

## Ajahn Mett 05-19-2010



Ajahn Metta was born in 1953 in Germany. She has lived at Amaravati and Chithurst Buddhist Monasteries since 1993 and took higher ordination as a *siladhara* with Ajahn Sumedho in 1996.

During her monastic life, she has been involved in many areas of the community. For the past several years she has taught retreats and has been one of the sisters to lead the nuns' community at Amaravati. She visited Asia for a year in 2008, spending time on retreat and visiting holy sites in India and Sri Lanka.

Currently, Ajahn Metta is part of the group of senior nuns building up a training monastery in California. Having spent the first three months of 2009 in the USA, she intends to return there by the end of 2009.

Prior to monastic life, she worked as a secretary and office assistant. She is the mother of a grown-up son and lived a family life before entering the monastic path. She has been practicing meditation since 1984 and has lived in other spiritual communities in Europe and Thailand (Wat Suan Mokkh). While there, she came in contact with the Theravada Tradition. Her first teacher was Ajahn Buddhadasa, one of the foremost contemporary teachers in Thailand at the time.

### The Importance of the Spiritual Community

Ajan Metta spoke to us on the importance of the spiritual community, or the *sangha*. One of the main reasons she became ordained was the friendship and support of the *sangha*.

*... Ven. Ananda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Ven. Ananda said to the Blessed One, "This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie."<sup>1</sup>*

*"Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life."*

*Upaddha Sutta: Half (of the Holy Life); Samyutta Nikaya 45.2*

Your friends in the spiritual community are a different kind of friend than, for example, those you watch sporting events with. In the spiritual community we come together to share truth and to practice the *Dhamma*. As spiritual friends, what connects us is goodness and honesty.

Spiritual friends are like a mirror. They help us see ourselves as we are. In a monastery, especially, our friends know and can show us when we are going off the path.



Solitary practice can be very good. Ajahn Chah spent 7 years living in caves and forests. However, he notes that there is a pitfall in solitary practice. Ajahn Chah felt he made excellent progress in his aesthetic, solitary years. But when he came around other monks again, he realized that he had missed some of his delusions. When you are by yourself, it is easy to think you are making more progress than you really are. Being with spiritual friends keeps us honest, and helps us see things we've missed.

Being with spiritual friends is the first level, the horizontal value of having other people who know us and can tell us when we are going off the path.

A second level is the vertical relationship, or the relationship with someone who is more advanced on the path. The experience of being with a teacher is very helpful. We can all benefit from being with someone who is further advanced. A teacher can guide us to places where we have not yet been. It is important to find someone who comes from a place of compassion and kindness who can take us to places we have not yet experienced.

One of the valuable aspects of the spiritual community and the teacher is that it brings us into the unknown. As we enter the unknown, we learn that we are not in control of the unfolding. We must be open to the unknown, and make friends with it.

Stepping into the unknown is a scary process, but it is what we have to do. Spiritual friends help us on this journey. When we share this fear with spiritual friends, we not only have someone to listen to us and supports us, but probably has a similar fear. Sharing our fears reduces them.

The *sangha* is a vehicle that transports us further into the dhamma. Having spiritual friends accelerates the speed of our journey.