.

Losing my watch was a big message for me. I wondered if it was possible to recover what I had lost... and that ain't the watch I'm talking about either!

Later that very night I had trouble sleeping. I happened to wake up as the sun was starting to rise. The sky was red, the beach was empty, and the water was low. As I was walking, I asked myself, "I wonder if I can find my watch this morning?" As I approached the shore, I thought about how impossible it would be to find a watch lost in the ocean for a whole day and a whole night. I said to myself, "If I find my watch, I will definitely become a monk! No more games – I will really do it." Almost immediately from the distance I could see something flip-flopping as the calm morning ocean waves lapped the shore's edge. As I walked closer, I saw that it was the black Velcro strap of my watch floating with the face half-buried in the sand. The water was still passing over it. I hesitated for a moment, smiled, and felt something like a defeat or possibly a surrender. There were no more games I could play to excuse myself from ordaining.

Standing in front of my watch, I thought of the impossible "If I find my watch..." promise I'd made, which I thought I would never be held accountable for. Nobody would ever know if I just kept on walking, but finding the watch was just too much of a coincidence to let this moment of truth simply drift away. I lowered myself down to pick up the watch. I had to be true to who I was, or what I was to become. As I picked it up, I felt it was one of the heaviest things I had ever picked up. Change and destiny, especially my own, bore a lot of weight. After this, the only question was when I would become a monk, and that was only a matter of time.

The third tipping point happened at Sai Babba's Ashram. It is also from the book *Going For Broke*<sup>1</sup>.

...It was an experience to go see Sai Baba, and during this experience I finally made up my mind about when I would end up in Thailand.

I am a Libra. As you may know, Libras have a very hard time making decisions. In the past I used a little trick to help make decisions, flipping a coin and calling heads or tails. Although it sounds like the familiar trick, I do it a little differently. I flip the coin and if I do not like the results, then I choose the opposite, the one I liked. This method lets me get in touch with my heart and what I feel I really want to do. Recently, I had made a similar test for whether to go straight to Thailand. Rather than flipping a coin, I used my "flippies" (flip-flop thong sandals). It was appropriate because I was using my shoes to decide which path I would take!

On my first day at the Sai Baba ashram, a Westerner told me to get a different (cheaper) pair of shoes before my Texas got stolen outside the temple. Not everyone who comes to the ashram follows the Universal Rule (love and respect others). Luckily, I heeded his advice, for within 24 hours my 50-cent "flippies" were stolen during breakfast. One of my friendly roommates jokingly told me that someone outside the ashram was probably wearing my shoes. I responded that I really pitied the person who has to walk a mile in my shoes!

After a few days of putting my shoes in places that would be less likely to be stolen, I challenged myself that I would go straight to Thailand the next time my shoes got stolen. I became fearless concerning my shoes. I started to leave them neatly together near the entrance of everywhere I went. Eventually I was putting them right in front of the exit and facing the right direction so that one only needed to slip his feet into them and walk away. "Go ahead and take 'em," I would say to myself. When I would come back and find them still there, I sensed some disappointment. Later, I realized becoming a monk was now in my heart. I could make a decision finally under my own power. With this in mind, I made up my mind to rush through India and Nepal and then fly directly to Thailand before my 30th birthday. For the first time in 11 Months (has it been that long?) I have an itinerary! I'm now a tourist rather than a traveler. I recently gave my compass as a gift to my camel driver. I no longer needed my compass at this stage since I finally had a clear direction in my life. **And so that is what happened. I ended up in the monastery on October 5th, only one day before my 30th birthday.**

## Learning from cultures for common values:



### **Venerable Dr. Nagasena Bhikkhu**

(MA, PhD, SOAS, University of London)

Senior Lecturer and Secretary  
of the Birmingham Buddhist Academy  
Birmingham Buddhist Vihara, UK

*Founder of Lotus Children's Education Trust:*

<http://www.lotuseducation.net>

We are social beings, and we sort out our problems by supporting one another. In one phrase: no matter what identity you are, you depend on others for your survival. This is a simple statement, but the meaning of this statement has been overlooked by many, particularly from the context of the modern world where all resources are interconnected, exported in, or imported from somewhere. However, human beings are still relatively overwhelmed by the notion of their identity such as nation, ethnic groups, culture, and religion.

They fail to appreciate their relationship with others through the eyes of material objects that they use in everyday life. Even though they feel connected with others, the trajectory comes under the influence of culture, nationality, race, or religion but not by practical way of how they depend on one another through essential requisites. These essential requisites required no identity, culture, nationality, or religion.

If we look at our relationship with Christmas Day from the lens of festival and cultural perception, non-Christians are not connected with their emotion and feeling of the festival as much as a Christian would do. This is an example of how our emotion primarily descends from our relationship with the content of the object we cherish.

Such an emotional relationship with their respective festivals is in fact not different across the spectrum of religious and cultural traditions, for example, when Buddhists observe key Buddhist festivals or when Hindu pray in front of their gods, non-Buddhists or non-Hindu feel unimportant for these events. This is the sign of

division within humanity, which clearly dominates the prospect of our social life, even if we depend on one another for our existence beyond culture and religion.

However, when we consider the larger context of our existence with reference to the nature of our survival, the content of culture and religion is not important because a Christian buys his needs from a Muslim shop. The character is in fact the same for everyone regardless of their identity and culture.

We can observe our dependency on one another, especially the way material objects are being exchanged between west and east for our business or survival. If we can exchange material objects between and among different cultures or nationalities, why cannot we exchange our mind, emotion, and perception between and among us beyond culture and religion?

There are things appreciated by humans regardless of their culture and religion. Given a gift and support to a needed person, for example, requires no identity or culture. Unfortunately, such a practice is more visible within the spectrum of the same cultural members and very limited to those who are not their own, for example, Theravada Buddhists may donate and support to the monks more than they do to those who are not monks. Likewise, a Christian would favour donating to a Christian charity, rather than to a Hindu or Muslim charity.

This is what I meant - about dependency on social life - in the beginning of this essay. They depend on one another at least within their own cultural or religious community, but can we see a little bit further beyond the boundary of culture, nationality, and religion? My question is that if each social and cultural group can have such a practice of sharing gifts as Christmas, why cannot we extend this cultural practice beyond and across different spectrums of culture?

What Christian feel is meaningful within their culture can also be meaningful in another culture! Philosophy of Christ which is treasured by all Christians is, for example, the statement of 'love your neighbour and even your enemies'. Whatever 'hidden ideology' behind such a statement, say for example, 'if you love your neighbour, God will love you'. One thing we cannot deny is the fact that love is the most powerful and beautiful part of human identity without which human beings would behave like wild animals.

The main purpose of life could be different in terms of our belief and action but the main purpose of requisites and logic behind having requisites are not different. They all need these requisites for their survival regardless of their religion and culture.

Therefore, my point in writing this message is to see other cultures with a positive mind. We must develop such an attitude of valuing other cultures if we are to live in this modern world relatively peacefully. We can learn from one another to achieve mundane goals as supramundane goals are more philosophical and will be extended gradually.

## Dr Ottarana Nyana's Activities

### Retreat (5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> August 2023)

Dr Ottara Nyana led a Metta & Saccá (Four Noble Truth) retreat at Dhammaramsi in Belgium during Aug-23.

### Vipassana Retreat (10<sup>th</sup> Nov to 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 2023)

Dr Ottara Nyana led a ten days Vipassana retreat at Dhammaramsi in Belgium during Nov-23. Abhidhamma (Four Paramatthas) and Maha Dukkakkhandha Sutta were taught from a practical point of view during the meditation retreat.



### Dhamma Journey to Myanmar (29<sup>th</sup> November – 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024)

Dr Ottara Nyana travelled to Myanmar as his usual annual dhamma trip. He will be attending various ceremonies including International Theravada Buddhist missionary University event. We wish Sayadaw safe and successful journey.



Sayadaw attended Dr Rewata Dhamma's High School annual prize ceremony at Zalun Township, Myanmar on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023.



Sayadaw Dr Ottara Nyana and Dr Nagaseana attended London Mogok Vihara Kathina ceremony on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2023.



## Dr Nagaseana's Activities

### Meditation Retreat (24<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023)

Bhante conducted a meditation retreat in Brno, Czech Republic between 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023. Mettarama Buddhist society in Brno has been working with Birmingham Buddhist Vihara to promote Dhamma in Central Europe since 1998. Our Founder Bhante Dr Rewata Dhamma cooperated with this group for Dhamma to flourish there.



### Kathina Robe Offering – November 2023

Bhante went to attend Kathina Days at Metta Vihara, and Lotus Education Charity's fundraising in Paris from 17<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Bhante gave lectures in a few places in Paris on "Children of the future world and universal values of the Dhamma".



## Vihara News Spiritual Director Dr.Ottaranyana

**Birmingham Dhamma Talaka Pagoda 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Waso Robe Ceremony** was held on 30th July 2023 successfully. Over 200 devotees attended. Academic session on “Buddhism and World Peace” was interesting too. Thanks to all great speakers. Many thanks to everyone for your participation and generous donations. **Certificate Award Ceremony** also took place in recognition of dedication to the Sāsana.



Sadhamma Jotika certificate was jointly awarded to Mr Yann Lovelock (Patron) and Mrs Ann Lovelock (Chair of Birmingham Buddhist Vihara Trust) in recognition of their work in furthering Buddhism during the last fifty years.



Sadhamma Jotika certificate was awarded to Dr William Myint in recognition of appreciation from Sayadaw U Ottara Nyana for translating his book into English (biography of the late Sayadaw U Rewata Dhamma, founder of the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara)

Sadhamma Jotika certificate was also awarded to Marie-Cecile Forget for her many years of support to Birmingham Vihara Trust.



### **Abhidhamma & Pavarana Day (29<sup>th</sup> October 2023)**

This is the Day Buddhist monks end their three months retreat. Devotees and Sangha lit candle lights around the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda and chanted the Pathana section of Abhidhamma. Samosas and tea offered.

### **Kathina Robe Offering Ceremony 5<sup>th</sup> Nov23**

Our Kathina ceremony for the year 2023 was held successfully sponsored by Dhamma Friends Dr. Kyaw Htun Aye & Dr. Htet New Win. About 250 Dhamma Friends attended the ceremony.



**Bangladesh Buddhist Council attending the Kathina**



### **Renovations/Repairs**

**Sep-23:** A new boiler has been installed in the Sangharama Vihara.

**Nov-23:** The boiler in the Rewata Dhamma Hall is repaired by Vaillant Services.

**Conference: 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

Being Buddhist in Britain conference organised by UK Association for Buddhist Studies, the Network of Buddhist Organisations, the British Maha Bodhi Society and Centre for Applied Buddhism was hosted by Birmingham Buddhist Vihara Trust at Birmingham Buddhist Vihara and the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda. Thirty-three delegates attended despite inclement weather the day before.



**Birmingham Buddhist Vihara - Birmingham Heritage Week - 8th - 17th September 2023**

City of Birmingham opened up 90 places of heritage interest during the 10 day heritage week. About 300 visitors visited the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda during the Birmingham Heritage Week.

**Visits:**

Fifteen members of National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers. Retired Members, Retired Members' Association visited the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda and Birmingham Buddhist Vihara on 13th October 2023.

A contingent of delegates from MENSA Conference held in Birmingham visited the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda and Birmingham Buddhist Vihara on 20th October 2023.

Twenty primary schools have so far visited the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda for Religious Education visits this term.

**Donations:**

**August 2023:** Dr. Win Myint Aung and Dr. Khine Thin Han donated three storage batteries for solar panels that they donated in 2019 completing the renewable energy project they embarked upon from 2017. The cost of the installation was £10969.00. They also donated the roller blinds for the ground floor windows in the Rewata Dhamma Hall.

**October 2023:** Dr. Aung Myint Kyaw and Daw Mya Mya Aye's Dana. Offering of light in Kwan Yin, Goddess of Mercy's sanctuary on the west side of the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda.

**Birthday celebrations:**

93<sup>rd</sup> birthday celebration was held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2023 for Ratan Lal Sampla who is one of the forefront supporters of Birmingham Buddhist Vihara's founder Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma when he arrived in 1975.



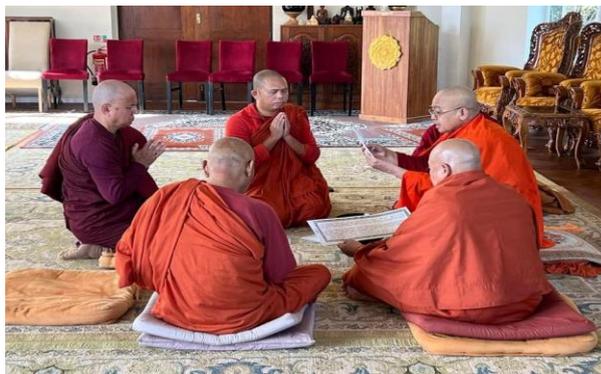
Dr. Ye Lin Hock and Dr. Shwe Phyu Thaw hosted a blessing celebration for their granddaughter Nina, with parents Colin and Eilish Dickson-Hock on 29th October 2023 at Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda and Birmingham Buddhist Vihara.

**Wedding Ceremony**

Wedding ceremony of Mr. Gareth Wright and Miss Aye Nge Win was held in the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda on 9th July 2023.

**Ordination**

Dr Myo Thu and Dr Lynn Lynn Sein family from Newark on Trent offered lunch dana to the Sanghas at Birmingham Buddhist Vihara for Dr Myo Thu's ordination held on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023.



**22<sup>nd</sup> July 2023 – Logan Aung Wild**



# 2567 BE/2024 EVENTS CALENDAR

## BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST VIHARA - DHAMMATALAKA PEACE PAGODA- BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST ACADEMY

### FESTIVALS

#### Buddha Day (Visaka)

Sunday 26th May 2024 10:30am

*Note: 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr Rewata Dhamma (The founder of Birmingham Buddhist Vihara) passed away*

#### Dhammacakka Day & Pagoda Anniversary

Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> July 2024 10:30am

#### Abhidhamma & Pavarana Day

Thursday 17th October 2024. 7:00pm

#### Kathina

Sunday, 20th October 2024 10:30am

### FULL MOON

Chanting in the Pagoda at 7:30pm except on festival days.

26<sup>th</sup> Jan, 24<sup>th</sup> Feb, 25<sup>th</sup> Mar, 24<sup>th</sup> Apr, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 22<sup>nd</sup> Jun, 21<sup>st</sup> Jul, 20th Aug, 18<sup>th</sup> Sep, 17<sup>th</sup> Oct, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov, 15<sup>th</sup> Dec

### RETREATS

#### Easter Retreat

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> March – Monday 1st April 2024

Led by Dr Ottara Nyana

#### 10-DAY Insight Retreat

**Friday 16th Aug – Sunday 25th Aug**

(experienced)

Led by Dr Ottara Nyana

Designed to enable meditators to experience the characteristic of impermanence and nature of non-selfhood as part of the process of insight meditation.

### SCHOOL VISIT FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Many schools visited the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda for religious education. The visits continue to provide students with invaluable experience to hear about the Buddha and his teachings and to meet Buddhist monks. This is also part of the community work that Birmingham Buddhist Vihara does. For a school visit please contact:

**Contact : Dr Nagasana**

**Email : [uk.suriya@gmail.com](mailto:uk.suriya@gmail.com)**

**Dr Max Kyi Email: [Maxkyi@gmail.com](mailto:Maxkyi@gmail.com)**

### SUMMER COURSE FOR CHILDREN (7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Aug 2024)

Please bring your children to the Vihara to stay here and learn about Buddhism. During this five-day course children can learn meditation, chanting, prayer plus key cultural and philosophical points of Buddha's teachings. Accommodation will be available in our Vihara and we look forward to our children's course. If you want to train your children with novice ordination, you are welcome to book with us during these children days.

For details please contact Dr Nagasana:

[uk.suriya@gmail.com](mailto:uk.suriya@gmail.com)

### MEDITATION CLASSES

**Beginners:** Thurs. 7:30pm

**Advanced:** Mon. 7:30pm

**Zen Group :** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Friday 7pm

### PAGODA OPENING

**12pm – 6pm**

The Pagoda is open most days but to avoid disappointment **please call or e-mail first** to ensure there will be someone available to welcome you and show you around.

Phone: 0121 454 6591 or

email: [venuttaranyana@gmail.com](mailto:venuttaranyana@gmail.com)

### New Year Patthana Chanting

**5pm – 7pm 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024**

Everyone is welcome to join New Year's Day Patthana Chanting at Birmingham Buddhist Vihar

### Buddhist Studies Online Course

- Diploma course second semester will start from 26/01/2024 – 24/05/2024.
- New Diploma course will start from Sep 2024.
- Students will study Abhidhamma, Pali Grammar and Meditation taught by Dr Ottara Nyana and Dr Nagasana.

For further details please contact:

Dr Ottara Nyana,

email: [venuttaranyana@gmail.com](mailto:venuttaranyana@gmail.com)