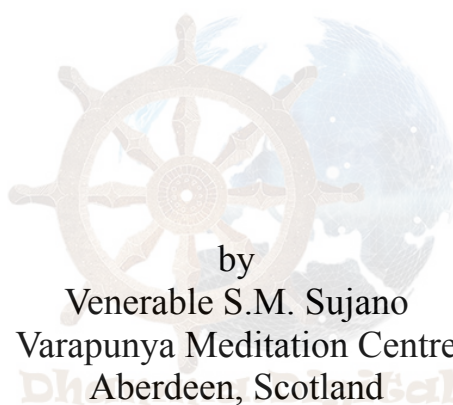


Buddhist Culture:  
Introduction and Challenges in the Western  
world.



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# Buddhist Culture:

## Introduction and Challenges in the Western world<sup>1</sup>

*'There is nothing, or almost nothing, in the Buddhist interpretation of spiritual truth which ties it to any soil or any climate, to any race or tribe... in Buddhism there is nothing which cannot be easily transported from one part of the world to another.'*

(Dr Conze quoted in Christmas Humphreys [1972: 202])

### **Abstract:**

When Buddhism began to be introduced into Western society unparalleled interest and enthusiasm toward Buddhism significantly increased in the 19th century. Academic scholarship and media were significant factors for the increasing popularity of Buddhism. Buddhist associations, groups, centers and monasteries were established for the first time on Western soil. Today, there are all three major schools of Buddhism, Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. However a further distinction can be made which cuts across all three schools. This distinction consists of Indigenous Western based Buddhist Groups; and Indigenous Eastern based Buddhist groups.

Western based Buddhist groups have tended to be established by Western indigenous people in varying degrees of association and guidance from Eastern Monks and Nuns. Western-based Buddhism

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Andrew Singer for his linguistic help and valuable thought towards completion of this essay. I also would like to thank all the members of the Varapunya Meditation Centre, Aberdeen for their help and assistance to compile this essay.

has largely been focused Buddha's teachings and around meditation centers. Conversely Eastern Buddhist groups tend to be based on the Eastern model of the 'temple system'. This system tends to be established by *Dhammaduta* or 'missionary' Monks and Nuns. These monks and nuns export the 'Temple System' from Thailand and Burma and Sri Lanka. The Monks and Nuns have a remit to propagate Buddhist teachings in the West and to support the migrant Asian Buddhist communities who have moved to the west. Thus the temple system is designed primarily to support both religious and cultural needs. Amaravati Buddhist monastery and its branches, however, stand out from both these two models in that it is a Monastic system which was established in England or other parts as a result of Western lay people being ordained in Thailand under the tradition of Ajahn Chah, one of the famous meditation masters' wish to introduce the Eastern Forrest tradition, on Western Soil. All the schools, nevertheless, directly or indirectly still have connections with their origins in the East in spite of adaptations and modifications.

A central question in this paper is what is Buddhist culture? In attempting to answer this question, it will make distinguish between two concepts or notions of Buddhist culture. Firstly it will discuss the concept of all embracing 'ethnically free' or 'pure' notion of Buddhist Culture. This notion of Buddhist culture is free from a national and geographic identity. The Buddha's own concept of Sangha as defined in the Pali Cannon might be an example of this. Varapunya Buddhist Society and Meditation Centre attempts to be free from any ethnic base and to be established purely in terms of 'Buddhist culture'. Secondly it will address ethnically based notions of Buddhist culture. These notions are more geographically or nationally centered. Examples of these include: Burmese; Sri Lankan; Thai; or Tibetan Buddhist Culture.

In addressing Buddhist culture this paper will focus on Buddhist missionary work (*Dhammaduta*) in the city of Aberdeen, the third largest city of Scotland. It will attempt to provide an analysis based on a bird's eye view of the influence of Buddhism on the city. This abstract will discuss the spirit of the introduction of Theravada Buddhist missionary work in the city. It will also identify the major challenges to the missionary work, and it will discuss leadership initiative. This account will also discuss the adaptation, modification and preservation of Buddhist culture in the City of Aberdeen. It will also address the theme of the influence of the popular Buddhist

concept of Mindfulness on different aspects of Aberdeen's culture. Finally, this paper will examine and assess the impact and influence of the establishment of the Varapunya Buddhist Society and Meditation Centre as a centre of Buddhist culture, free from any ethnic base but established purely in 'Buddhist culture'.

### Contents:

1. Buddhism beyond Boundaries & the 'Dhammaduta' Monks
2. What is Buddhist Culture?
3. The Introduction of Buddhism to the West
4. Buddhist Missionary work in Scotland
5. Varapunya Buddhist Society and Meditation Centre
6. Social Services
7. Social implications of the teachings and Meditation
8. Introduction and Challenges
9. Adaptation and change
10. Meditation in the City of Aberdeen
11. The Issue of Financial Stability
12. Conclusion.
13. References:
14. Ven. Sujano's CV

## 1. Buddhism beyond Boundaries & 'Dhammaduta' Monks

'Buddhism' is a western term for the Buddha's teachings. It has adjusted to different geographical contexts and adapted to existing traditions, cultures and ways of life every where it was introduced. After his enlightenment, at the age of 35, the Buddha thought that people would not understand his finding. Thus he contemplated keeping the teaching to himself.

'This *dhamma*, which I have realized is indeed profound, difficult to perceive, difficult to comprehend, tranquil, exalted, not within the sphere of logic, subtle, and is to be understood by the wise. These

beings are attached to material pleasures. This causally connected ... is also a matter not easily comprehensible. If I too were to teach this dhamma, the others would not understand me. That will be wearisome to me, that will be tiresome to me.' (Narada, 1988.57s).

The story goes on saying that Brahma Sahampati, one of the highest gods appealed three times to the Buddha to share his findings. 'Out of compassion and pity for all beings' the Buddha surveyed the world and accepted that some beings 'were less sunk in the mud' had 'less dust in their eyes...' and declared: 'opened to them are the doors to the deathless state. Let those who have ears repose confidence. (Narada, *ibid*)`

This was the genesis of Buddha's dispensation. Since that time, it has significantly contributed to different societies around the world and continued until this day crossing all boundaries of race, culture and tradition. It has succeeded in establishing a peaceful Buddhist 'culture', a 'culture that is based on living a moral life, with a controlled mind, free from all clutters. A culture that is famously embraces almost every aspects of the social life.

The Buddha's mission began with sending forth sixty fully enlightened monks to propagate the teaching in different places. The Buddha instructed the sixty monks:

*'Go forth, O bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men... preach, O bhikkhus, the dhamma, excellent in the beginning... middle... and end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the holy life, altogether perfect and pure.... Hoist the flag of the sage. Preach the sublime dhamma, work for the good of others, you who have done your duties.'* (Narada, *Ibid*, 107-108)

The above instruction of the Buddha provides a clear framework that a missionary monk should follow in spreading Buddha's teaching. It is an individual monk's responsibility to live a moral life according to the discipline and achieve the higher goal in order to work for moral upliftment both by example and by precept. Nevertheless, Buddha's message was not to preach to everyone but to those who wish to hear the teachings and practice accordingly.

The spirit of sharing the Buddha's teaching is exemplified in the story of the householder Upali. The story illustrates a guideline as to how a *dhammaduta* monk should work. In the story Nigantha Nataputta, the founder of Jainism, sent Upali the householder, to debate with the Buddha to convert to their dispensation. The case turn other way around and Upali wanted to convert into Buddha's dispensation. The Buddha did not try to convert Upali. Instead he made the dhamma available to him. Dhammika, therefore suggests that proclaiming the dhamma in the Buddhist sense 'means making it available to all who wish to inquire about it, and then leaving any decision beyond that to the individual concerned' (2013.forward). A *Dhammaduta*, therefore, should merely present the dhamma to the people who wish to learn and practice accordingly but conversion from one dispensation to other should leave to individual.

The Buddha's teaching spread rapidly within a short period of its start. This was partly due to the noble personality of the Buddha and through the living example of the Buddha's disciples; their spirit of renunciation, self-discipline and sacrifice for the benefit of many. The spirit of spreading the noble teachings continued beyond the Buddha's death. It spread far and wide. The flexibility of the teachings but clear path to the eradication of sufferings assisted widely to spread harmoniously into any country, culture or tradition. Meanwhile, it was accepted by the societies and it also adapted to local custom, tradition and culture, and blended well into it introducing unique identity of those particular societies.

## 2.0 What is Buddhist Culture?

*"Buddhism is open to all traditions and customs provided they are not harmful to the welfare of others."*

(K. Sri Dhammananda

[1993]:225)

The meaning of Culture is contentious. Etymologically, culture has been defined as the cultivation of both the body and the mind. Similarly, early sociologists suggested that 'Culture, like a set of glasses, focuses our experience of the world... it becomes a part of us, right down to natural reactions' (John, 2000.40).



According to Ward, (1963), culture consists of standards for deciding: "what is", "what can", "how one feels about it", "what to do about it" and "standards for deciding how to go about doing it" (John, 2000. 45). John asserts that culture is a characteristic of a particular society or country that consists of traditional behaviour that has been developed and successively learned and practiced throughout the generations. Therefore culture can be introduced and learned. It can be accepted by different cultures and adapted to fit in according to suitability of individual societies. In this way culture becomes a '*symbolic behaviour of a community*' (John, Ibid).

Buddhism constitutes *the Triple Gem*. The Buddha established the community of Monks and Nuns (the Sangha), after Buddha's enlightenment, together with the teaching (the Dhamma), and the Buddha (the teacher). The triple gem is thought of as a secure refuge or vehicle (*Vada*) for developing Buddhist practice. Since the establishment of the triple gem Buddhism has become a tradition for the cultivation for developing the purity of body and mind. Its emphasis is on the cultivation and daily practice of the development of a generous heart; not harming any being; sharing loving kindness and compassion; and living a controlled and balanced life. This Buddhist path is said to promote a 'noble way of life', as opposed to living a 'miserable and deluded life'. Over a period of time, Buddhism has established standard views and values to help nurture Buddhist spirituality and development in people and societies. Buddhism, further, has also accepted and adapted to local traditions, customs and cultures in order to fit in. This acceptance and adaptation means that Buddhism has evolved and developed a new identity in those cultures.

King Ashoka, the patron of third Buddhist council sent 'missionary' (*Dhammaduta*) monks abroad after the council. Thus Buddhist teaching began to be spread to other countries beyond ancient India such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Nepal. The *Dhammaduta* monks learned about the local cultures, accepted those cultures and traditions and adjusted into those customs and tradition. They adapted to the local community thereby creating a new form of culture in those societies. This new form of culture overlapped with the indigenous culture and became hard to differentiate in some ways from the indigenous culture. Therefore, the introduction of the Buddha's teachings into Thailand is different from the 'Thai

Buddhism', which later evolved. Similarly, the introduction of the Buddha's teachings into Sri Lanka is different from the 'Sri Lankan Buddhism', which also later evolved. The same is true for Myanmar, Cambodia, China, Japan etc. Over a period of time, each country developed an individual Buddhist identity and developed a 'national' form of their Buddhist culture. Nevertheless, they share same principles and teachings of the Buddha.

When a question is asked to Buddhist practitioners from the West what is a Buddhist Culture? Answers tend to include the basic morality (or precepts) and cultivation of mind. Conversely if the same question was asked to Eastern migrant Buddhists, their answers would vary dependent on their specific ethnic and national back-ground. Ethnic based Buddhists tend to emphasize the ways in which family members introduced them, or the ways in which they have practiced themselves in their countries.

Ethnic based Buddhism and its differences can be illustrated by examining the differences of practice in both Thailand and Sri Lanka. In Thailand, offering basic needs and basic requisites of food and robes (*Sanghadana*) to the monks has become a part of the daily life of lay Buddhists. Lay people visit the temple and offer Sanghadana to ensure their own goodness and safety in their life. In the Thai tradition, women must avoid any physical contact with monks. Thus monks must use a cloth to accept an offering of food etc. Meanwhile, lay people can receive temporary ordination as a monk or nun at the monasteries on different occasions etc. for the spiritual cultivation.

Conversely in Sri Lanka, the practice of making offerings to the 28 Buddha's and celebrating Bodhi puja are central to their Buddhist practice and way of life. This practice is carried out in addition to offering food and robes to Monks. Monks do not have to use a cloth to accept an offering. In Sri Lanka there is no temporary ordination.

Buddhists in the West, including converts and practitioners tend to emphasize the genuine authenticity of the Buddha's teachings. They tend to be less ritualistic or devotional. Basic rituals such as chanting, bowing (paying respect to the Buddha), bowing (paying respect to the monks), lighting candles and incenses in front of the Buddha, a presence of a Buddhist monk, observation of precepts tend



to be secondary in emphasis and importance to the 'art of practical Buddhist culture'.

Nevertheless, there are some common grounds in cultural similarities and its celebration across cultures. The common practices including individual behaviour and religious performances. Firstly, common practices amongst Buddhists that represents their behaviors includes; paying respect to the Buddha; practicing generosity; developing a strong and focused mind with 'right concentration'; purification of one's mind. Secondly, common grounds for celebration tends to be on important days related to the Buddha and the Buddha's dispensation of his teaching (dhamma). These days include: Veskha Puja; Asalha Puja; Magha Puja; Vassa; Kathina; and Ordination. These Buddhist festivals are traditionally observed and celebrated across national and ethnic boundaries. During these special days Buddhists devote their time to abstaining from all evil actions and maintain their practice of at least five precepts. Furthermore, on these occasions one would devote themselves to the purify their heart and also to helping others to become liberated.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that monastic order (*Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis*) plays a vital role in the maintenance and promotion of Buddhist culture. Thus, it has been important for Buddhist *dhammaduta* monks to establish monasteries and temple. This provides monks or nuns a place where they can stay whilst performing their dhamma work, sharing the Buddha's teaching and spreading the noble culture of mental purity. The saffron robe of the Buddhist Monk/Nun has played an important visual and symbolic role for spreading and maintaining Buddhist culture acting as a 'flag of dhamma'. This is keeping with Upali's instruction. As a result, lay people feels the responsibility to provide sufficient support to the sangha community that would help them to continue spreading noble message to the wider community by both example and teachings.

In order to fulfill the Buddha's instruction to 'Hoist the flag of dhamma' a *dhammaduta* monk/Nun should have a good understanding of the Buddha's teachings and practice and importantly ability to explain. This will assist him or her to remain undistracted and to introduce relevant activities for the cultivation of mind. Similarly, a *dhammaduta* should also develop a pure heart of spreading the

dhamma and great strength of patience, dedication and determination. The *Punnovada* discourse from the Majjimanikaya is an important discourse for the dhammaduta because it provides a framework, which a *Dhammaduta* has to follow in spreading the teachings to a foreign country. The discourse consists of advice in how to face challenges one may encounter during their work. Diligent and determined with a pure motive to spread Buddha's teaching is require. The virtue of a true *Dhammaduta* should also not work for financial gain, fame, or honour but for the happiness and welfare of people and community. One should perform their duty as a bridge with helping hands, to heal people's pain and suffering from their heart. Further, one has to develop an open mind to listen and accept other views as well as their individual practices and faith.

### 3.0 Introduction of Buddhism to the West

Christmas Humphreys, one of the pioneers and Buddhist scholars [1972: 202] begins his chapter 'Buddhism comes west' with a quotation. The quote comes from Dr Conze;

*'There is nothing, or almost nothing, in the Buddhist interpretation of spiritual truth which ties it to any soil or any climate, to any race or tribe... in Buddhism there is nothing which cannot be easily transported from one part of the world to another.'* [Ibid.]

The Buddha's teaching and the Buddhist way of life has spread into many areas of work and life in most societies. However, it did not exist as a discourse in the West until the nineteenth century. According to Almond "in the Western imagination, Buddhism is the most recent of the major world religions" [1988:139]. At its inception, Buddhism was introduced to the west by academics, businessmen, travelers, academics, and government officers as the religion of Asia [Ven. Sujana: 2007].

Many studies and research have taken place concerning Buddhism in the West. According to Mackenzie, the earliest introduction of Buddhism to the West was at the time of King Ashoka (1928.p.v). There have been also few attempts to interlink Buddhism and Christianity, which suggests a likeness between the two faiths. The work of the John of Damascus, in the eight century, in particular,

was a legend of Barlaam and Joshaphat that supports a relationship between Buddhist ascetic influence and the Western Christian ascetic ideal. The history of Buddhism in the West is, however, unclear until the 19th century. It became very popular in the late 20th century.

It is appeared that Buddhism has become widely known with the work of Edwin Arnold 'The light of Asia'. This work, perhaps more than any other of its day, drew the attention of the English-speaking people to Buddhism (Almond, 1988.2). Almond writes that Buddhism was already gaining popularity in Victorian culture and Arnold's poem was part of that more general popularity. It was taxonomic at the time. It was also congenial for the development of scholarly studies on Buddhism [ibid].

The Buddha's teaching has gradually established its root in Western society. The establishment of the Pali Text Society in 1881 by T.W. Rhys Davids in England has immensely supported for the establishment and preservation of authentic teachings of the Buddha. To this day the Pali Text Society is supported, and protected by the Buddhist academic community in the West. From academia to practical side of Buddhism began in 1899, when Gordon Douglas, the first known British person to take ordination into Theravada Buddhism. In 1901 Allan Bennet, later known as Ven. Ananda Metteya, took ordination and returned to the United Kingdom as a missionary monk in 1908. Ven. Ananda Metteya eventually went on to lead the first Buddhist mission to the west and made the monastic community more aware of the possibilities of establishing the Buddha's teaching in the United Kingdom. Between the 1920s and 30s the Buddhist society and the Maha bodhi society were established in Britain. The Buddhist Society was established at the 'Buddhist Lodge', under the leadership of Christmas Humphreys. The 'British Mahabodhi society' was established under the guidance of Anagarika Dharmapala, a Buddhist activists from Sri Lanka. Both societies helped to establish Buddhist activities and the Buddha's teaching more firmly in the UK. In 1926, the London Buddhist Vihara was established by the late Dharmapala in association with Sir Edwin. This enabled, for the first time, a Sri Lankan *dhammaduta* monk to take residence in the UK. This helped to furthering the establishment of the Buddha's teachings and centres. Meanwhile, the Buddha's teachings were further disseminated through the publication of periodical

journals such as 'the British Buddhist', 'Buddhist Studies' etc. In 1940 Ven. U Thittila from Myanmar was invited to London to further Buddhist activities at the Buddhist Society and later, gradually established a community of Myanmar Buddhist centers.

The Buddha's teaching appealed to those who were seeking an alternative religious view to Christianity. As a result, today, the number of Buddhists in the UK is growing both physically, practically and academically. Meanwhile, there are various secular centers established as a centre of Buddhist studies, which have a relationship with eastern countries directly or indirectly. According to statistics in 1952 there were only five Buddhist centers. By 2003, this number had increased up to 371 Buddhist centers and Buddhist organizations in the U.K. Amongst, there are over 40 Theravada Buddhist temples, where Buddhist monks and nuns are presiding, providing services to the community. These Buddhist temples established in the UK with the support from Thai, Sri Lankan, Burmese, Indian and Nepalese ethnic communities. Thus the establishment of the centres indicates that the Buddhist Temples (viharas) are firmly established in various different cities in the UK. Further, according to the statistics in 2001 Buddhists constituted 5% of the population in the UK. Within this group 60% of these Buddhists were born outside of the UK. Buddhism. Thus it is valuable for research purposes to divide UK Buddhist practitioners into: (a.) Eastern based Buddhists and (b.) Western Buddhists.

Almost all Buddhist Temples (viharas) are directly linked to their root or Eastern/Asian Buddhist communities in their indigenous country. These temples were established as centers to provide religious services to the people from the same background. The centers and their activities are, nevertheless, open to every nationality regardless of colour and race, however most of the activities and ceremonies are in support to the Temples own indigenous ethnic groups and nationalities. Thus Sri Lankan viharas support Sri Lankan communities, whilst Thai centres support Thai communities. On the other hand, in contradistinction to the temple system, meditation centers tend to have a Western cultural friendly orientation, whilst simultaneously maintaining direct or indirect links with the east. However these centers and their activities tend to be not so inviting to eastern based Buddhists, who are living in the UK, who wish to their



sense of community and cultural practices. Nevertheless, there are few centers that co-ordinate with both groups, such as Amaravati Monastery and its branches.

Thus it can be seen that Buddhism originated in India and spread to different countries, adapted to different cultures, traditions, customs, and obtained new forms [Alexander: 2007: 31]. These forms may appear to be different but there is a common ground that every form shares equally. That common ground is a Buddhist culture, which transcends national and ethnic boundaries.

#### **4. Buddhist Missionary work in Scotland**

On the 12th of May 2013, Venrable Sujano gave a reading on behalf of the Buddhist group to the Aberdeen City Councilors Interfaith Service in St Nicholas Kirk, Aberdeen. In the reading Venerable Sujano addressed the audience thus:

*'It has been 2556 years since the Buddha passed away but His message of peace, compassion and loving kindness have spread around the world. It was introduced to Scotland a few centuries ago. Today, Buddhism is not here in Aberdeen to convert anyone from one religion to another but definitely [to assist in] helping one to convert from: misery to happiness; hate to love and compassion; enemies to friendships, through individual mental clarity and understanding, and with a vision of helping each other to build better society both physically and mentally.'*

(V.Sujano: Aberdeen City Councilors' Interfaith service: 2013)

It is, however, difficult to produce a historical background for Buddhism in Scotland. It seems that Buddhism is very recent arrival in Scotland. According to Scotland's Census in 2001, 0.13% of the population of Scotland are Buddhist. During the data collection, 'People [in Scotland] were asked both their current religion and they were brought up in. The result prevails that 6,830 people gave Buddhism as their current religion, and 4,704 said they were brought up in it, with an overlap of 3,146' (www.wikipedia.org, *Buddhism* in Scotland.)



Interfaith Scotland has provided a good foundation, which has enabled the newly introduced Buddhism to accommodate and acclimatize to the needs of rapidly growing multi-cultural communities of Scotland. Meanwhile, there are famous Buddhist scholars from Scotland who precede these more recent interfaith discussions. These include: Stephen Batchelor; Rupert Gethin; and Ajahn Chandasiri.

It can be claimed that Buddhist 'groups' were emerging in Scotland by 1912/14. According to Rawdon Goodier, a biologist and senior member of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, the records show that Edinburgh Theosophical Society discussed a paper on Buddhism in 1912. Following this discussion, a reading of 'The light of Asia' was given. Goodier also suggests that in 1914 there was a discussion on 'Meditation in terms of the great Religious teachers' (Goodier: 2006). Interest on Buddhism and its teachings began to eco in the Scotland which institutionalized in 1952, when a branch of the Buddhist society was established in Edinburgh. The society also managed to celebrate the Vesak Puja Day, a day of Buddha's Birthday, day of realizing Enlightenment, day of passing away. The Venerable Y Siri Nyana was to led the ceremony with observing a five precepts and gave an address( Ibid). Apparently, it was the first Vesak Celebration ever to be cerebrated in the Scotland.

The early Buddhist introduction would appeared to be Theravada Buddhist form of Buddhism in Scotland. Theravada Buddhism was introduced to Scotland and practiced until 1950. After that, Buddhism in Scotland becomes much more diverse and new centers for Buddhist studies and meditation are established. The records also indicates the establishment of Buddhist centre by a Theravada monk known as Venerable Anandabodhi in early sixties. Later in 1967, it was handed to the two Tibetan monks, which later developed into 'Samya ling Tibetan temple' with the charismatic leadership of Venerable Choje Akong Tulku Rinpoche and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Since then Buddhism has begun to flourish in many forms in Scotland.

There have been also few records of Theravadin monks travelling and teaching across Scotland. However there were no Theravadin Centre's until the establishment of the Scotland Buddhist Vihara in

Glasgow. This was established in 2001 under the spiritual guidance and leadership of Venerable K. Rewata Thera from Sri Lanka. The centre is a good example of ethnic based Buddhist culture in Scotland. The centre provides a place of gathering and performing religious services for the people of Sri Lanka, who are living in Scotland. The religious activities at the centre are mainly based on the Sri Lankan custom and cultures. The main support for the temple, furthermore, comes from reliance on Sri Lankan devotees. However it should be noted that Ven. Rewata, does run a secular mindfulness course for non-Buddhists at the centre.

In 2003, the Buddhist Thai Temple (*Wat*) Dhammapadipa was established in Edinburgh under the leadership of pre-existing 'Thai Scottish Organisation'. It was founded under the firm leadership of the already established Thai temple Wat Buddhpadipa in London, which was established with the help of Thai government. The Dhammapadipa temple was established as a charity in Edinburgh in 2005. The Dhammapadipa Temple represents an ethnically based of Theravadin form of Buddhism based on Thai culture. It has also become a centre for Thai community in the UK and centralized to the Thai community. In 2011, Wat Thai Buddharam Temple in Aberdeen was established under the leadership of Wat Dhammapadipa temple in Edinburgh. This is also a Thai temple, which intends to support a growing Thai community in Aberdeen.

Personal observation and participation in those temple, it seemed that the 'temple system' provides a very nominal support for western interests into Buddhism. This is not by design, but is due to a number of different reasons. Amongst the main reasons are language difficulties, reliance on ethnic support and national-ness. There are, however, a few other Buddhist groups, which help to spread Buddhist principles in their ways, which are designed to fit into western society by both adjusting and adapting Eastern Buddhist culture into its new form in the west. Unfortunately there are not enough centres or temples that could affiliate or accommodate people from both cultures. Thus in 2012, the Varapunya Meditation Centre was established in Aberdeen as a centre for learning and sharing Buddhist meditation and its practices. The centre's objectives are to affiliate people who are interested in Buddhism and support their good

intention to learn and apply Buddhist principles into their life whatever their cultural background.

### **5. Varapunya Buddhist Society and Meditation Centre.**

The Buddha established a Sangha, an order of Monks and Nuns. He trained Monks (*Bhikkhus*) and Nuns (*Bhikkhunis*) in the dhamma (the teaching) which characterized as an excellent in the beginning, middle and the end. The Buddha trained many of the Monks and Nuns and Lay people until they understood its principle and practice that leads to attained *Arahantship*. *Arahantship* is the final stage of enlightenment, where desire has been completely extinguished.

The Buddha advised sixty *Bhikkhus*, who had achieved *Arahantship* to propagate the dhamma in the world. These Arahant *Bhikkhus* can be described as the first *Dhammaduta* Monks or *Bhikkhus*. He instructed the *Bhikkhus* not to follow the same path together but to take different routes to the different villages and communities. The *Dhammaduta Bhikkhus* were to teach for the good and happiness of the many. It was a challenge for a *dhammaduta Bhikkhu* to spread the teachings to foreign villages. The *Dhammadutta Bhikkhus* today experience similar challenges teaching Dhamma in foreign countries. Western society has its foundation in Christianity and a rational scientific approach. Introducing Buddhism in this context has been a great challenge.

Many would claim that Buddhism is growing in the West. This can be accounted for, in part, due to the influx of Asian lay Buddhists who have migrated to the West for economic purposes, and who brought their religion and culture to the West. However there are also a great number of Western people who see themselves as secular in their beliefs. There are two reasons often given for this secularization; firstly a liberal generation are refusing to accept the conservative 'status quo' which has a strong connection to Christianity. Instead they are adopting a more independent, community-based and institutional-free spirituality. A second reason, which is offered, is a scientific inquiry or empirical proof has provided rational knowledge, which has enhanced human understanding of the universe. It is argued that Buddhism may potentially has something to offer here and fill the gap. Therefore, it is very important that a *Dhammaduta Bhikkhu*

should be aware of the social background, which they are entering into, before spreading the teachings of the Buddha. On the other hand, a Dhammaduta Bhikkhu should also be proficient in knowledge of the Buddhist teachings and moral practices as well as sufficient knowledge of local language and acquires ability to explain Buddha's teachings. The Varapunya Meditation Centre aims to fulfill these needs in the city of Aberdeen.

In September 2012, under the spiritual guidance of Ven. S. M. Sujano, in association with pious lay devotees, Varapunya Buddhist Society and Meditation Centre was established in Aberdeen. It was established with the aim of providing a centre for learning and practice of meditation. It also aimed to provide a context where people could share personal direct experiences of practicing meditation. The intention was to provide an environment, which could facilitate a better understanding of the concept of Buddhist meditation. In so doing, the aim was to help people to develop their practice in order to apply it in their daily life. In such a way it was hoped that people could develop and enhance their own spiritual journey.

Later, with the increasing numbers of members, the centre registered as a charitable Buddhist Organization with the help of The Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organizations (ACVO). Thus in May 2013 it was registered as the charitable organisation in Scotland under the name of the Varapunya Buddhist Society (Varapunya Meditation Centre). The centre aims to provide a secular view but to also to make available the teaching of the Buddha and the Buddha's practices in order to produce greater benefit for the practitioners. The centre intends to introduce Buddhism in a culturally sensitive way to Scotland rather than introducing a national ethnically based, asian culture or tradition.

Since the establishment of the centre, the emphasis has been on spiritual development and self-realization for practitioners. This is in contradistinction to the aims of material and religious expansion. The centre also intends to help to establish a community with an open mind and kind heart. In this way the goal is to help promote the development of a peaceful mind in practitioners, which can help to build harmonious society. The goal is, ultimately, to develop complete liberation of the mind and heart, free from inner and outer tangle using

the practice of morality, concentration and development of wisdom. In order to achieve its aims and objectives, the centre regularly provides these classes:

1. Evening Chanting at 7 pm.

Chanting is one of the important practices that enables to understand and memorized Buddha's teachings. The Chantings are in Pali language, a language in which they are compiled. It is also believed that Buddha had spoken Pali language. Thus the centre provides an evening chanting at 7pm and invites everyone to join. The evening chanting is open to everyone and people can drop in for the event. It consists of chanting and meditation. Over a period of time, this chanting has become a part of healing practice for people at the centre. Further discussion on this matter will be discussed later.

2. Practice of Meditation on Tuesday.

Meditation plays an important role at the centre. Thus the emphasis is on practice. Everyone is encouraged to practice meditation and application of mindfulness in their daily life. The Tuesday Meditation session has been very successful. This session is again a combination of chanting, meditation and discussion. It was originally developed from just two people participating at the beginning. The number has increased to 12-15 participants.

The discussion at the end of the meditation was an important section that enables everyone to extend their understanding on the concept and practice of meditation. The discussion, now, has developed from informal discussions to pre-prepared topics by members of the congregation. The session has become famous for the candidates. The session is conducive to both beginners and regular practitioners.

3. Practice of Meditation on every Sunday:

This meditation session is adapted from the Western Christian concept of attending Sunday prayer at the Church. Christianity is facing great crisis in the West and also in the City of Aberdeen to maintain their faith among Christians and spreading message of the God. Although, Christianity is a major religion in the city, Churches



have been closed down and sold because of the dropping number of people attending the church. As a result, Churches have been sadly converted to Housing flats, Super markets and Bar & Public houses in the city. It is, one of the reasons, the Varapunya Meditation Centre began an hour meditation session every Sunday Morning at ten o'clock. The goal is to help foster spiritual upliftment. This session does not include chanting and seeks to minimize ritual. Instead the emphasis is on the direct experience of meditation. The Sunday Practice is divided into 'Sitting-Walking-Sitting and loving kindness meditation'. Often, the session ends with small discussion if the candidates feel this is necessary. The session has been very successful and the number of people who attended it can be up to 15 people depending on Scottish weather conditions. The Centre, however, does not wish to replace the Christian Sunday service but instead intends to support Western values of culture, which the Western indigenous population have been practicing for millennia. Hopefully, it can fill a spiritual absence within the secularization tendency that people can take into their daily life.

#### 4. Saturday Meditation retreat.

This retreat is part of intensive practice. Therefore, it is only for those who have participated in the Tuesday or Sunday sessions and who understand the basic concept of meditation in both theory and practice. This retreat is designed to train the mind and thus encourage candidates in the practice of making the mind peaceful and concentrated in order to gain insight into the nature of the mind. As the sayings goes: 'practice makes perfect'. Everyone is requested to practice diligently and apply his or her experience, dedication and determination in order to gain a greater benefit from the practice.

The Saturday meditation retreat has encouraged practitioners to go on longer retreats for three to five days outside of the center. The Varapunya centre, therefore, wishes to hold these retreats at the centre or other suitable places in the near future. Since the summer 2014, the centre also has organized a two hours of drop- in meditation session for the general public at Duthie Park, inside the Winter garden in Aberdeen. This is held on every last Sunday of the month. It is attended by up to 20 people.

#### 5. Study of Scripture and reflection:

Study of scriptures and reflection plays an important part of the educative function of Varapunya meditation centre in terms of introducing people to the Buddha's teaching. It is hoped that reflection on these teachings will help people to resolve some of their difficulties and develop their meditation practice in a more straightforward manner.

It is said that when the Buddha became enlightened, he discovered or realized profound 'knowledge' and 'wisdom', which had never arisen in him before. This knowledge and wisdom concerned: The Four Noble Truths (*Ariyamagga*); The theory of Dependent Origination (*Paticcasamupada*); and the theory of Conditional Relations (the *Patthana*).

The Buddha went on to teach the Dhamma to his disciples. These teachings were eventually written down and constitute the scriptures of Buddhism in the form of the *Pali Canon* or *Tipitika*. The *Tipitaka* consists of three collections (baskets) of teachings: (i) the rules of training for Monks and Nuns (*Vinaya*) (ii) teachings concerning the life of the Buddha (the *Suttas*); (iii) 'Buddhist Psychology' (*Abhidhamma*).

The Teachings on Buddhist Psychology or *Abhidhamma* became of interest to the academic community in the West. The teachings of *Abhidhamma* appeared consistent with some of the findings of modern science. Thus psychologists, physicists; ethnologists; anthropologists and Social Scientists began to take interest in the Buddha's teachings.

Thus study of the Buddha's teachings from scripture, therefore, has been a very important part of the centre. Scriptural study has enhanced practitioner's greater understanding of both the theory and practice of meditation and its application in daily life.

#### 6. Celebration of Buddhist important days:

There are five important days in Buddhism, which are celebrated at the Varapunya Meditation Centre. These celebration days are related to: (i.) important life events of the Buddha himself. (ii.) important days relating to the life and organization of the Sangha. The five days include:

## (i.) Vesak day.

This day signifies the Buddha's day of birth, the Day of his Enlightenment, and Day of his passing away. The celebration often creates misunderstanding about the Buddha's birth or enlightened or death among the new comers in Buddhism. Therefore, the centre intends to celebrate this day as the 'birthday of the Buddha' and promote its year of birth rather than the Buddhist era, which signifies the *mahaparinibbana* of the Buddha. This has reduced significant misunderstanding and hustle to speak out publicly.

## (ii) Asalha Puja.

This day marks the beginning of the Buddhist three-month retreat. The three-month retreat occurred as a result of the rainy season in Asia, which contrary to the west. However, this has been a beneficial practice for both lay people and enunciates. Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis are not allowed to leave the Monastery at this time has greatly provided an opportunity to extend their practice and share their understanding with lay people. Therefore, over the vassa, rains retreat time, the centre provides special classes and retreats to the people.

## (iii) Pavarana.

This is an invitation ceremony, which marks the end of three months retreat. The beauty of this ceremony is the tradition of requesting for forgiveness and forgiving each other. The centre has emphasis the day as the 'forgiving day' and encourages members to learn to forgive oneself and others.

## (iv) The Kathina Ceremony.

The Kathina Ceremony occurs after the three-month rains retreat. It is a communal ceremony where robes are offered to the community of the monks. It is a rare opportunity for lay Buddhists to perform in once a year. This is also a joyful event after three months of extensive study and practice on the Buddha's teaching. The centre intends to make a Kathina robe from normal white cloth every year. Members will take part in making robe from cutting, sewing, dye the robe and finally offered it to the community of the sangha. This

Kathina ceremony also has become the part of fund raising event, as it has been evolved in Theravada Buddhism, to continue support the centre and its activities.

(v) Magha puja.

The Magha Puja celebrates the great congregation of the Sangha. The day celebrates as 'learn to love oneself and to the other'. The message that the Buddha has delivered on the day was to learn to love own self truly. Present modern materially injected society lacks this. Thus the centre intends to radiate the light of dhamma to see through mental darkness and find a true nature of own self.

The centre organizes these public events to celebrate on these occasions. Amongst, Vesak Puja day, Asalha Puja and Kathina are organised in a big scale in order to create an awareness about its significance and provide an opportunity to other interested people. These events are organized in order to support and enhance meditation practice. These events are consists of chanting, meditation and reflection, thus, spiritually rich and emphasis on practice. However there is very nominal ritual. It starts with group chanting. This is followed by half an hour of guided meditation. After this, practitioners can offer Buddha puja and lunch to the monks. This is followed by a buffet lunch for the lay practitioners.

On the Vesak Puja day, offering Buddha puja is celebrated with decorative and symbolic items of food, fruits, drinks and flowers to show our humble veneration to the Buddha, one who has fully accomplished. It follows with introductory talks and meditation practices such as sitting, walking and lying down meditation practice.

Venerable Dr. Nagasena from Dhammatalaka Peace Pogoda Temple in Birmingham attended the Kathina ceremony at the centre in 2013. He wrote his reflection on his Face-book blog (Ven. Nagasena, 2013. November). He writes:

*"Scotland is politically a part of United Kingdom, previously, [it]...was an independent country; geographically however, the lands are more mountainous, making up with many valleys, highlands, seas, rivers and [is] more close to the North Sea... So, it is quite cold around*

*the year, maybe very cold during the winter months, sometimes covered with snow up to early summer. There are three Theravada Buddhist temples..*

*... There is only a [single] temple [Varapunya meditation centre] in along the highlands [Aberdeen], now run(ning) by a friend of mine, Ven. Sujano, [a] highly qualified monk from Nepal, educated in Thailand, good at Thai, Hindi, [and] English, ... Most of his supporters are Thai, but he works with Scottish, local people to teach meditation and spiritual activities and of course quite a number of other Asian [devotees] too, who are faithful to the Theravada Buddhism.*

*I attended at the first Kathina Ceremony in this temple taking place on the last day of the Kathina season and full moon day of November..*

*...This is a real international Kathina offering ceremony which was held on the full moon day of November, 17th, 2013, the last day of the annual Kathina ceremony. Four monks attended at the ceremony and each of them represents a country, Burma, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. Although Thai devotees make up the majority, there are other backgrounds [who] also attended such [as] from Sri Lanka, Nepalese, Chinese, Scottish, English. ... The supporters but also [from] other communities too including [the] local faithful [people of Scotland] , [they] made this robe rather unexpected! They made this robe starting from piecing the white cloths together, coloring and sewing [them] in a perfect way."*

Similarly, Venerable Nagasena wrote his reflection on the Vesak Celebration in 2014 which he chaired that:

*"Scotland on Sunday, 18th May 2014. ...Only a few years ago, a Buddhist temple has started to function here, run (ning) by Ven. Sujan[o], originally from Nepal. Being a dedicated, competent and experienced monk, he started to organize to teach meditation to the local people. We really*



*need more monks like him, who are dedicated and capable of teaching in such area[s] as Aberdeen where no local Buddhist have established a centre] in its history. He lives with no hope of material wealth but a hope of sharing peaceful meditation and [the] teaching of the Buddha. I really feel it and my heart is always with his good work. ... The Vesak day here is unlike anywhere in the UK as, we spend the day with chanting, meditation, offering, reflections and talks. Some of these agendas are not found in traditional Vesak day celebration. It was [a] quiet, serene, calm and devotional atmosphere."*

## **6. Social Services.**

A Vesak declaration at the United Nations in 1999 suggests that Buddhism has contributed and 'continue[s] to make [a contribution] to the spirituality of humanity'. A central teaching within the Buddha's teaching is referred to as: the four Noble Truths, which are:

- (1.) The truth of Suffering. (*Dukkha Sacha*)
- (2.) The truth of the cause of Suffering. (*Dukkha Samudaya Sacha*)
- (3.) The Truth of the cessation of Suffering. (*Dukkha Nirodha Sacha*)
- (4.) The Truth of the path leading to the cessation of Suffering. (*Magga Sacha*)

The Buddha taught the first truth is to be 'understood'; the second truth is to be 'abandoned'; the third Truth is to 'realized'; the fourth Truth is to be 'cultivated'. The Fourth Truth or 'the truth of the Path' is divided into eight path factors. Thus it is called the 'Eightfold Noble path'. It can also be listed as:

1. Right View or Understanding. (*Sammaa Ditthi*)
2. Right Thought; Right intention. (*Sammaa Sankappa*)
3. Right Speech. (*Sammaa Vaacaa*)

4. Right Action. (*Sammaa Kammanta*)
6. Right Livelihood. (*Sammaa Aajiva*)
7. Right Mindfulness. (*Sammaa Sati*)
8. Right Concentration. (*Sammaa Samaadhi*)

Thus people seeking to put the Buddha's teachings into practice, tends to be engaged with forms of social service, to help to create a better society. The Buddha's teachings have only been introduced to the City of Aberdeen very recently. As a consequence of this, only limited minorities of the people of Aberdeen have taken advantage of Buddhist centres. There are, however, a few groups who are running meditation classes, with minimum charge of five pounds for each class, around the city. This has made a remarkable contribution to the community of people.

There are four basic needs necessary for every human being. They are food, shelter, clothes and medicine. For different reasons, uncertainty in life is inevitable. As a result, there are people who may have roof over head but are struggling to meet their daily meal. There are also many homeless people in the city. Surprisingly, it is legal in the U.K. to be homeless. Homeless people struggle to meet their daily food requirements, unnecessary to mention roof over head. The number of homeless people may increase every year. There are many social organizations that are helping in this sector. In Aberdeen, one of them is 'Instant Neighbour'. Since the establishment of the Varapunya Meditation Centre, the centre has started a scheme to distribute food to homeless people. This scheme is known as 'the homeless support scheme'. This event has been very successful and spreading Buddha's message of kindness into practice. The centre also visits and supports people in hospital, as well as senior citizens in the city. Socially engagement has significantly assisted to accommodate Buddhism in the city.

## **7. The social implications of the teachings and Meditation.**

The Buddha's teachings include five precepts. These 'precepts' act as pre-requisites for meditation practice and spiritual training.

They help the practitioner to stay on the 'spiritual/Buddhist path'. The five precepts include:

- (i) To refrain from harming any living being.
- (ii) To refrain from taking what is not given.
- (iii) To refrain from sexual misconduct.
- (iv) To refrain from telling lies, gossip and idle speech.
- (v) To refrain from taking intoxicants which can cloud the mind. (Alcohol/Drugs).

The centre encourages people to observe the five precepts honestly. It also strives to help people to develop their heart, in the midst of facing their difficulties in their life. Over duration of two years, the centre has successfully helped number of people to establish a balanced life.

The centre's mission has been to emphasize personal and social transformation, happiness and wellbeing. One of the ways the centre achieves this is to help people cultivate spiritual friendship. A '*Kalyamitta*' is a 'spiritual' or 'noble friend' who supports and accompanies one on the spiritual path. They give wise counsel, keep one away from danger, and to help one to liberate oneself from suffering. To a great extent, modern society is facing a shortage of a 'good friendship'. Thus, the centre intends to support and build such friendship.

A second way in which the centre seeks to cultivate personal and social transformation is through the cultivation of spiritual qualities or virtues. In the Buddha's teaching there are ten spiritual qualities known as 'the ten *parami*' ('ten perfections'). These include:

1. Generosity or Sharing (Dāna)
2. Morality /practice of five precepts (Sīla)
3. Renunciation (Nekkhamma)
4. Wisdom / Insight (Paññā )

5. Diligence/ Effort (Viriya)
6. Patience/Acceptance (Khanti)
7. Truthfulness/ Honesty (Sacca)
8. Determination (adhitthana)
9. Loving-Kindness/ Love one another (Mettā)
10. Equanimity (Upekkhā)

Therefore the centre helps people to develop a loving kindness, spiritual friendship, a compassionate heart towards all living beings and understanding individual self in order to create a better individual and community. The centre also encourages Mindful living as a main function at the centre. The centre encourages its members to practice mindfulness in everyday life. It is proven that meditation is a very beneficial in all aspects of life including the professional context. The teachings are also incorporated into the center's everyday life for the benefit of the society. The centre also works as a place, where people can visit for spiritual counseling, finding financial solutions and for various other reasons including personal, family, or social issues or problems.

## 8. Introduction and Challenges.

*'Samanaananca dassanam etam mangala uttama'.  
(One of the highest blessings is: 'having seen the sight of monks'.)  
[Adapted from the Mangala Sutta.]*

The city of Aberdeen is becoming a more multi-national and multi-cultural society. This is in part due to the expansion of the oil business over the last 30 years. However, Buddhism was alien to the people until 5/6 years ago, and the sight of a Buddhist monk in the city was strange. Now, Buddhism and the sight of Buddhist monks are more commonplace in the city because of the presence of Buddhist Monks in the city.

People's reactions seemed initially to be strange and uncomfortable, but this attitude has gradually changed with the

establishment of Buddhist temples and regular visits by monks to the city. In the Mangala Sutta ('the discourse of the highest blessings') the Buddha taught that there are thirty eight kinds of blessings which are '*the highest blessings*' a person could wish for if they wish to practice in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. One of these is '*Samanaananca dassanam etam mangala uttama*'. In other words: One of the highest blessings is 'having seen the sight of noble monks'.

In recent years, the city has been blessed with the presence Buddhist monks. Their presence has changed the local inhabitants attitude. Thus one of the ways in which the Varapunya meditation centre has helped to spread the Buddha's teachings is through a visible presence of Buddhist Monks and Buddhist Robes in the city. As the saying goes 'action speaks louder', therefore, although it is still not acceptable the practice of *bindapata* (alms-around) in the city, wondering in the city has made significant different. Meanwhile, practicing in accordance with the *vinaya* is also essential in the dhammaduta work. It is the very life of the teaching. Therefore, this culture is an ancient form in the modern glass. Practicing in accordance with the *vinaya* provides the regularity of monk's practice and acceptance in the society; and preservation of authentic teachings of the Buddha. There may arise temptation to adopt and adjust in accordance with the modern need and leaving large part of the discipline. Therefore, *dhammaduta* monk has to be very careful and aware of the discipline and practice it diligently. Living in a modern technologically advance and materialistically injected society, dhammaduta has to train even harder and mature enough to deal with modern crisis. To many, therefore, it may old and out-dated lifestyle but it represents a great deal to modern society. It represents simple way of life, morally and ethically supporting, providing spiritual upliftment etc and being a good friend to everyone.

## 9. Adaptation and change.

*'Buddhism is strong enough to face any modern views which pose a challenge to religion.* K Sri Dhammananda (1993:268).

Ward and John define culture as ...a 'what' 'how' of ideas and principles, and how they have become a tradition and behavior of



people (John, 2000).

A Buddhist culture, ultimately, is about living a moral life, having a controlled mind and mental training.

In this way a 'Buddhist culture' has a basic foundation of Buddhist principles, which all Buddhists should be practicing. The five precepts (as mentioned above) is the basic foundation of Buddhist culture. The Buddha explicitly instructed these five precepts as the foundation of lay practice. In Anguttara nikaya (iii,203) the Buddha spoke of the benefit of practicing in accordance with the five precepts that one will live with complete self-confidence, free from negativities and a good human. Therefore, it is a minimum ethical code that a Buddhist should practice in their daily life. Introduction of this precept in the city of Aberdeen is not easy tasks, in particular to the fifth precept, which relates to Alcohol and drugs.

#### (i) Alcohol.

In Scotland, alcohol and liquor are a part of the Scottish culture. Public-houses have become a second church. Thus the introduction of the five precepts has met with varied success. Therefore, the introduction of the fifth precept has been modified to 'mindful drink' or 'moderate drinking' rather than the complete giving up of drinking. This also applies to smoking. Since the introduction of the precepts in a modified version, it appears that members have significantly reduced the amount of alcohol, which they consume, and some practitioners have stopped drinking completely.

#### (ii) Chanting.

In the Theravada Buddhism it is very common to find chanting practice twice a day with great devotion and faith. Meanwhile, the chants are important for Theravada Buddhist practice because they contains teachings of the Buddha. Through the chanting culture all the Buddha's teachings are preserved. Each chant is therefore in a way a teaching as such it can help to shape and preserve a Buddhist culture free from defilement.

Chanting involves verses in the ancient *pali* language. This is unfamiliar and hard to understand. *Pali* language, is a language, which was originally used to record the Buddha's teachings and was believed

to be spoken at the time of the Buddha. It is a strange language that requires a lot of attention, devotion, and determination to participate. It also involves sitting on the floor, kneeling, paying respect and bowing. This is a part of traditional Theravada Buddhist practice. It has become a part of Buddhist culture. Chanting, however, is not a familiar sight to Westerners. It is good for *dhammaduta* monks to be aware of this when the spreading of the teachings. People are often interested in practicing mindfulness meditation but there is a resistance and legitimate suspicion when encountering the practice of Chanting. The usual reaction to their first encounter with the chanting is: 'what am I doing here? What am I supposed to be doing? Why is there chanting?' etc.

Thus chanting, may often cause people to stop coming back to the centre to practice meditation. Chanting can be anything up to an hour in Buddhist temples. The centre therefore modified its chanting to just recollection of the Triple Gem: the Buddha (teacher); the Dhamma (teaching); and the Sangha (Community of practitioners). This minimised chanting has encouraged many practitioners' to return to the centre for further practice. The level of interest is, however, different for people who have practiced for some considerable time at the centre. They tend to show a growing interest in chanting and its application for the cultivation of mindfulness practice. Daily chanting, is open to everyone, and the intention is to make it available every day for those who wish to practice.

The centre provides a transliterated *English/ Pali* Chanting Book. However the centre does not expect people who come to the centre to follow the culture. It is, therefore, very important to introduce and speak with everyone with regards to the chanting event. People are not forced to chant or to follow procedures, instead they are requested to remain silence during the chanting. Meanwhile, if they wish, they are requested to listen to the chanting from their 'heart rather than from their ears'.

The Centre, nevertheless, despite their resistance always encourages people to participate in chanting if they wish as this can calm down, focus and prepare the mind for the practice of sitting meditation. Chanting is also introduced as an alternative to Walking Meditation before undertaking Sitting Meditation. Surprisingly, a

number of people would prefer to have chanting before meditation because it helps to create a conducive environment for the cultivation of the mind. There are, however, many people who prefer not to follow the Buddhist chanting due to their preconceived concept of religiosity and chanting.

### (iii) Bowing and Keeling

Bowing down before the Buddha or to the monks is one of the Buddhist practices, which is very new in the western culture. The statement "I only bow to the Queen, not to anyone else" illustrates the general attitude the local culture has to bowing. Local people, furthermore, may find it difficult to paying respect to the Triple Gem because of their belief and views. They also feel uncomfortable kneeling and paying respect to the Triple Gem. This is true especially at the beginning, however, the physical discomfort gradually decreases over the period of time once they have cultivated their confidence on the practice. Therefore, it should not be expected from them at their first visit. Once the faith and confidence have developed through individual practice, it appears that they gradually realised the importance of these practices, which assist the cultivation of the mind and these are as important as practicing sitting meditation. Therefore, a *dhammaduta* should practice a great amount of perseverance and patience. These are very important qualities that a *dhammaduta* requires order to spread their practices.

The culture and religion of Buddhism are different to the indigenous views and beliefs in Aberdeen. The centre's mission is to share the teachings and practices of the Buddha and affiliate the people in Aberdeen to the centre through carrying out different classes and sessions. The classes include: the Tuesday Meditation Class at 7-9 pm; The Sunday Meditation Class at 10.00-11.15 am and the Saturday Meditation Class (See above).

A number of people joined the classes to gain benefit from them. However only a handful remains and continue their practices. The initial receptivity to the Buddha's teaching (Dhamma) varies. However, with patience, and over time some people become more interested in the Buddha's teaching. The ultimate aim is to share the Dhamma. The Dhamma has begun to be gradually appreciated by

different people around the city. The centre feels grateful to be part of this process

## **10. Meditation in the City of Aberdeen.**

Over the last few decades in the West, '*Mindfulness Meditation*' and its applicability in daily life, has been of much interest. In the U.K., in particular, in the City of Aberdeen, Mindfulness Meditation has been introduced to every sector of society. This 'mindfulness' is incorporated into educational practice; psychological praxis; government offices; and the professional practice of private companies. In many cases Mindfulness meditation has been introduced in different forms as a secular practice. However it has also laid a foundation for the application of Buddhist principles in meditation practices, should people wish to explore it further. For example, for the past four years, the University of Aberdeen has been running a part time three year Master's degree on Mindfulness. One of the graduates from the 'Mindfulness course', has been running eight week courses at the Varapunya Meditation Centre.

Meanwhile, there are many groups and individuals are providing 'meditation sessions' in the city. The Aberdeen Buddhist Group has been running meditation sessions for over a decade. It is an independent Buddhist group. It has a direct relationship with Triratna Buddhist Community, (formally known Friends of Western Buddhist Order). These meditation sessions are held at the Quaker Meeting House. Meanwhile, New Kadampa also runs meditation classes at the Quaker Meeting House. There is a Zen group offering 'meditation' in the City and also Buddhist Group in the University of Aberdeen offers meditation sessions.

A Tibetan Buddhist Group is running a meditation class every Monday evening at the Unitarian Church. There is also a meditation session once a week at the Thai Buddharam Temple. Occasionally monks guide in these classes. In addition to these centres, the impact of the 'mindfulness meditation' is in every sector of the city's life.

The Varapunya Meditation centre has to adapt and evolve for the greater benefit of the community. The emphasis of the centre is on Buddhist meditation and is mainly based on the meditation technique of Mahasi Sayadow of Burma and S. N. Goenka. However the

teachings have to adapt to meet social conditions and modify to satisfy practitioners. Therefore, it is evolving in accordance with the Sutta and adapting from modern secular mindfulness practice at the centre. Meanwhile, the Varapunya Meditation centre must continue to actively research and engage with concepts of Buddhist culture in Aberdeen. At the same time it must strive with theory and practice to provide a non-ethnic based Buddhist culture which can be accessible and be of the benefit to the community of Aberdeen.

#### 11. The issue of Financial Stability.

One of the challenges confronting *the dhammaduta* in a foreign land is the issue of financial stability. It is very important for *The dhammaduta* to understand that it can be a very painful process spreading teachings in a foreign land. At the time of Lord Buddha, these problems were also encountered. Thus it is good for *Dhammaduta Bhikkhus* to examine and reflect upon on the story of *Venerable Punna* and his determination to go on to a foreign land to spread the teachings of the Buddha.

Over the last century, many Buddhist temples and centres have been established in the Western world. These centres and temples are undoubtedly established with the support from traditionally Buddhist eastern migrants. For example: Sri Lankan Temples are supported by Sri Lankan migrants; Thai (*wat*) temples are supported by Thai migrants; and Burmese temples are supported by Burmese migrants. Thus a combination of ethnically based migrant communities, and national Patronage support these temples. In this way temples achieve a relatively secure level of financial stability.

Varapunya Meditation Centre is established to work and to assist mainly non-ethnic and non-nationally based interest in the Buddha's teachings in Aberdeen. The city of Aberdeen is predominantly Christian that only came into contact with Buddhism recently and the number of people interested in the teachings of the Buddha is a handful. As a result, there are very limited financial resources helping to support center's dhamma work in the city. There is a lack of financial support from the local community in Aberdeen and non from any other sectors outside the city. It is running entirely on donation basis and charges nothing for its services. Therefore, the centre needs



to find sources of support in order to continue its successful work in the city, and to spread the teachings of the Buddha to the people from a non Buddhist back ground, whether they be from the U.K. or from other ethnic groups living in the city. Further, the centre is not only shortage of the fund but also human resources to fulfill the city's need. Thus, the centre also seeks a enthusiastic genuinely Buddhist monk, who would happy to work for the promotion of Buddhist activities in the city.

## 12. Conclusion.

Christianity has historically been at the heart of Scottish culture for centuries. The Buddhist teachings came to Scotland almost a century ago. *Dhammaduta* monks began to visit the City of Aberdeen, the third largest city in Scotland, just over a decade ago. The monks finally established a place of residence from which they could spread the Buddha's teachings in the city.

The Varapunya Meditation Centre is working for the development of spreading the Buddha's teachings to the city and to the country as a whole. In this way, they aim to share Buddhist ideas and teachings beyond the boundaries of traditional Buddhist countries. *Dhammaduta* Monks and people and organizations associated with *Dhammaduta* Monks should have a comprehensive understanding of the teachings of the Buddha in both theory and practice. They should also have a proficiency of language and retain an open mind.

Meanwhile, the practice of sharing the original teachings of the Buddha helps *Dhammaduta* Monks to purify their own minds and heart. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of sharing the teachings, is to convert people from misery to happiness and not to convert them from one organized religion to another.

It is, however, should be understood that from the point of view, the Theravada school of Buddhism has been accepted as the school that tried to preserve the original teachings of the Buddha through great sangha councils. Therefore, in terms of non-ethnic based Buddhism, it could be argued that the Theravada Buddhism represents a 'real Buddhist culture', in which it is merely a culture based on the original teachings of the Buddha that is undistorted by any other cultures. The culture that revolves from the vinaya, a purer Buddhist

culture. An ethnic adaptation is just a ethnic distortion that created different schools of Buddhism. Therefore, the reflection on the sangha provides a qualities who has maintain and preserved the true teachings of the Buddha. So, the centre faces the difficult tension between preservation and adaptation. Emphasis on authentic teachings of the Buddha as recorded in the canon could it be the pure Buddhist culture, which could be less accessible to many. Whereas, it the Buddhism is adapted in order to make it more accessible to many could it be distorted the purity and watering it down creating the purity of Theravada Buddhism with a Scottish ethnicity. This is a paradox, which the centre may have to ask itself. It is a dichotomy between preserving the purity of a teachings and tradition and progressive adaptation and changes.

Finally patience is the key to success. A successful mission needs: dedication; determination; and continuity. One has to be dedicated and determined, and patiently continue working for happiness of the many. The centre's motto is 'Helping hands Healing hearts'. The centre seeks to achieve its goal of providing helping hands and to open people's hearts by helping them to develop a peaceful mind and ultimately enlightenment for the greater happiness.

Please accept an invitation to come and join with the centre and spread the teachings of the Buddha to heal people from inside out, in Scotland and beyond.

May all beings be happy...

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**Ven. Sujano**

Venerable Sujano is a Buddhist Monk, born in Nepal (The Buddhas Birth Place). He was ordained into the Theravada school of Buddhism in Nepal under the guidance of the late Most Venerable Sudarshan Mahasthavira at Nagar Mandap Srikirti Vihara, Kirtipur. He studied Buddhism and Buddhist Meditation in Thailand. He took higher ordination at Wat Paknam Bhasichoroen, Bangkok. He trained under the preceptor-ship of the Most Venerable Somdet Phramaha Ratchamangalachar who is the Current Acting Supreme Patriarch of Thailand and Abbott of Wat Paknam Temple; Bangkok. Venerable Sujano completed his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religion; and his Masters degree in Buddhist Studies. He completed these at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Thailand. Venerable Sujano is currently studying for a second Masters degree of Social science in Religion and Society at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

**(ii) Buddhist Work.**

Venerable Sujano arrived in the United Kingdom in 2005 as a Minister of Religion. He has since worked with different Buddhist organisations as Buddhist Monk, teaching Buddhism and meditation. He has been involved in different religious and social activities. These include: 'the Punjab Buddhist Society U.K.' [in the capacity of a Trustee Member]; Lumbini Nepalese Buddha Dharma Society [in the capacity of a Spiritual Adviser]; The Buddhavihara Temple Kings Bromley, Watmahathat, UK (in the capacity of Resident monk and assistant teacher); Ambedkarite Organisations [in the capacity of Spiritual guidance]; the Thai Buddharam and Cultural Centre [in the

capacity of Resident monk and spiritual teacher]; Interfaith Groups in different cities [in the capacity of member]; School visits [in the capacity of Assistant teacher]; and Hospital visits [in the capacity of spiritual guidance].

Venerable Sujano has published a number of books; and articles in different languages on Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy.

Venerable Sujano founded the Varapunya Buddhist Society and Meditation Centre in Aberdeen in 2012 with the help of pious devotees. The centre is dedicated to the cultivation of learning about the Buddhist Teachings and practising Buddhism in a Western, and more specifically Scottish Context. Venerable Sujan holds the position of Abbot and lives and teaches at the centre.

