

Like a River

the life of a boy named Todd

reflections by

Ajahn Pasanno
Tan Ahimsako

Ajahn Amaro
Tony Anthony



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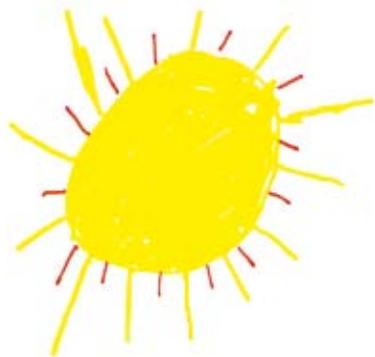
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in the summer Todd is playing
soccer with his friends. Todd
makes a goal. yeah Todd!
by Alyssa Ariel 9-1-07

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*Special thanks to Ajahn Amaro
and Pamela Kirby for their kind assistance
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and Janejira Sutanonpaiboon
for their publishing help.*

Patriya Tansuhaj

DEDICATION OF THE SECOND PRINTING

The second printing of *Like a River* is dedicated to Venerable Ajahn Pasanno, on occasion of his sixtieth birthday, July 26, 2009. Ajahn Pasanno has tirelessly and wholeheartedly devoted the thirty-five years of his bhikkhu life as “Dhamma Father” to many disciples of all ages, including Little Todd. His loving-kindness, virtue, wisdom, and dedication to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha are immeasurable and inspirational.

May all beings be at ease.



DEDICATION

Todd's life was like a river that flows gently to make all who came to know him happy. He always cared about others without expecting anything in return. He shared his favorite toys, lunch money and allowances with friends in need, not to mention the many sweet smiles to encourage people to be happy. He taught us to be generous, kind, caring and forgiving. As one of his buddies, Stephen, put it, "Todd was one of a kind, like finding a needle in the haystack. I will miss him." Adopting Todd is the best decision that we made in our lives, and we continue to be thankful to have had him as our child.

We put together this book with kind assistance from family and friends for readers who are interested in life's lessons through stories and teachings related to this special boy's life. We also wish to dedicate it to all who made Todd a good and happy boy. We thank the Abhayagiri community and especially the kind bhikkhus residing near and far in America, Australia, Canada, England, Italy, Switzerland and Thailand who have guided Todd and us with their boundless hearts over the years until now.

We are indebted to the wonderful grandmothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, teachers, friends, neighbors, doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and other children and grown-ups who have helped us. We will not mention any names as we could leave out some unintentionally. You know how your friendship, love and kindness affected Todd's life in a truly positive way. You are in our hearts and we remain thankful.

Like a River focuses on Todd's life as a little novice because it was the most special time for him and his family, and it was a true privilege for him to be ordained at one of Venerable Luang Por Chah's forest monasteries. Although it was for a short time, to a nine-year-old boy it's quite a significant and meaningful time for spiritual development that grown-ups often do not have. The experience and wisdom were truly precious and memorable to him, his family, and friends even till today.

We hope that all readers will find this book meaningful, leading to a bit more inner peace, wisdom and loving kindness. May you be blessed with peace, good health, and happiness.

Chusak and Patriya Tansuhaj

Pullman, Washington, USA, July 20th 2008

*Like water, unconcerned,
does only what it can,
unexalted, all-sustaining,
brings its gift and passes on.*



Tatcha Todd Tansuhaj
July 20, 1995 ~ April 27, 2006



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Tatcha "Todd" Tansuhaj
July 20, 1995 ~ April 27, 2006

Todd....came from nature on July 20, 1995
adopted into our lives from Thailand
lived and went to Franklin School
in Pullman, Washington
ordained as a little monk at
Abhayagiri Monastery
in Redwood Valley, California
returned to nature on April 27, 2006.

A pure spirit full of grace...
deeply touches our hearts with love
and happiness
A courageous character...
greatly inspires our living
A compassionate soul...
profoundly enriches our journey
A sweet little Todd gently blesses our lives
with incomparable memories
we will always cherish.

FOREWORD

This small book has been compiled to commemorate the short but noble life of Todd Piyasilo Tansuhaj and to share the blessings of the goodness he helped to bring into the world.

Todd was adopted soon after he was born on July 20, 1995 by Patriya and Chusak Tansuhaj in Chiang Mai, Thailand. From the newborn screening tests, it was discovered that his body carried a genetic disorder called thalassemia, a kind of hereditary anemia that is common in countries where there is a lot of malaria. It is the kind of illness that can make you weak and sickly all your life, and need to have a lots of medical treatments, not to mention possible failures in vital organ functioning along the way.

Todd's parents are Thai but they live in the USA, so that's where he grew up; their home is in Pullman, a small town in eastern Washington State. Since Todd needed to have special blood treatments at a hospital in Oakland every few months, his parents got into the routine of stopping at Abhayagiri Monastery, which is also in northern California, for a few days whenever





they were in the area. The family thus became a familiar sight in our meditation hall and helping out around the buildings and forest that make up Abhayagiri's property.

When Todd was just nine years old, the family discussed the possibility of a new approach to Todd's illness — a stem cell transplant that might cure him of the disease completely. They knew it was a little risky and the risk increases as the child gets older, but they all agreed (Todd included) that they wanted to try it. The alternative was the heavy-duty treatments for Todd carrying on for the next twenty to forty years if he survived other complications. While this disorder could be mild for some, allowing one to live up to sixty years, patients with its severe form called thalassemia major are often short-lived.

The family also consulted with a highly revered Buddhist monk in northern Thailand, Luang Por Opaht, before they made the decision. He suggested that it would be a very good idea, in order to tilt the karmic odds in Todd's favor, if he spent time as a novice monk for a while. This is something that people often do in Buddhist countries so that they maximize the forces of goodness in their lives and thus help to bring events to the best possible result.



Todd could have become a novice at Luang Por Opaht's monastery but since Todd felt much more at home in America than he did in Thailand, and also because Abhayagiri was his "home monastery," Chusak and Patriya asked if he might take a temporary ordination with us in California. He thus spent a week in robes at Abhayagiri in May of 2005. He went in for his stem cell transplant at the Children's Hospital in Seattle in September of that year but, tragically, all did not go well; despite beyond-heroic efforts of the medical staff and his family, he died in the hospital on April 27th 2006.

Even though Todd's life was brief by some standards, it is also worthwhile reflecting on some of the Buddha's teachings about how to live in the most wholehearted way:

*Even a single day
Of a life lived virtuously and meditatively,
Is worth more than a hundred years
Lived carelessly and without discipline.*

*A single day's life
Of one who makes great effort,
Is better than a life of a hundred years
Lived in idleness and sluggishness.*



*A single day's life
Of one who sees the Truth,
Is worth more than a life of a hundred years
Where the Truth is never seen.*

Dhammapada 110, 112 &115

What this means is that if we are wholehearted about what we are doing, if we act and speak from a place of kindness and if we pay complete attention to the present, then to our surprise our life has indeed been fulfilled — the number of years we might have been alive is of secondary concern.

Todd's life was a very good example of someone living in this way: he took every opportunity he had to be generous; he was patient and good-humored with the many discomforts that came with his illness; he was always straightforward and friendly. So, even though ten years might not seem like much time to most of us, Todd used those years very well indeed — thus, despite being brief, his life was also complete in its own mysterious way.

Todd's cheerful and kindly qualities led him to have many warm and deep friendships — several of his young buddies



came all the way from Washington State to attend the memorial for him at Abhayagiri, when we placed his ashes in a shrine in the forest here. It also led, during the seven months that he was in the Seattle Children's Hospital, to some competition between members of the staff — apparently every one of the nurses was keen to be assigned to his room in the ICU. They spoke very fondly of him and often praised the brightness of his character. When I asked them if they felt and spoke about all the kids on their wards the same way, one of the nurses memorably replied, “Well, we love them all dearly but some are really special — Todd is a great guy . . .” and then her eyes turned teary.

The various elements that comprise this book have come from a range of sources: the family photographs and much of Todd's own artwork have been provided by his parents, Patriya and Chusak; of the three talks that make up the main body of the book, one was given by Ajahn Pasanno in Thailand, when Todd's condition was deteriorating, another one was given by me on the occasion of the first anniversary of Todd's passing away, at a memorial ceremony held at Abhayagiri Monastery, and the third of these talks was from a similiar event, a year later (in April of 2008), when Ajahn Pasanno offered his beautiful words on “Friendship”; the book also includes a brief collection of reminiscences and reflections by Venerable



Ahimsako, one of the monks at Abhayagiri who became a close friend and mentor for Todd during his short stay as a novice Buddhist monk in 2005.

May the words and pictures contained within these pages serve to bring light into the hearts of all those who pick up this book, and may the spirit of Todd's good and cheerful nature be a bright light in this world.

Amaro Bhikkhu

Abhayagiri Monastery, June 16th, 2008



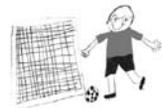


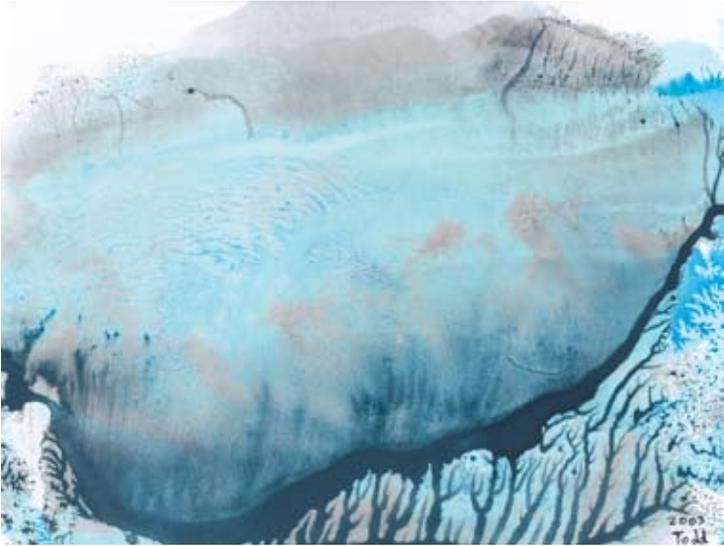
TODD AS ARTIST



Self Portrait, age seven, 2003.

Todd started taking art classes after school when he was seven years old and excelled under his kind and understanding teacher, Mrs. Lina Quock. He also had an enjoyable and memorable time studying Buddhist art from Khru Bee during his last summer in Chiang Mai, Thailand. A small sample of his work is included here.





Whales in Ocean, age nine, 2005.



Animals at Sunset, age eight, 2004.



Colorful Day, age eight, 2004.



Standing Fish, age seven, 2003.



Space Bird, age nine, 2005.



Last Flowers Drawn, age ten, 2006.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS



One month old, Pullman, Washington, USA, 1995.





*Grandma Virginia
with six-months-old Todd, 1996.*



*Mom, Dad and
four-year-old-Todd, 1999.*



Aunts, Uncles, Grandma and Cousins in Seattle, 2005.



At Home in Chiang Mai with Grandma and Aunts, 2005.



Friends in Mr. Lippay's Fourth grade class, 2005.



Bennett visiting Todd at hospital, 2005.



With Pavle and his sister, 2004.



Toddler friends, Chanel and Elizabeth, 1998.



Brandon, Nathan and Naris, 2004.



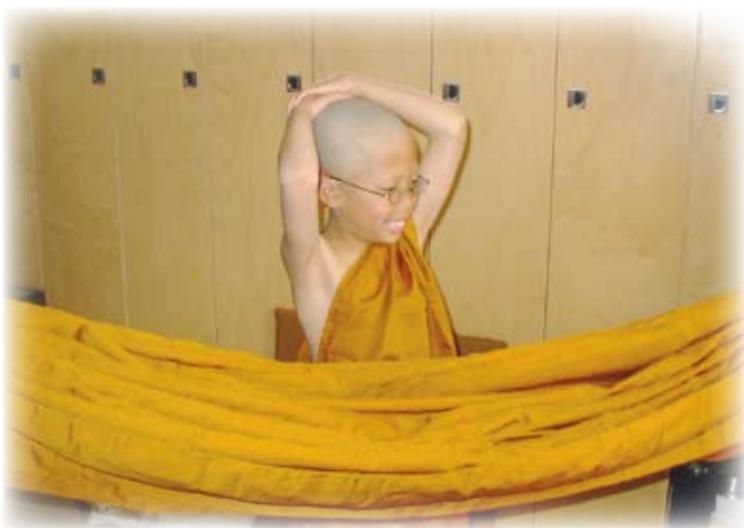
Celebrating birthday with orphaned friends in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2003.



Stephen and Todd, Filipino Night, Mrs. Harms' Third grade, 2004.



Cousins Meme and Mudang, 2008.





THE ORDINATION OF TODD TANSUHAJ

NINE-YEAR OLD BECOMES A MONK AT ABHAYAGIRI BUDDHIST MONASTERY

Tony Anthony

A reprint from Ukiah Daily Journal, May 2005

Something out of the ordinary took place at the Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in Redwood Valley on the seventh of May. Todd Tansuhaj, at just nine years old, was the youngest boy ever to be ordained a novice monk at the monastery. The ordination took place because of a set of extraordinary circumstances. The adopted son of Chusak and Patriya Tansuhaj has a rare blood disorder that makes his future, including a bone marrow transplant, difficult and uncertain. Young Todd needs transfusions every three weeks plus iron chelation therapy five days a week to keep up his strength. They also learned that a bone marrow transplant might be young Todd's only possible cure.





During their time in the Far East a knowledgeable Burmese-Thai monk named Ajahn Opaht told Patriya that he felt, “The boy’s treatment would be a major challenge for him.” He suggested that Todd become a novice if even for a brief time “to live a virtuous life.” Ajahn Pasanno, co-abbot, and the monks, kindly accepted this ordination request to help him prepare for a long and risky treatment.



Blessed by Ajahn Anand and Ajahn Achalo in Thailand, June 2005.

Ordination is not something to be taken lightly. Preparation even to become a novice monk usually takes at least a full year or more of diligent practice. So the Tansuhaj family



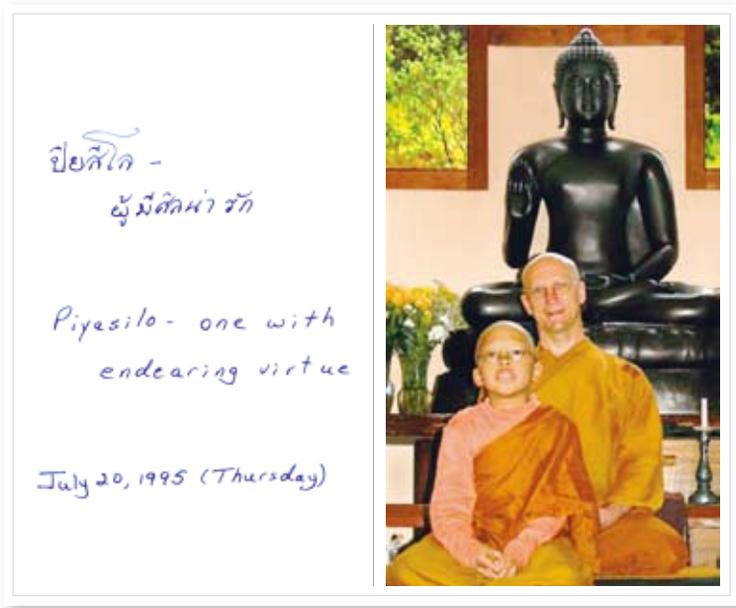
continued the preparations at home and visited Abhayagiri last December to seek guidance. Todd readied himself above what his parents expected. His mother says, “Todd recognized that he would have to make a real commitment to the practice and he memorized almost all the chanting — something difficult even for an adult.” She says, “Todd knows the importance of meditation.”

A Formal Ceremony Filled with Feeling

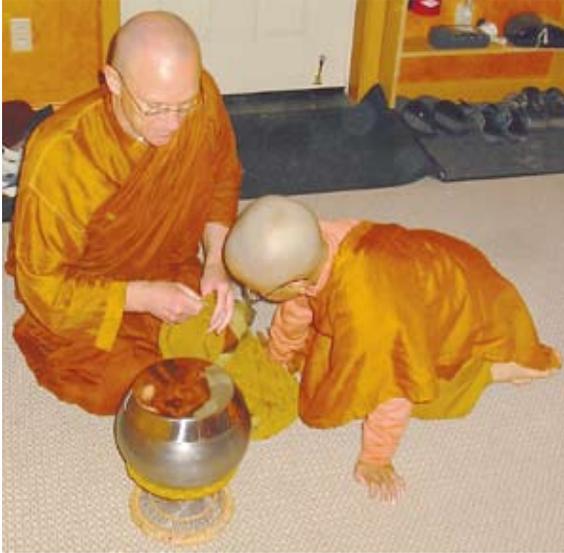
Todd’s ordination ceremony as a novice monk was well-attended by extended family and friends and many of the lay community as well. A highlight of the traditional ceremony was when the boy’s head was shaved, something the audience enjoyed immensely as the animated Todd squirmed in the barber’s chair.







After making the traditional offerings to Ajahn Pasanno who performed the ceremony, Todd left the hall with the other monks and returned a few minutes later proudly wearing the orange-colored robes of the Theravada tradition. Although the audience remained respectfully silent, Todd was as animated as ever, busily doing his best to keep his robes from unwrapping. It was then that Ajahn Pasanno gave the young novice the name, Piyasilo which in the ancient Pali language, means “One with Endearing Virtue.” One observer commented that Todd imbued the usually formal ceremony with a special quality of innocence and humanity.





When asked later to describe the experience of having his head shaved, Todd exclaimed, “It felt like a bee sting!” In the way only a nine-year-old can get right to the point, he added, “It feels cold!” For the monks at Abhayagiri, Todd is a breath of fresh air. He adds a natural childlike quality to the normally serene atmosphere of the monastery. Immediately following his ordination, dressed in his monk’s robes and with his head shaved, he could be seen skipping rocks across the driveway, while the other monks went about their chores. “He acts, naturally, like a nine-year-old, and he has a fascination for rocks,” a novice named Lee said.

Ajahn Pasanno explains the more serious side. “What Todd is doing is very much a traditional practice. It is recommended for someone going through a transition to do something that is meritorious and skillful. Todd will be going through medical treatment and convalescence and it’s not sure how it’s going to turn out — it’s very major and he’s just a little guy. So this is something quite big in his life.”

“I was a bit concerned that the life might be too rigorous,” Ajahn added. “Day begins for the monks at five o’clock every morning. It concerned me because we chant for twenty to twenty-five minutes and then we sit for an hour or more.



I thought this might be too much for him, but Todd gets up on his own and wants to be doing it. It's inspiring. He's putting a lot of effort into learning the chanting," Ajahn says. "He did almsrounds with another monk and received offerings from six people. It was quite exciting for him. And he was able to recite his blessing chants."

When asked what he likes best about Abhayagiri Monastery, the young boy immediately answers, "I like to sleep." But he is also quick to add, "I like to do the chores, I like the brooms. But my favorite thing is using the magnet." The magnet is one used for picking up nails around a new structure being constructed at the monastery. With typical boyhood exuberance, the young monk says, "I like being a novice because the other monks and I get the food first."

A monk named Tan Ahimsako says, "All the monks have joined as a group in helping Todd. Everyone here really enjoys him. We're all trying to be an example." Tan Ahimsako, who previously worked with four-six-year-olds, adds "It's been an education for me. He is still just a boy — not trying to be anything he is not."



Regarding Todd's illness, it's fortunate that one of the monks at the monastery, Tan Karunadhammo, which means compassion, is an experienced nurse and is able to administer Todd's chelation therapy. When the boy leaves the monastery, his mother says there is a good bone marrow match from a donor in Taiwan, so Todd's operation will most likely take place in Seattle within a few months.*

Patriya says with a tear in her eye, "Compassion for fellow human beings seems to be the overriding principle at Abhayagiri. In Todd's case, it is out of compassion that the monastic community allowed Todd to join them. What makes it so special is, I know that if they went by the book they wouldn't have done it. But here, they go by their heart."

*Todd's unrelated stem cell transplant failed and he passed away on April 27, 2006.



SKIPPING STONES

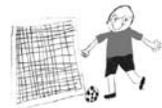
REFLECTIONS ON TODD TANSUHAJ

Tan Ahimsako

November 2007 at Abhayagiri Monastery

I find it interesting how sometimes we can spend just a short while with someone, and yet get to know them very well and become quite close in some ways. I think this is the case with Todd and me.

I joined the monastery in 2002, and from the start of my time here Todd would come with his parents, Patriya and Chusak, for occasional stays. During the last eight years of my professional life, before coming to the monastery, I was working with young people in an educational capacity, which I really enjoyed and appreciated. So when young people come to the monastery I definitely find that I have a heightened interest in their presence and experience here.





When talk began of having Todd come to spend time here as a novice monk, I was thoroughly supportive and excited by the idea, and right from the start looked forward to it. But I do remember thinking, “I wonder how this will be?” A few months before his novice ordination, Todd and his parents came by for a brief visit, and I helped them gather together the text and audiotape of the chanting that he would need to learn for his ordination ceremony. I recall how uninterested Todd appeared to be on that day, so when he arrived a few months later for his ordination, once again, I thought, “I wonder how this will be? What will he do with his time? How will he get on with the routine? Will he take it seriously?” Quite a few of my memories of him, before that time, were of seeing him with his computer games, toys and comic books . . .

I find perception to be a very interesting thing and this experience with Todd has really helped remind me, yet again, to understand how we can perceive or think something, and yet be so far offtrack. And, wow, was I offtrack.

One of the things that touched me about Todd was how natural, sincere and genuine he was, and this became more evident to me during his time here as a novice. Here he was, not even ten years old, in the ochre-colored robes of a Buddhist



monk. Now, what do I mean by “natural, sincere, and genuine?” For me it’s not trying to be something or someone you aren’t, and not creating false impressions of yourself (externally and internally) which aren’t in line with how you really are at that time. Simple enough — what’s the big deal about that? But when I think back, how many times during my life have I acted in an insincere, disingenuous, and unnatural way?”

The ordination ceremony itself is very formal but before that Todd had to have his head shaved. The ceremonial clipping of hair was done first by his father, then by his mother and uncle and finally a small amount more by Ajahn Pasanno. From then on, many of the Abhayagiri monks finished removing all of his head hair and eyebrows, first with electric clippers and then with a razor blade. Meanwhile, Todd’s family and friends, and other visitors to the monastery that day, all sat around and watched. A rather public trip to the barbers!

The ordination came next, with Todd starting out wearing white robes for the first part before changing into the ochre robes (which was a multi-person job, trying to get one wriggly little person wrapped up in yards and yards of cloth that should look neat and tidy in the end!). His chanting was remarkably good, and so well-learned that he was zipping along at a great



speed. I recall that Ajahn Pasanno even had to slow him down at one point. It was during this ceremony that Todd received his monk's name, *Sāmanera Piyasīlo*, which means one with endearing virtue.

Todd truly put effort into being a novice; he came to all but one of the morning meditations (which begin at 5:00 a.m.). The morning he missed was the day following the ordination after a long travel from Washington State. He knew by heart a great deal of the chanting that we do here, he listened to instructions, did his chores wholeheartedly and learned how to do many tasks that he'd never done before. And yet he still remained Todd/Piyasīlo, the young boy/novice, not putting on any false act of trying to be a monk or trying to be someone who he wasn't.

Todd seemed instinctively to know what was appropriate and when. For instance, when we went out walking with our almsbowls (*pindapat*), making ourselves available in the community for food offerings, Todd knew, without asking, that this was a time to be more composed and quiet; walking single file down the road, not acting in ways that were unbecoming for a monk. While out walking we received many food offerings and our bowls were heavy, especially Todd's as



he had been given many large items. He was a little guy but he managed to get back to the monastery entrance still fully laden. The driveway is extremely steep and he slumped and started moaning as we walked up the hill. I was in stitches with laughter while, at the same time, both supporting his bowl and pushing him up the hill. He and I had a good chuckle about that. After we arrived at the top and got into the monks' common room, and our laughter had faded away, the first thing Todd did was to very thoughtfully offer me some of his almsfood — food items that he had received but I hadn't.

Don't get me wrong, though. There were a few times when he was definitely Todd-the-nine-year-old, and did things slightly differently than us older monks would do (or would get away with!). One of my favorites was when we were having one of our morning work meetings, when the day's work tasks are organized. Todd sat next to me as I was the most junior monk at that time, and we sit in order of seniority (not only was there finally someone in ochre robes sitting to my left, but also someone shorter). During these meetings we are allowed to finish our morning bowl of cereal and hot drink. At that time Todd seemed to really enjoy slurping his hot drink, taking it in spoonful by spoonful, and was having a great time of it there in the back of the hall, "slurp, sluuurp, slurp . . ." Patriya



was in the hall as well and I could see that she was not having a great time. With every slurp her shoulders seemed to look higher up on her body and her face in a bit more of a wince. As a professional ballet dancer and teacher, which I did as a career for my entire working life, one of the things we had to know how to do was use stage mime because we don't generally speak in ballet performances. At the next slurp I managed to catch Todd's attention and did my very best drinking mime. Two things happened: Todd stopped slurping his drink and Patriya relaxed. Ahhhh . . .

Another thing that touched me about Todd was how matter-of-fact he was about his body and the medical stuff he was undergoing. He had to use a medicine delivery unit at night: a needle would be inserted in the side of his body before going to bed and the small machine it was attached to would slowly deliver his medicine for the next twelve hours or so. In the morning the needle and device was removed. Todd's dad, Chusak, was here for the first few days so he was setting up this device for Todd and doing the injection each night. When Chusak left to go back home, one of monks here (who just happened to have been a nurse in lay life) took over for Chusak. I watched the injection part of the procedure one evening and was surprised at how ordinary it seemed to Todd: no fuss, no



bother, no complaint, just a few jokes. And when Todd would come down in the morning he would remove the needle all on his own: no fuss, no bother, and no complaint (and perhaps a few more jokes). I can't imagine many nine-year-olds coping that well and, at this point in my life, I know it would take some getting used to if I had to do that to myself.

Earlier I mentioned morning chanting and meditation. Todd would be there with the rest of us; twenty minutes of chanting and an hour plus of silent meditation. On two or three mornings Ajahn Pasanno walked past me on his way into the hall and whispered in my ear, "Tell Todd he can go into the monks' common room and rest after the chanting," which I relayed to Todd. But he didn't take up the offer. He stayed right there until the end. However, on one or two mornings I heard a definite change in Todd's breathing. I looked over to see the young lad with his head leaning back in the window frame behind his head, his mouth slightly open, in a blissful-looking state of slumber. He looked so peaceful. He'd then wake up as we all began the closing chanting at the end of the meditation. Perhaps he was thinking, "That seemed like a short meditation this morning!"



Probably Todd's favorite work task while he was with us that week was going around with a large carpenter's magnet, collecting nails and screws from the ground. We were in the middle of an extensive building project here, with lots of construction debris. Todd's task was important because the gravel in the parking area around the compound was full of semi-hidden nails. He loved this job, was excellent at it and derived great pleasure from letting us all know how many nails he'd collected so far. As a result of his diligent efforts no one got a flat tire that summer.

At that time I tended to get down for the morning meditation pretty early. On Todd's last day here I arrived to find him already there, ready to have us wrap him up in his robes. "Hey Todd, you're here early this morning." "Yeah, well, actually, ummm, this is the third time I've come down." "Oh yeah, why?" "Well, ummm, I woke up really early and thought I'd come down and see what was going on, but no one was around so I went back to my cabin. Then I came down again, and still no one around. So I went back again. And, ummm, here I am, again!" The way it turned out, he was just so excited about it being his last day that he simply couldn't sleep any more. Not that I think he wanted to leave, but it was definitely a big day, and a day of change. He'd be leaving the robes of a novice



monk, leaving the monastery and heading back to Washington State (and, also, his mom had promised him a trip to the toy store).





So this last day saw Todd leave the robes of the monkhood—his week was up and it was time to head north and back home. We were all out on various work duties when he had his small ceremony to return to lay life, so when I came back to the main compound I saw him back in his jeans and T-shirt out in front of the Dhamma Hall, skipping stones along the driveway, just being the nine-year-old-person that he was. A huge smile came to my face as, yet again, I saw just how comfortable and natural it all was for him. I spoke with him a bit and he did seem slightly subdued, but didn't let on as to why. I later heard that he had cried a little when he took off the robes and had expressed his wish to be a monk again, sometime in the future.

These are just a few remembrances of Todd and his precious time with us here at Abhayagiri Monastery. Glancing back over what I've written, once again I return to this theme of naturalness, sincerity, and genuineness, and how we can reflect on these qualities, or their absence. What's going on around us and being felt and understood inside? How is the inner feeling being expressed to those around us and is this the right time and place for doing so? Am I being sincere and genuine or am I acting in ways that could perhaps help me to be seen in a certain way or get what I want? When I think back on Todd's



time here, more and more I realize that he really helped remind me to keep an eye out for this in myself. Of course, it's not like my teachers haven't talked about this — looking at our minds like this is one of the key encouragements of the Buddha's teachings. My teachers often urge us to use experiences in a way that, if we use them wisely, can help us see what's what in the mind and heart. Thanks Todd, you've been a good teacher by silently and unknowingly reminding of this principle.





MY LIFE AS A NOVICE

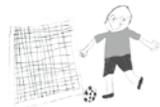
Piyasīlo Sāmanera (Todd)

May 2005 at Abhayagiri Monastery



My life as a novice is fun but hard. The hard part is that you are supposed to wake up early at 4:30 a.m., the fun part is in working to pick up nails with a big magnet. I also like playing with lizards.

The monks are great. We help each other work on dishwashing. They taught me how to wash my clothes, to





set up the mats, to get dressed in a robe, and to wash my bowl differently. The monks are fun to be around because they are really nice people. We tell each other stories.

The almsround was interesting but the bowl was heavy for carrying up the hill. Tan Ahimsako was fun to go with though.

I would like to thank Luang Por Pasanno for ordaining me. I would like to thank all the monks for helping me and for being kind to me while I learn to be a novice. I will remember everyone at the monastery always.







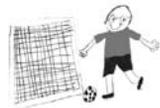
FRIENDSHIP

Ajahn Pasanno

A Saturday night talk, April 26, 2008
Todd's two-year memorial service day
at Abhayagiri Monastery

Today we have had a very special ceremony for Todd Tansuhaj, a young boy who died about two years ago and who was a novice here just prior to his hospitalization for an illness. His parents and friends have come for a memorial service. Some of them came last year. A couple more have come this year as well. So that all together, we have Todd's parents, a cousin and several friends. During the day we had a couple of little ceremonies to commemorate Todd's passing.

I was thinking about a theme of friendship, because Todd's friends have made the effort to be here and Todd's parents have made the effort to bring them. His friends were keen to come here and to do some kind of memorial commemoration for their





friend, Todd. The theme of friendship is an important one to be considering as we live in the world. We were born into this world. We have a shorter or longer lifespan in this world. We don't live separately from other people. We have the association with others as human beings. And, the friendships that we make are the ones that sustain us, support us, give us a sense of connection to each other.





During the ceremony out at the Cool Oaks today, Bennett who, in recollecting Todd, was certainly missing his friend, but also remembering the good qualities of his generosity, curiosity, and humor. It is the qualities that we remember of each other as we think about our friends. It's the qualities that are important, and those are the things that are actually carried on — various qualities. So, for ourselves as well, trying to recollect what kind of qualities to bring into our own lives. How do we want to associate with others? And how are we able to relate to each other in ways of friendship? In particular, in Buddhist teachings, the Buddha places a great importance on spiritual friendship or admirable friendship, *Kalyanamitta*. When we have noble friends or have good friends, those are the things that help support us in our own life and in our own aspiration for living skillfully.

There is a very famous discourse or teaching where the Buddha was approached by his attendant, Ananda. Ananda had spent the day in solitude. When he was meditating during that day, he had an insight and was really excited to share the insight with the Buddha. So, in late afternoon he came and told the Buddha that he had been meditating through the day and had this great insight that half of the holy life, half of the spiritual life was having good friends, having noble friendship.



The Buddha said, “Oh. Don’t say that, Ananda. It’s not just half of the holy life. It’s all of the holy life, to have good friends, to have spiritual friendship, admirable friendship.” That sense of the importance that the Buddha placed on having good friends, of cultivating good friendship, being a good friend of other people — these are really important qualities.

Also if we consider that the Buddha never referred to himself in an inflated way, “I am omniscient. I am omnipresent. I am the greatest. Look at me!” What he said was, “I am a Kalyanamitta for the world. I am a good friend for the world.” Again, this highlights his own sense of the importance of good friendship. The Buddha, being fully enlightened, a fully awakened being, thought the best thing that he could do was to provide spiritual friendship for others, spiritual guidance. So this quality of friendship is important.

There’s a lovely Jataka* story that I remember. It begins with a scene in the Buddha’s time when a young man and a young woman are interested in getting married. Her question to him was, “How many friends do you have?” It wasn’t —

**Jatakas* are tales or fables of the Buddha’s previous existence.



how much money do you have? Or, how much fame do you have? But, how many friends do you have? He was taken aback by that. He realized that even if one has all sorts of material well being or has any power or influence because of birth, even if one was born in the ruling class or the warrior caste of those days; if you don't have friends, you will never know what can happen. You need to have friends in times of need, in times when lacking support, or in times of problems and difficulties. When you need advice, you have to rely on friends. It really struck this young man that this young woman he is interested in and wants to marry had real wisdom. It made him even more interested in her. He made an effort to cultivate friendship with many different people, including royal families and the monastics of the time, including being introduced to the Buddha. And, in time, they got married in a very large ceremony as he had many friends now. It was commented on by many people how many friends seemed to be there. The Buddha said, "This isn't the first time that they have cultivated friends."

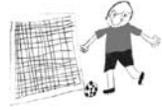
In a past life, the couple were born in the animal realm as hawks, male and female. The same question was asked of the male hawk who was trying to seek for a mate and found this young female hawk, and her question to him was, "Who are



your friends? How many friends do you have?" And he said, "Well, who would be appropriate friends for us?" She said, "In this area around here, we have a big pond over there and a tall tree. There's a very big gull, a very large turtle and then there's also a lion." They cultivated friendship with these animals. They started a family. They built their nest in the big tree.



One day there were hunters from the neighboring village out hunting. They weren't very successful in finding anything that day and they stopped by this pond. There were mosquitos out so they lit a fire to chase them away. The smoke went up high and the little hawk chicks in the nest weren't used to smoke at all. They started to make noises, crying out and making a fuss. The hunters said, "Well, we didn't get anything else. We could have bird meat." So, they built up the fire and of course, put a lot of stress on the chicks. The parents were worried and concerned what to do, how to deal with it. They said, "This is the time we could ask for help from our friends."



So the male hawk went and asked the large gull who was living nearby to help out. The gull said, "Certainly." The gull went swooping down to the water, filled his beak and made sure his wings were dripping wet. Just as the hunter was trying to come up with a torch to burn the nest down and drive out the little birds with their parents, the gull came, swooped down, beat its wings, let loose its mouthful of water, then went back and forth until he put the torch out. Of course, the hunters got more frustrated and tried to be more persistent. The gull's effort was successful to a certain degree but it looked like the hunters were not going to quit.



So then, the hawks let the turtle know. It was a very large turtle, and as it came, it formulated a plan — it covered itself with a lot of moss and weeds from the pond, along with mud



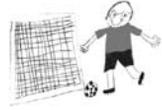
and slime. It came up and went right on to the fire and put it out. That made the hunters really angry. They started to try to catch the turtle and beat this turtle. Of course, it was very large and strong and was able to get away. Still these hunters weren't going to give up.



Finally, the hawks had to go to the last friend, the lion. The lion came and roared his lion's roar. The hunters were finally afraid and ran away. After the hunters left, the hawks, the gull, the turtle thanked the lion and thanked each other for their friendship. They all rejoiced in their friendship with each other and determined to remain friends and live as friends



in that area, which they did, helping to look after each other. As the Buddha finished this story, he said, "In that lifetime, those two hawks were this young man and this young woman. The gull was Sariputta. The turtle was Moggallana. The lion



was myself. Even in these former lives, living as animals, we appreciated and saw the value in friendship.” So we can see the Buddha placed much importance in the value of friendship.

When we live in the world, even though it might not be as spectacular as the Jataka story, in many, many little ways, it always comes up in our lives how important and necessary it is to rely on our friends, and to be able to know how to be a good friend, to give friendship to others. Sometimes being a good friend isn't necessarily always doing what your other friends want. Sometimes a good friend is one who is willing to point out when your friends may be doing something that might be harmful or that may not be of benefit to them, or that is going to create disharmony. Being a good friend is also sometimes being willing to criticize if it's necessary, or if you think it's something that is really right or appropriate. So that being a good friend is always looking out for the benefit or the good, not just in the short term but also in the long term — the benefit and happiness of one's friends. Friendship is perhaps something that we only tend to think of as having a group of friends or helping friends or being in social situations, and of course these are very important. But as the Buddha said, so much of what supports the spiritual life is having good friends — the nurturing of our spiritual aspirations is fulfilled by how we cultivate friendship.



Another aspect that is really important is how we are a good friend to ourselves. Sometimes we are able to be good friends with others, but sometimes we may not be a good friend to ourselves. It may be that a friend makes a mistake or may have done something a bit foolish. We might say something but it would rarely be harsh or overly critical. One would say something but it would be out of care or kindness or compassion. But if we ourselves do something unskillful or foolish, often-times we can be really harsh on ourselves. Sometimes we are not a good friend to ourselves. It's important to know how to be a good friend to yourself, as well as being good friend to others — that sense of knowing how to encourage yourself, to support yourself in ways that allow one to be peaceful or at ease with oneself. We can create a lot of tension out of worry or fear — and that's not being a good friend to oneself. We wouldn't do that to our other friends. We wouldn't make them worry or make them really anxious. We would want to try to protect them. But oftentimes we don't do that to ourselves. We wouldn't criticize our friends so much that they feel really badly. We would want to help them, maybe by giving encouragement or helping them to do something better, but we wouldn't want to hurt them. We have to learn how to do that to ourselves as well. So learning how to be a good friend —both learning how



to be a good friend to others, as well as being a good friend to ourselves.

In the teaching that the Buddha gave, when he was talking to Ananda and saying that having noble friends is all of the holy life, the Buddha actually ends by asking, “How does one have noble friendship?” And he says, by cultivating or by living this path of practice of having right view, having right intention, having right speech, having right action, having right livelihood, having right effort, having right mindfulness, and having right concentration; that is, the Noble Eightfold Path. The path of skilful living is the way we cultivate noble friendship, so that we both look after ourselves and then also learn how to look after others. Again, learning how to be a good friend to oneself is learning to be a good friend to others.

Another thing that the Buddha pointed out in terms of when we are looking at friendship with others is, how do we decide or how does one gauge who is a good friend? The Buddha said it comes back to qualities — the qualities of having similar or compatible virtue, similar or compatible generosity, similar or compatible faith and similar or compatible discernment. These are all the wholesome qualities that we build together



as friends. This is something that binds us together and provides the basis for friendship to continue over a long period of time.

Today Todd's friends and family come to make offerings and dedicate the blessings and goodness of those offerings for Todd. That's something which is very very beautiful. I wish to express my appreciation to them all for coming and providing an example of friendship for us all. It's something that is noble and beautiful in the human condition. They have come a long way. And, tomorrow they will be returning to Washington State. I wish them all a safe journey. I will close with that for the evening.







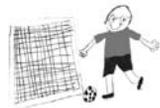
VICTORY OVER BIRTH AND DEATH

Ajahn Amaro

Saturday night talk, April 21, 2007
Todd's one-year memorial service day
at Abhayagiri Monastery

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Buddham Dhammam Sangham namassāmi*

I'd like to begin by welcoming everyone who has gathered this evening — this rainy night at Abhayagiri Monastery. This is a weekend of many auspicious events. In Thailand they often say that when something really special, a very blessed occasion, is happening then the sky opens up and the rain falls as a benediction from above. So let's hope that it's a good sign from the heavens and let's also hope that there isn't so much water in the sky, that all will have come down by the morning and that we'll have a clear spell for the ordination ceremonies outside tomorrow.





Today we had a memorial, a one-year death anniversary memorial for our dear friend and Dhamma companion, Piyasilo Todd Tansuhaj. He was a young boy who was ordained as a novice, a *sāmanera* here for a little while before he undertook a medical treatment. For many months he was in a hospital for a bone marrow transplant and sadly the treatment didn't work and he passed away on April 27th of last year. So today is a few days shy of that anniversary.

I spent a bit of time with him in his last few months up in the hospital in Seattle. His parents are here and many of his friends have come down for this occasion, other family members also. I was very impressed this evening when some of the young ones were given a choice of going into town for dinner or staying here at the monastery to hear a Dhamma talk. They wanted Dhamma over dinner. When I was eleven, that wouldn't have been much of a contest. I freely admit dinner would have won out every time. So this has been a special day reflecting on our young friend Todd and his life. Up here on the shrine you can see some pictures of him: here on my right, when he was a novice and, on the other side, when he was in the hospital before he passed away. We've been reflecting on him and his life for this last little while.



As I listened to all the rain coming down during the sitting, I was reminded of a poem I read many years ago. It reflects something of my impression of Todd's life and also some of the things that people were saying this afternoon when we had the memorial service. It's a very short poem, it goes:

*Like water, unconcerned,
does only what it can,
unexalted, all-sustaining,
brings its gift and passes on.*

Many of us knew Todd as an unexalted, cheerful little fellow running about just doing his thing, but also all-sustaining, refreshing to all who knew him. He brought great gifts which enriched the lives of so many people, and then he passed on. Just like water flowing down from the sky falling onto the ground, fertilizing the spring plants, moistening the ground and then running down into the creeks, to the streams and then flowing out to the sea. It's a beautiful image, to think of a being's life in this way. Just like water: nothing special yet totally special, all at the same time.



This afternoon we took the beautiful, simple marble casket that had been made in Thailand for Todd and which contained his ashes, out into the forest. We had made a little nook under the natural curve of a root, beneath a great oak tree out in the very heart of the forest in the area called Cool Oaks. Three of the main streams come together there and it's a place where there's water running all year round. As luck would have it, there was a perfectly shaped little niche so we made a space there for Todd's ashes.



Todd's shrine in the forest at Cool Oaks.



One of the verses that we chanted at the very end of the ceremony began:

*Jayanto bodhiyā mūle
Sakyānam nandivaddhano*

This is called the Jayaparitta or Victory Protection Verses. It describes the victory of the Buddha as he sat under the Bodhi tree, the tree of enlightenment. When Ajahn Pasanno and I were discussing what we wanted to do for the ceremony, I said “Well, you know when there’s a tree root involved the Jayaparitta is always good because it talks about the Buddha sitting at the root of the Bodhi tree, the tree of enlightenment.” Then thinking about that verse, I considered, “What was the victory of the Buddha? What was the Buddha victorious over — what was the contest?”

According to Buddhist mythology and understanding, the Buddha’s enlightenment is a complete waking up, a breaking through to the total understanding of the way life is. It’s represented as a victory over birth and death, a victory over Māra, the Lord of Death, the embodiment of death. When we look at this kind of language, “victory over birth and death,” this is not the kind of phraseology that normally comes up in



a conversation at the laundromat or in the aisles of Safeway. It sounds a bit remote or difficult to relate to, “What’s that got to do with my life?” We recognize that it has a dramatic, mythological flavor to it but what makes such a concept important? It sounds like such a powerful, special thing that often its practical relevance gets missed when we come across such language in spiritual teachings.

The main aim of terms like “victory over birth and death,” particularly in Buddhist teachings, is that these are supposed to be ideas and principles that help our lives in very direct and practical ways. So when we take a theme or a principle like this, maybe it’s a little more helpful to look at it in terms of our own lives. One way we can bring this particular principle home is to reflect that it’s talking about all of the little ups and downs, the births and deaths within our own lives: the times of happiness, the times of sadness, the times of success, the times of failure, the feeling of being praised, the feeling of being criticized. So, if we talk in terms of “victory over birth and death,” we can see it as some sort of strange mythological fable. When we talk instead about being liked, being disliked, winning, losing, being praised, being criticized, that’s a bit more close to home — we know what that’s about! We can relate to that.



When we talk about what we're aiming to do in Buddhist practice, we're using the Buddhist wisdom to learn how to break free, to achieve victory over being pulled around by the ups and downs of life and being swept along by the waves of success and failure, praise and criticism. The Buddha referred to such forces as "the worldly winds." They are classically listed as: happiness and unhappiness, praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute. These are winds that can become the dominant concern of our lives. We all get blown around by them from time to time.

I was reminded today of when I was young, the age of some of these lads staying here at the monastery. When I was in school we tried out for different specialties in gym or in track and I found out, to my surprise, that even though I have short, thick legs, I was very good at the high hurdles sprint. In that kind of race you have a line of eight or ten hurdles in eighty yards, a hundred yards or a hundred and twenty yards, depending on the age-group. It was very easy for me to get over the hurdles as I had inherited the flexible hips of my mother, who was quite a gymnast when she was young. I was quick over the hurdles and so, whenever we had these races, I always won them.



The school then put me in for the district championships races and to my amazement I won, way ahead of everybody. Oh, that was good! You know what winning feels like? “Yes, I really like that! This is great, going to the competition and leaving everyone in the dust. Oh, this is marvelous!” I won the district championship, I think I was about eleven or twelve years old at the time and then I was qualified to take part in the county competition. Then I won the county championships as well; in quite a good time too. “Ha, I’m really hot stuff! This is great, I really like hurdles! Athletics is great; this is a totally important thing!” I got very excited about all of this.



When you win the championship and you run for the county team, you get a big flash to put on the back of your tracksuit. The county that I lived in had a very short name Kent, just four letters, so that made the letters on the flash really big. I thus got to have this big sign on the back of my track suit that said KENT. It was very noticeable from a distance. There were only three or four guys in my high school who ran for the county, so we could strut about looking incredibly special and



pretend that we had forgotten that we had a big sign on our backs saying “Look at me, I’m wonderful, I run for the county.” It was a big status symbol at that time, and I got very pleased with myself. I thought it was a great thing.

When the time for the national championships came, I found out that my county wasn’t going to put forward a full team; most significantly, they weren’t going to put out a team of hurdlers. So I wasn’t going to get to go to the nationals and I felt, “I’ve been robbed! I’m sure I would have won.” You know how one can get pretty deluded: “If only I could have raced I’m sure I would have won!” I had to wait another year or two to go up to the next category of intermediate hurdles so I was about fourteen by this time. Once again I did the district championships and won those, and the county championships and won those. “Ok, now I’m definitely going to be running in the nationals. This time I’ve got a chance . . .”

When you are that kind of age I guess you don’t really see these things coming, however, I do suffer from an over-inflated estimate of my wonderfulness, at times. So there I was at the national championships and strutting about with my big sign saying KENT across my back. But of course everyone else had a big sign on their back of the county that they had come from, so it wasn’t quite so special as it was in my high school. Nevertheless,



I was already working on my victory speech when I got back to my school, telling everyone what it's like to win the national championship.

There we were in the first heat, lined up at the blocks. Some of the other guys looked pretty sporty — long-legged teens with an air of being very fast and serious. I thought, “Well, I’m pretty good at this so I’ll probably just have to pace them, just do enough to win the heat.” And lo and behold, who was left in the dust? Out of the six people in the heat, I think I came fifth. There I was. I couldn’t believe it, coming up to the finish line with all those people way ahead of me. So then there was a feeling of, “Oh! How could this happen? Something has gone terribly wrong.” There was a feeling of enormous disappointment and not wanting to tell anybody. How can I go back to school and not mention where I came in the race, how I got knocked out in the first heat?

So, hope and disappointment, they’re partners for each other, aren’t they? These kinds of lessons are ones that all of us have. My particular lesson there was in the realm of races and athletics, and it was something of shock to me. I didn’t see how much my mind had invested, how much my heart had poured into it. It had become crucial for me to be a winner



and the mind had assumed that was something good and real and special, and then the cold fact of being ordinary, being a loser. That was so unbearable, so embarrassing. The fact that I had this big flash on my back saying KENT suddenly said, “So what? Here among all these equally qualified people, it doesn’t mean anything. Besides, I just got knocked out in the first heat. I’m ordinary here, I am nothing special.”

Now, when we begin to look at life, we see that the degree to which we invest in hope becomes the degree to which we invest in disappointment. As in mathematics, that’s a perfectly balanced equation. Moreover, even when you win, even when you do come out on top, you find that a similar chemistry is going on. An American monk who used to be in our community in England was a champion wrestler when he was in high school. This is what they call “Greek wrestling”; this was not World Wrestling Federation — TV wrestling with smoke bombs and rock music and enormous guys with very, very angry looks and lots of costumery. This was a serious sort of Olympic-type wrestling.

Anyway, he was extremely gifted. He came from Tennessee and was the Eastern States champion twice when he was in high school. I remember when we were monks in Thailand and



he was telling me the story of his going to competition after competition, winning and winning, and finally he won the whole championship of the eastern states of the USA. And he felt so good, he said it was incredible. There he was at the top of the heap, "I did it, I won! This is great!"

Most interestingly, he said that there was about ten minutes of complete and utter happiness at having won the championship, becoming the big hero and at having made it after so many hours of training, with so much hard work. And then he started to notice the other guys out in the audience looking at him saying, "Next year... just you wait, you reckon you're so smart but just you wait. Next year I'm going to get you." So then his delight at victory and success suddenly became the cause for fear, "Oh no, I'm going to have to do it again." Ever had that feeling? Suddenly we feel we have to repeat the same thing and live up to other people's expectations.

So victory and winning — it was sweet, it was really sweet and perfect and good but it could not sustain itself. It was only sweet for so long and then it became, "Oh dear, now they're going to want to get me. They know I'm the winner and they're going to be looking out, gunning for me in particular." When we talk about something like victory over birth and death, what we are



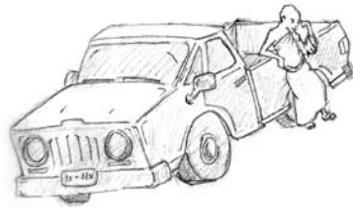
talking about is learning how to find a place of understanding, a place of peace in relationship to all of these cycles, these up and downs that we experience. And this doesn't just apply to sports, as you might have guessed. This has to do with all other aspects of our life. When we get hired for a job — yay! Then we find out who we have to work with — aaarrrrggghhhh! We think we want a promotion, so then we get promoted, “Yay! I'm the office manager” and then, “Gee, I gotta look after these people” and then, “Why does everyone think I'm supposed to be responsible here?” “Well, because you're the manager.” “Oh, that's right, I actually have to be in charge of things and take responsibility.” That's the rider that goes with it.

When things come together and it's successful, it feels so sweet. We get promoted. We fall in love. We get married. It's very sweet and delightful. Then it gets difficult, it gets strained and then becomes hard work. In many of our lives, things start out so hopeful, so sweet and beautiful, but then it can easily turn into bitterness and difficulty.

These are very, very familiar themes to all of us, whether it's in sports, our schoolwork, and our relationships or even in monastic life. Coming to the monastery you might think, “I really want to be a monk! I have to be a monk! Yeah, this is



really important." Tomorrow we have an ordination ceremony. Anagarika Lee is going forth as a sāmanera, as a novice, and Sāmanera Thitābho is going forth as a bhikkhu (a monk). So we can take hold of the idea, "Ah, it's going to be really great. Yeah, I'm going to become a novice, this is great! Hang up these car keys forever, don't have to worry about money ever again. This is going to be great!" And then we realize after we've made the leap and we take on the training of a novice or a monk, "Oh, so I can't help myself to food anymore." Or, "I can't help with the van, I've got to find someone else to drive the vehicle. Oh, that's an inconvenience."



When we are unwise, then we just keep going through this cycle of hope and disappointment over and over again. When we get disappointed we just look out for the next hope, "Oh, that one didn't work out. Ok, let's try the next one. Try a different competition, a different job, a different relationship, a different school, a different subject, a different monastery, a different Buddhist tradition, go back to the Christians, join the Hindus, go back to the synagogue, get back to England, "That's the answer! Go back to Thailand." We never learn, we just keep



going from one thing to another, “Well, that didn’t work out. Ok, let’s try something else . . . try something else.”

The cycle of birth and death goes around and around: one hope, one disappointment, and then another hope, another disappointment. We never learn that there’s a pattern there. We never see that we’re not ever finding any kind of contentment or any kind of settledness within ourselves — we never find any ease — we’re just riding on one wave of hope after another and we’re not able to deal with disappointment.

One of the things that is the most precious and helpful in Buddhist tradition is that we find, if we pay attention, it’s often the difficult things, the painful things of life — when we are disappointed, when we lose someone that we love, like Todd or when we get fired from a job, or when our relationship goes sour, or our monastery falls apart, or we come second to last in the first heats of the competition — these can teach us a lot. Furthermore and strange as it may seem, we often learn better from painful experiences than we do from pleasant ones. Our teacher, Ajahn Chah, used to say, “If all our experience is happiness and success, we just go to sleep. We end up snoozing through life. Oftentimes it’s only the difficult and painful things that get our attention. It’s then that we wake up.” In the



trade, this type of experience and mode of practice is called “the suffering that leads to the end of suffering.”

We don’t go out looking for trouble, we don’t go looking for pain and difficulty, we don’t deliberately lose races or break up relationships or get ourselves fired or disappoint our friends, but these things happen on their own in the natural course of things. Like having this big rainstorm thundering down tonight and having the ordination ceremonies scheduled for tomorrow. How many of us living in the monastery have accessed Accuweather in the last few days, looking at the forecast?

So we don’t go out looking for trouble but we can rest assured that trouble will come on its own. The trick is learning how to see those painful situations, to know them for what they are and to see that they’re an intrinsic part of nature — that life is always this way. There are always going to be difficult and painful things as well as sweet and pleasant and neutral things. If we’re wise, then even when things get difficult or painful, those experiences will help us to learn. We’ll find a quality of peacefulness and ease, a quality of understanding that we wouldn’t find if we were just snoozing our way through life.

When we stop to look and examine life, we recognize that,



even when things are successful, it's a case of, "Well, it's only success to a certain degree because I remember what happened last time. The last time I was a big winner it just made people more determined to beat me the next time around." Yes, it was pleasant to win, to be a success, for things to go well, but there were also many difficulties that came along with it. Along with the wedding, you got the responsibility of having to take care of someone. Along with the ordination, you found you had all these extra rules to keep. Along with the delight of having a fancy beautiful new car, then you had to worry about parking it in a place where it was safe and not going to get damaged. Or acquiring a fine new camera and then finding you had to put it away ever-so-carefully and make sure it didn't get bumped or damaged . . .

"Aha! There's a downside that goes with every plus. Aha! That's what happened last time so I should be prepared this time." Similarly, when things get difficult, sometimes they bring gifts with them. At teatime today we were talking with one of the guests staying here about her long visit to Thailand and her difficult stint of teaching at a university there. She said, "That was just a huge disaster but it also was where I met my two masters." So a painful episode brought these great blessings along with it as well.



There's a story that comes out of the Tibetan tradition that illustrates this principle very well. It's the tale of a young boy living in a country village. His family was very, very poor but the one thing that the family did have was a mare, a female horse, otherwise they didn't have two coins to rub together.

One day, the horse escaped, she ran away. So all the family lamented and cried, "Oh, what are we going to do!? Our pony ran away. She was the one precious thing we had and now she's gone. Now we're really lost, we are helpless. We have nothing, absolutely nothing. We're ruined." So mom was crying, dad was crying, the boy was crying, granny was crying. But then granny thought for a moment and said, "Well, maybe it's not such a bad thing after all." The rest of the family replied, "How can you say that, granny?" "Well, you never know. Maybe it's a bad thing, maybe not."





And lo and behold, a few days later, to their great surprise and delight, the mare came trotting back over the hill and she brought a stallion back with her as well. She'd found a boyfriend. "Oh wow!" the family cried out in delight, "not only have we got the mare back, we now have a stallion too. We can breed them. This is great! Our fortune is made. This is marvelous. This is wonderful! Now we're going to be rich — they can have lots of foals and we'll start a whole herd of horses. This is marvelous, hooray!" But granny then said, "Well, I wouldn't celebrate just yet because it might not be a good thing."

"How can you say that?"

"Well, you never know. You never know."

Then, a little while later, and boys being boys, the young son of the family thought, "This stallion is a much bigger and stronger horse than that little slowpoke of a mare. She's nice and sweet but she doesn't really go very fast. That stallion, he's really big. He can move. I think, instead of riding the mare like I used to do, I will go for a ride on the stallion even though mom and dad said I shouldn't do that, that it's dangerous. They're probably not looking anyway, so why don't I just hop on his back and go for a little bit of a trot around the hill." So he hops up on board the stallion and boom! Races off, charging over hill and dale. "This is really great!" he thinks.



They were incredibly fast, bounding and leaping over stone walls, streams and rocks — the kid's having a great time but suddenly, boom! The horse makes a sudden turn and he comes flying off — crash! Broken leg. Other families from the village found the boy lying on the ground, crying, "Ahhhh, my leg, my leg!" They carried him back to his house and told his parents what had happened. "Oh, no, this is our only son and now he's got a broken leg. He's never going to walk properly again. How will he run the farm when he grows up? Oh dear, what are we going to do? We're ruined, we're ruined." And then granny said "Well, maybe so . . . it's sad he has a broken leg, but maybe it's not such a bad thing."

"How can you say that?"

"Well, you never know. You never know."

So the boy lies there at home, his leg is in a splint and he's sitting there grumbling, he didn't even have a comic to read. This is Tibet, you know. Maybe there were a few sutras to study but nothing more distracting: no comics, no radio, no iPod. Everyone was upset because the boy had a bad leg and they worried, "Oh, it doesn't look like it's healing properly. He's never going to walk again, and he's our only child. What's going to happen? This is a terrible thing, we're really ruined



now." Again granny said, "Well, you know, maybe it's not such a bad thing."

Sure enough, a few weeks later, an army general came through with a battalion of troops and they were recruiting. The country was going to war and the general proclaimed, "All the young men of this village over the age of eleven and under twenty have to come with us and join the army."

"Oh General, we are so sorry but our son can't come. He has a broken leg so he has to stay at home." The general lets him off but all the other able-bodied boys have to go. The family is very happy! And so the story goes on, and on and on and on and on. It tells us that in good fortune, in bad fortune, you never know: even a broken leg can be a blessing.

When we develop wisdom we see that in any success, there's a shadow. In any failure, we see there's a brightness. When we hope for something we also develop a wariness, a caution. When we're disappointed, we see, "this has a bitter taste but maybe there's some goodness here too." We see both sides of the coin. Our teacher, Ajahn Chah, would often point out that a hand has a front and a back. With the hand, we get both sides. We don't just get one part of it. This fact is one reason why we meditate.



When we sit here silently with our eyes closed and not speaking to each other, one of the things that we're aiming to do is to learn this kind of lesson. We learn to watch the mind as it goes through cycles of hope and disappointment, happiness and unhappiness; as it experiences feelings of the sweetness of being praised and the bitterness of being criticized. When we meditate, we are learning how to watch these feelings — just as if we were standing back and looking at them from a distance. We're not trying to wipe the feelings out. We are not turning ourselves into zombies, neutralizing or sterilizing the mind so that we won't feel or sense or think anything. That's not what we're trying to do with meditation, although some of it might look like that from the outside.



When I talk about not depending on hope or not getting swept along by the feeling of hope, it's not meant to mean that we're trying to make ourselves feel hopeless. It's not about developing hope-less-ness, instead more hope-free-ness. We're



freeing the heart from being tied to hoping and being tied to disappointment. We're able to watch those cycles of feelings and moods as they sweep through the mind: the pleasant, the unpleasant, the beautiful, the ugly, the painful, the delightful. As we train the mind, we can see that these are just like waves on the ocean. It is their nature to be transient, to pass: the rain comes and the storm bursts through and the sky is clear again; days follow nights, nights follow days. This is somewhat obvious when we think of the weather or the sea, however, even though it might not always feel that way, our mind works in exactly the same fashion.

The more that we learn to meditate, the more we are able to watch the mind and see that the mind is just an aspect of nature, just like the rain and the clouds, just like the day and the night, just like the tides of the sea. Then we find the tremendous peacefulness in our heart. We find a real ease.

Tomorrow, when we have the ordination ceremonies, whether it's raining or not, one of the things that you'll hear being said when the candidates ask for the going-forth, is *Sabba dukkha nissarana, Nibbāna sacchikaranatthāya*. This means to relinquish, to pass beyond all dissatisfaction, and to realize true peacefulness. This is the purpose of going forth, this is



why people like Lee and Tan Thitābho have asked to go forth, to cross beyond all difficulties and to realize true peacefulness, and this is also why we meditate. These further steps on the Buddhist path of commitment are really just to facilitate learning this same kind of lesson.

When we find that quality of serenity of heart through wisdom and peacefulness, it enables us to be sensitive to the cycles of life. It enables us to know, to understand those cycles and not to be confused by them. So that when we meet with success, and pleasure and delight, when everything goes well — we won the race, hooray! Well, ok, it's sweet but it's just a sweet taste, there's no need to get drunk on it. And when we lose, when we fail and things fall apart, when we lose those that we love, well, it's bitter but it's only a bitter taste. No need to break into a million pieces on account of that. It's a bitter taste, it's a sadness but it's just a bitter taste. No need to fall apart.

We find that peacefulness is a true harmonizing of our lives; we find ourselves at one with others, at one with the world, at one with the people who like us, who dislike us, the people who we live with and the world around us. We find a true quality of independence so that we can work with the ups and downs of life. We can work with pleasures and pains,



successes and failures. We can make the best of each situation that we meet with, so in our heart we find great contentment, great happiness and a great quality of freedom. Nothing can go wrong. Even if it's pouring with rain all day. We realize, "This is the way it is." We find that even if everything is not as we would have chosen it to be, we can find true ease, true peacefulness and true contentment. This is because we realize, "Here it is, the world is like this and I can either make a problem out of it or not. This is how the world is." Thus we find that true quality of peace and ease and then we're fine, the heart has extricated itself from the cycles of birth and death and thereby those cycles have been conquered. We realize this is the greatest richness in life, the greatest joy and the greatest gift that the world can bring us.

So I offer these words for consideration this evening.

*Handa mayam dhammakathāya
sādhukāram dadāmase
Sādhu sādhu sādhu, anumodāmi*





BODY CONTEMPLATION

Ajahn Pasanno

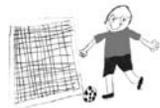
Translated from a talk given in Thai
February 2006 at Banboon, Pakchong, Thailand

The biggest obstacle to the Dhamma (the Truth or the Lord Buddha's teachings) tends to be our own selves, the sense of self, carrying the "I" or "me," carrying opinions, pride, feelings of anxiety or fears, or even suspicion and lack of confidence. Sometimes, carrying the "me" may simply be thinking that we can never reach the Dhamma. So, we need to unload all of the above manifestations of self, and then lean respectfully toward the Dhamma. Our effort to dispel the sense of self will open up the opportunity to reach the Dhamma.

Earlier this afternoon, I talked about balance or what is "just



Todd's view of "me"





right.” That balance must be reached by relinquishing the sense of self from our heart. This way, no matter where we go and what we do, things feel just right. However, it is difficult to do because the feeling of self always likes to infiltrate. That is why we need to practice mindfulness, to be able to keep up with emotions in the heart. There needs to be two components residing in our mind: concentration (*samādhi*) to make the mind stable, and wisdom (*paññā*) to see things as they truly are. We actually do not need to create concentration and wisdom because they have always existed in our mind. Yet, we tend not to make effective use of them. We like to let chaos, distractions and ignorance take up residence.

This is the root of our problem. We make wrong choices because of the lack of clarity in our minds. It is thus important to develop clarity. A continuity of mindfulness will help support this. To train our mind to be more clear and bright, we need to observe and experiment with what will help develop the mind and what will not.

One thing that I would like to bring up tonight is to encourage you to contemplate the body. For those people who have studied the Dhamma through listening or reading, they will know that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is purity of mind, for



the mind to be completely free from suffering. Yet, sometimes we don't know where the mind (*citta*) really is. We wish we knew. Yet in reality, it resides wherever we place our attention. There is nothing concrete, no object for it to reside in. It is made up of emotions, feelings, and thoughts. As such, it is often difficult to know the *citta*. Thus if we place our mindfulness (*sati*) with the body, it is a helpful aid to see this more clearly. Be it *citta*, which is *nama-dhamma*, or body, which is *rūpa-dhamma*, they are all *sankhāras*, that is, of a compounded nature. Our chanting a few minutes ago emphasized this point. *Sankhāras* make up body and mind and all are impermanent. *Sankhāras* arise and cease, leading to *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) because they are born, undergo dissolution and pass away. Because of the challenge of seeing impermanence in the mind, we may find it more helpful to see it in the body. Both are subject to the law of impermanence just the same.

The Buddha's teachings do not require seeing and understanding everything in the world, simply an understanding of their nature. When the Buddha saw that all things are impermanent, he taught that once we see how it then leads to suffering, we can let go. There is no need to follow up and analyze everything endlessly, as we will easily become confused and have lingering doubts. Yet, with our understanding of the



impermanence of things, we can see it all clearly. This is an important point to make because people generally like to know for sure and to see for certain. In fact, if we understand only one subject, such as that of the body, we can understand both our mind and the world around us.



This can be illustrated with a simple example. Luang Por Chah is a monk we all highly respect and who we all feel truly reached the Dhamma. But just think, he had very little formal education. As I recall, he only finished first grade, not even completing his elementary education. Yet, Thais and Westerners with college degrees humbly sought him out to

be his disciples. This is due to his mastery of the ultimate truth. Regarding formal Buddhist education, he did not even achieve any higher level than the basic foundational studies. Then, he devoted his time and his life to practicing the Dhamma, investigating within himself, to gain insights in the principles of truth, the Dhamma.



As Luang Por said, education should aim at letting go, not at wanting more. The goal is to reduce defilement and craving — less greed, aversion and delusion. When we see this greed, wants and ambitions surfacing, we realize, “Aha, suffering is still around!” When we feel frustrated, annoyed, angry, or displeased, we can see suffering clearly. These emotions recur time and again and we have suffered many times. Yet we continue in this cycle, making excuses, such as, anger will make us feel relieved. But, when we see the truth, we can let go.

Or when there is delusion it can manifest as confusion, cloudiness, fear, egoism, pride, or stubbornness. Yet, when we see its negative consequences, we can let go of delusion. Thus, Luang Por Chah emphasized knowledge and practice with the aim of letting go. He told monks, especially Western monks, “When you graduated with a Bachelor’s degree, your defilements received the same undergraduate degree. When you received a Master’s degree, so did your defilements (*Kilesas*). When you receive a Ph.D., your defilements got a doctorate as well.” *Kilesas* can overwhelm us at anytime. Suffering abounds in the world around us. Letting go is most crucial.

I recall another occasion with us Western monks, who typically have a higher education and many ideals and



idealistic concepts. One day Luang Por commented, “Oh, you Westerners are just like vultures. Vultures fly high. But look, what do they come down to eat?” Oh, that really hurt! But what he said is true — thinking about ideals, whether about the world, or about the Dhamma. A lot of thinking goes on while our emotions tend to return to rotten stuff.



All of us here too, are preoccupied with thoughts but what do they keep returning to? This is a lesson for reminding ourselves to find a way to let go of all things that bring suffering.

When contemplating the body, it is a part of contemplating impermanence. It is obvious that our body is impermanent. Just observe the feeling within our body now. We have been sitting on the floor listening to a Dhamma talk now for half an hour. I don't know about you, but I started out feeling great. And now, I feel pain in the knee, in my foot and start to feel it in my bottom. What can we do? The body is as it is — starting out stable and fine, and then changes show up — from feeling great to feeling uncomfortable. This is normal, and we can't stop the changes. When we feel the discomfort from sitting in one position, we move slightly, feeling relieved and contented



for a bit. After a while, pain and discomfort return. We really see impermanence within our body.

It is even more apparent about changes in the long term. As the body ages, there are more illnesses and symptoms of aging. It is suffering and is not self (*anattā*). We cannot stop this natural process. It follows its own course without consulting us or asking us for such permission as, “May I age this week?” or “I have not become ill in a long time. May I now?” The body is not self, doesn’t belong to us, or does n’t listen to us when we command it to stay healthy and young.

We talk about *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) and *anattā* (non-self), and say *sabbe sankhārā aniccā* (all conditions are impermanent). Sometimes it seems to be just something at the philosophical level. However, the Buddha’s Dhamma is not philosophy or theory. It is the truth about our everyday life. This is because the Buddha has just one goal: to help fellow human beings be free from suffering. We have body and mind that creates unsatisfactoriness. They create agitation, confusion, sorrow and pain. All of these conditions mean suffering, whether we are aware or not. The Buddha had compassion for fellow human beings. He wanted us to find a way of relief from suffering. All of the Buddha’s teachings are



aimed at setting us free from suffering. But, we must use them in our lives and must realize these teachings.

Contemplation of the body allows us to see more clearly because it is in the domain of the material (*rūpa-dhamma*). In practicing mindfulness, the Buddha taught us to stay with the present. The past is gone and the future is yet to come. Our mind tends to go back and forth between the past and the future. We project into the future with certain hopes and fears, excitements and trepidation. We look back to the past with regrets, disappointment, happiness and longing. If we were happy, we then are stuck on the “good old days.” The Buddha encouraged us to focus on the present. This is not an injunction to ignore the events of the past or the future. He wished for us to gain an insight leading to clarity in the present. Because the “now” is the moment to be able to decide the skillful course of action — what to improve, what to develop. Focusing on the body supports establishing our mind in the present. Although the mind likes to wander, “cooking up” thoughts, the body remains here and now.

Therefore, we can return to the present by being aware of feelings and sensations in the body. We focus our awareness on the in-breath and the out-breath. As we breathe in, we



know clearly. As we breathe out, we know clearly. In walking, we pay attention to the right step and then the left step, again staying with the present moment. As we stay in the present, we can dispel from our mind the thoughts that are stuck on the future and on the past. We must stay with the present relying on mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. It is also possible that our thoughts are able to be in the present, but are depending on greed, anger or delusion. We need to bring our mind back to the present moment established in that which is wholesome.

Keep it simple. We all have to breathe anyway. Observing our breath in and out is a simple method for gaining mindfulness. In addition, we can practice mindfulness through paying attention to our daily activities, our postures of standing, walking, sitting and lying down. This will help the heart lean toward the Dhamma. In the practice, please do not overlook the significance of simple things around you, be it various



postures, feelings or sensations in the body. For example, sometimes we are not observant of our body as it comes into contact with food; how much we eat, whether it agrees with us or not, or whether it will make us healthy. Sometimes we eat



only what tastes great to our mouth but is awful for our long term well-being. Sometimes we eat not for a healthy body, but for the sense of self. For example, we could order food at a restaurant so that people around us can see that we are well-off or that we are clever in ordering special dishes. The food is thus not for nourishing our body, but for the sense of self or for pleasure.

Before this last trip to Thailand, I visited lay supporters of our monastery. They had recently purchased a new home nearby. In their house there is a storage room for tools and things, enticing mice to take up residence there. They decided to adopt a stray cat from the animal shelter. A luxurious house was built for the cat, almost like a two- to three-story pet condominium. Whenever this fortunate cat wanted to eat, it would push its food bin for automatic feeding. Initially, the cat was quite skinny, but by now it has become a very fat cat! It cannot walk very well and it is rather neurotic. It is easily frightened. When someone enters the house it gets restless and it will start eating. If anyone goes nearby, it will rush to eat. Not out of hunger, but because of





anxiety. It is worth noting that sometimes we humans behave in a similar way. We do not want to stay with any suffering or discomfort that is facing us. We get restless and want to find a way out. Usually that way out is not really solving the problem, but creating another one. Just like the cat.

At the very least, if we relied on the body for contemplating our feelings, we would have more clarity. Am I at ease? Am I stressed out? Am I restless? Or, do I feel content? However, the more we contemplate, the more we realize that we can not depend on our body at all. Illnesses are always possible and we never know when death will knock on our door. We should be eager to search for a true refuge in the Dhamma.

This body of ours can fall apart at anytime, no matter what age. At present, I have a little disciple. He is about ten years old, a very good boy. He was ordained at Abhayagiri Monastery. In the photo album of the monastery, you can see the ordination ceremony of a little novice monk last year. He was ordained to help prepare himself for a major medical procedure this year (2005). He has a blood disorder (thalassemia major) and underwent a stem cell transplant to change the blood production system. To begin there was chemotherapy, eliminating his immune system temporarily. He has been hospitalized since



September 2005. I have been following news almost every day of late because it is at the most critical period. His body is not accepting the new cells. Initially, he was making good progress but in the past week or ten days, he has taken a turn for the worse. His nose bled unstoppably and he has been in the ICU.*

I am sharing this story with you so that all of us gathering here for Dhamma practice can help send loving kindness to him. His name is Todd. He is a boy whom I have known since he was very little. I have been his Dhamma father and his spiritual teacher. This is also to illustrate to you that all of us leading human lives do face the same danger. I am not trying to scare or discourage anyone. I am simply helping you understand that the truth is such. So, what shall we do when we see this reality about life? One thing is to spread loving-kindness. This helps to establish a generosity and warmth for one another and helps us establish the wisdom that lets go of any sorrow in our hearts. This is what we can do, all we can do and in fact, the best that we can do.

**He was hospitalized for approximately eight months and passed away on April 27, 2006.*



Ajahn Brahm and Ajahn Ritthi visited Todd at Hospital, November 2005.

We also need to maintain our mindfulness, reminding ourselves why we do what we do in this world, be it our occupation or our relationships with our fellow human beings. What are we doing and for what reason? I encourage you to return to the goal of generating loving kindness for one another. We do this to further develop our wisdom, to step away from ignorance or self-absorption. This is how we build strength in our heart. In our practice and in our daily life, we can always reach the Dhamma. But to do this, we need to be experienced and circumspect. That is why it is essential to



practice consistently, to study and listen to the Dhamma, and to observe ourselves. In this way we will always be able to bring the heart in line with the Dhamma.

For tonight I have taken sufficient time to offer these thoughts on the Dhamma.







MY CAT LUCKY

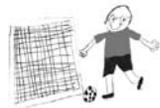
Todd Tansuhaj

A fourth-grade essay, age nine, April 2005

My cat Lucky means a lot to me. My mom and dad got him from an animal shelter in 1987. He is eighteen years old for a human. This is a teenager if he is a boy, but he really is eighty years old for a cat. An old cat!

I was born in 1995. That means I have been with Lucky nine years and ten days. I was adopted too, but not from an animal shelter, but from a human shelter in Thailand where humans give away babies when they don't want them.

Lucky is a mixed breed of a cat. He looks half Siamese and half raccoon. His neck looks like a ringtail lemur. His feet are white and grey like a tabby cat. His eyes are cat's eye marbles. He almost got de-clawed. My mom and dad's





friends said, “You should get him de-clawed.” But my mom and dad decided not to.

Lucky is honest, slow and stretchable. When he was young, he liked to jump around. He also watched movies with us. Sometimes he liked to sleep inside my clothes because it was warm. He is kind of a coward. He was chased by some bulldogs and he climbed up a tree. The fire fighters were busy, so my dad climbed up a ladder to rescue him. Another time, a dog bit him and he had a hole on his throat for a week.

When I was about three years old, I tried to eat his cat food. I didn’t know better. I also tried to copy him. I peed and pooped outdoors like him. What I like the best was when he cuddled with me and we fell asleep together.

I love Lucky very much. In fact, I think all girl cats would want to marry him because he is nice, strong, smart and easygoing, but he got neutered. A few years from now he would leave me. He is old and doesn’t walk much any more.

My mom wants me to meditate because it is good for me. She made me do it to calm down. When I sit cross-legged, Lucky would sit on my lap. When I try to float, Lucky tries



to float too. When I feel enlightened — that means when you know about the sick, the old, and the dead — Lucky snores on my tummy.

When Lucky passes away, I will treasure his pictures. I shall miss him.





FIVE PRECEPTS FOR KIDS

1. I promise to try not to take the life of any animal, bug, fish or bird.
2. I promise to try not to take anything which is not given to me.
3. I promise to try not to be greedy or disrespectful with regard to what I eat, see, feel and listen to.
4. I promise to try not to lie or speak harmfully to anyone.
5. I promise to try not to consume any foods, drink or drugs which make me stupid or crazy.



TODD'S LIST
DHAMMA RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

AUSTRALIA

- ☺ The Buddhist Society of Western Australia www.bswa.org
-

CANADA

- ☺ Birken Forest Monastery www.birken.ca
-

ITALY

- ☺ Santacittarama Monastery www.santacittarama.altervista.org
-

THAILAND

- ☺ Young Buddhists Association of Thailand www.ybat.org
 - ☺ Sathira-Dhammasathan www.websds.org
 - ☺ Thawsi School www.thawsischool.com
-

UNITED KINGDOM

- ☺ Amaravati Monastery www.amaravati.org
-

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

California

- ☺ Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery www.abhayagiri.org
- ☺ Bay Area Young Adult Sangha www.bayas.info
- ☺ Berkeley Buddhist Monastery www.berkeleymonastery.org



☺ BuddhaNet	www.buddhanet.net
☺ Buddhism for Kids	www.gakkaionline.net
☺ Buddhist Peace Fellowship	www.bpf.org
☺ City of Ten Thousand Buddhas	www.drba.org
☺ Deer Park Monastery	www.deerparkmonastery.org
☺ Dharmanet	www.dharmanet.org
☺ Dharma Punx	www.dharmapunx.com
☺ Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara	www.dharmavijaya.org
☺ Insight Meditation Center	www.insightmeditationcenter.org
☺ Spirit Rock Meditation Center	www.spiritrock.org
☺ Tathagata Meditation Center	www.tathagata.org
☺ Theravada Buddhist Society of America	www.tbsa.org
☺ Youth Yoga Dharma	www.youthyogadharma.org
☺ Vipassana Santa Cruz	www.vipassanasc.org

Oregon

☺ Great Vow Zen Monastery	www.greatvow.org
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Washington

☺ Atamayataran Monastery	www.atamma.org
☺ Seeds of Compassion	www.seedsofcompassion.org

The above organizations may offer programs for young folks.



ABHAYAGIRI BUDDHIST MONASTERY

Abhayagiri is the first monastery in the United States to be established by followers of Ajahn Chah, a respected Buddhist master of the ancient Thai forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism.

Abhayagiri is a center of teaching and practice for people in monastic and lay life. Its heart is a community of monks (bhikkhus), novices (sāmaneras), and postulants (anagarikas) pursuing a life of meditative reflection. Frequently monastics from the other branches of this global community visit for shorter or longer periods of time.

The Sangha lives according to the Vinaya, a code of discipline set by the Buddha. In accordance with this discipline, the monastics are alms mendicants, living lives of celibacy and frugality. Above all, this training is a means of living reflectively and a guide to keeping one's needs to a minimum: a set of robes, an alms bowl, one meal a day, medicine when ill, and a sheltered place for meditation and rest.



Ajahn Amaro began his training in the forest monasteries of northeast Thailand with Ajahn Chah in 1978. He continued his training under Ajahn Sumedho, first at Chithurst Monastery in West Sussex, England, and later at Amaravati Buddhist Centre outside of London, where he lived for ten years. In June of 1996, Ajahn Amaro moved to California to establish Abhayagiri.

Ajahn Pasanno is a highly respected and well-known Dhamma teacher. Ordained in 1973, he spent twenty-three years as a monk in Thailand, with the latter fifteen years as abbot of the International Forest Monastery (Wat Pah Nanachat). He joined Ajahn Amaro at Abhayagiri Monastery at New Year of 1997. Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Pasanno guide the monastery as co-abbots.

Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery

16201 Tomki Road

Redwood Valley, California 95470

www.abhayagiri.org

707-485-1630

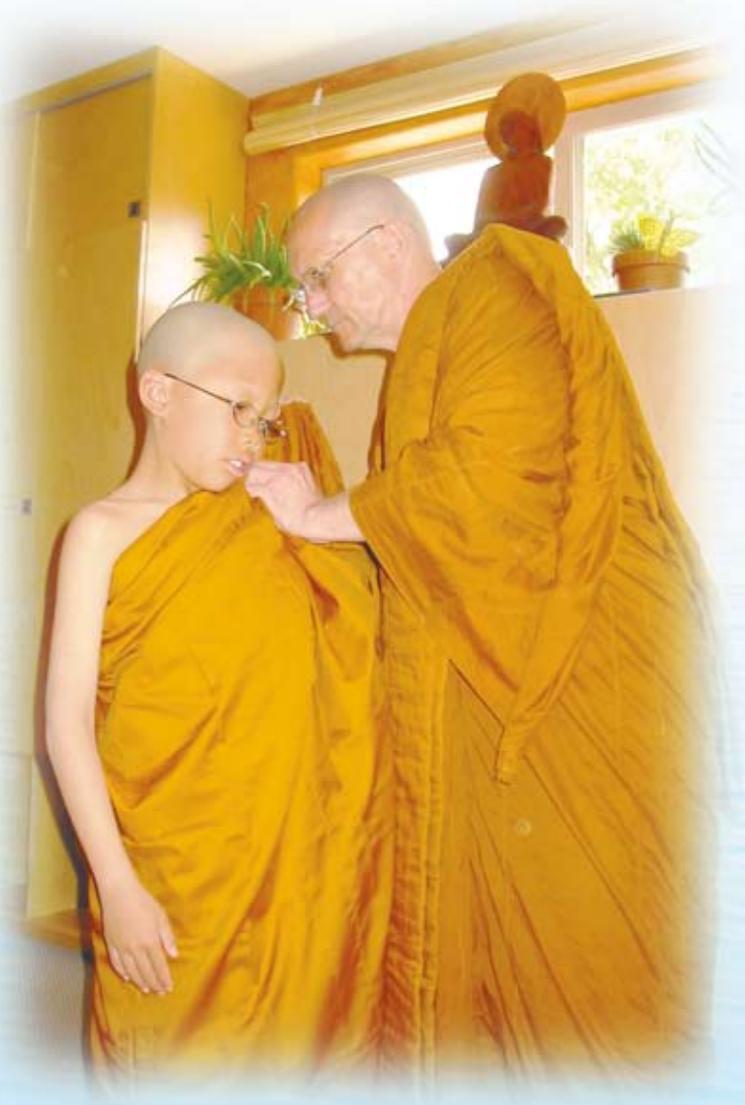


The Buddha's Death (Parinibbāna), Todd's drawing for Ajahn Pasanno, 2005.



Just a Simple Fish, age nine, 2005, for Ajahn Amaro.







Tatcha "Todd" Tansuhaj
July 20, 1995 ~ April 27, 2006

Loving Kindness Blessing

May we be happy.
May we be free from suffering.
May we be free from danger.
May we be well in body, mind, and spirit.
May we always trust ourselves,
our inner teachings, our intuitions.
May we have ease in our relationships and in life,
and in the divine order of our being.
May we feel loved,
and may we be loving toward
all that come before us on our path.
May we let go of criticism and judgment
of ourselves and others.
May we learn to accept disappointment
quietly and silently.
May we find gentleness, joyfulness,
serenity, and peace.

