



Mahapajapati Monastery News



A Quarterly Newsletter of the Bhikkhuni Pioneers in Southern California

Winter 2015

Building New Meditation Huts

In mid-November, building will commence on three new structures on the monastery grounds. These simple huts/kutis are designed to meet the needs of lay and monastic meditators who come to stay at the monastery. In conjunction with Ayya Gunasari and with the generous support of Dhammapali, a local builder has designed these huts to serve as dwellings for yogis who wish to deepen their practice in a monastic setting. We are hoping that they will be completed by February 2016. Your support is much appreciated. See inset below.

Ayya Gunasari goes on retreat

Taking a well-deserved break, Ayya Gunasari is now dedicating her time to the cultivation of insight. She intends to spend three months at the Tathagata Center in San Jose, CA. If you wish to contact her, please wait until late January to give her a call.



Project Details

Kuti Size: 10' X 12'

3/4 Bathroom Size: 10'X12'

Overall Cost: \$75,000

Money raised so far: \$60,000

Please help us to complete the project. Every bit helps.

Donations may be sent to
Mahapajapati Monastery

P.O. Box 587, Pioneertown, CA
92268



Thorns in the Flesh

by Ayya Dhammadhira

Anyone who spends time in the desert discovers that such a place is far from a wasteland. With patient observation, one sees that there is a wide variety of plant and animal life forming a complex ecosystem. The strength of these plants and animals is not in their showy features but in their ability to survive the extremes of heat and cold, lack of water and predators. One way that they do this is by developing prickly defenses: thorns, spikes, and poisons. If one treads unmindfully in the desert, he or she is quick to find painful results.

Walking through the desert or tending to the plants on the monastery ground, I frequently encounter thorns. I may not realize it when the contact actually happens, but after I return from being outdoors, I often notice small slivers or thorns lodged in my hands or feet. Pushing the invader out with force or trying to seize them with a tweezers sometimes works but usually I simply endure the discomfort until the body naturally rejects what doesn't belong to it. During this period before the thorn is dispelled, there is room for contemplation. What are the lessons of Dhamma/natural law contained in this experience?

Following the Buddha's advice to question the cause of suffering, I must ask myself: Did the cactus cause me to suffer? On a superficial level, one could say yes. After all, didn't the thorn come from the cactus? And yet, aren't there millions of cacti that don't cause me to suffer as they simply abide in their homes content to leave me alone. So far, I have yet to encounter cacti that run after or attack people. That scenario can be left for the imagination of science fiction writers. Instead, what actually happens is that the only thorns that get embedded in my flesh are due to the contact that I make with them. In terms of Dhamma, it is grasping which is the cause of suffering, not the objects themselves.

This second noble truth of the cause of suffering applies to the entirety of our sensory experience. Whatever sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts that I grasp hold of will eventually bring me to a state of stress. If I am not mindful, my liking and disliking can easily slide into the experience of clinging. Initially, I may find certain sense contact to be pleasant, but as it changes, I will feel the pain of separation and loss. Conversely, if the sensory experience begins as unpleasant, I will feel relief when it changes. Even so, how long is this new state going to last? When things aren't the way that we want them to be, we are dissatisfied. When things are the way that we want them to be, we fear or guard against the inevitability of change. Either way, we face the instability and unsatisfactoriness of the way things are.

So, how does one engage in the world without being afflicted by sense contact? Here, it is important to remember that it is the nature of the contact that determines the outcome. If the contact is joined with mindfulness, clear comprehension and wise attention, one can potentially perceive the Dhamma in everything. It is only when the contact is of the nature of grasping and clinging that we feel the burn and the bite. Thankfully, even this is a way to discover the Dhamma. What better incentive to let go than to know the drawbacks of holding on. If we are honest with our inquiry and refrain from blaming external circumstances, the unsatisfactoriness or pain of *dukkha* can lead us to the end of *dukkha*. This is why we call them Noble Truths.