A Beacon of Dharma in 2020

Sravasti Abbey
A Buddhist Monastery
Creating Peace in a Chaotic World
The Abbey had big plans for 2020. A trio of wonderful geshes—including the esteemed master Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe—would teach on texts rarely studied in English. A full schedule of other teachings and retreats would happen at the Abbey, and several nuns, myself included, had big travel plans. Best of all, we were poised to announce construction of a beautiful new Buddha Hall, hoping to break ground in the summer of 2020.

Of course, things changed. As news of the spreading coronavirus began to dominate the headlines and infiltrate the final weeks of our winter retreat in February 2020, we realized our plans would need to shift. How much? We had no idea.

Fortunately, the Abbey has a long history of streaming teachings online. Our resourceful Video Team nuns scrambled to move the March Sharing the Dharma Day—our first event of the year—to Vimeo Livestream. They even figured out how to hold our well-loved discussion groups on Zoom. We announced the change by email and were astonished when over 800 participants from around the world signed in to join us! Clearly, online Dharma filled a need for people struggling to understand what was happening in their lives and in the world.

Week by week we weighed the conditions, moving one retreat or course after another online. By summer, we knew the Abbey would stay closed to guests throughout 2020. However, we managed to stream every planned event and added more, allowing unprecedented international participation. By the end of the year, Abbey teachings broadcast and/or posted on YouTube and Vimeo Livestream had received over 800,000 views—truly a beacon of Dharma in troubled times!

Many of the YouTube videos were short Bodhisattva’s Breakfast Corner talks. These encouraged listeners to use the calamities we experienced externally and internally in 2020—the pandemic and rising death tolls, racial violence and systemic racial inequity, flailing economies, environmental disasters, a contentious U.S. election—as profound opportunities to deepen our understanding of the Buddha’s four noble truths, to cultivate bodhicitta, and to develop wisdom.

Abbey monastics believe that Buddha’s teachings apply to all aspects of our lives. When we discuss corruption,
racism, and other such topics, we do so from an ethical perspective: Which thoughts and actions create virtuous karma and which are non-virtuous? How do we cultivate compassion and friendliness toward those whose views are different from ours and those whom we believe are engaging in harmful actions?

For many, the Buddhadharma was the best and only medicine to ease the suffering of uncertainty, loss, and fear, and they turned to the Abbey as a source for that medicine. In turn, we could not have offered these teachings or even survived without your generosity.

Your concern, offerings, and care packages, coming from so many places, have touched us deeply. At a time when so many people are suffering, your heartfelt love for the Dharma poured out, and we are grateful. Last year gave us a vivid illustration of the mutual dependence between ordained sangha and lay practitioners.

Despite the connections made online, we missed having you here with us, and we missed your helping hands! A few local volunteers were occasionally able to help outdoors, but the monastics worked hard to care for the land, maintain daily activities, and keep up with our monastic education and study program. We still accomplished a lot. Read about that on the following pages.

We were grateful, too, to be able to offer material assistance to those in need. The Abbey worked with Dharma Relief to procure surgical masks for North American hospitals and hosted an online "Action to Feed the Hungry" with Buddhist Global Relief. We continued to support our local Youth Emergency Services, and the Abbey and individual monastics made many offerings to feed the hungry in the U.S. and elsewhere.

In the next pages, you’ll see the details of our extensive online Dharma sharing. Although we couldn’t travel, online platforms let us reach out to places we had hoped to visit in person. People in Europe, Singapore, Indonesia, the Middle East (with Arabic translation), and Puerto Rico (in Spanish) all received teachings tailored just for them.

Here at home we continued our regular monastic training program and ordained a new nun. In October, long-time Abbey friend Laresa Kerstetter “left the home life” to become Ven. Thubten Dekyi.

Through it all, I continued work on The Library of Wisdom and Compassion, the book series I’m co-writing with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Wisdom Publications released Volume 5, In Praise of Great Compassion, in August. It’s timely (and timeless), as the book is about bodhicitta—opening our hearts to others and generating compassion, love, joy, equanimity, and fortitude. Volume 6, Courageous Compassion, will be out in May 2021. More volumes are planned.

From the huge response online, it’s clear that a new, spacious Buddha Hall will be even more necessary once we reopen, hopefully this year. Thus, we’ve worked steadily to finalize the details to be ready to begin construction as soon as conditions align.

Early on in the pandemic I gave a talk encouraging people to remember that we were all in this together. And we still are—this being cyclic existence in general, not just a pandemic and the litany of troubles in 2020. Together, we can take these situations onto the path, use them to grow our love, compassion, wisdom, and skill, and resolve to transform our minds and fulfill our potential to become fully awakened to benefit others most effectively.

As we do this together, your support makes the Abbey a beacon of Dharma, creating peace in a chaotic world. Thank you so much, and we hope to see you later in 2021.

Abbey monastics gratefully receive a special lunch offering.
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Fifteen retreats or courses, over 60 talks for Buddhist groups, another 40 talks for civic groups, several series of teachings, plus nearly daily Bodhisattva’s Breakfast Corner talks — your offerings helped the Abbey reach out around the world. All were offered online except the winter retreat and a few live talks Ven. Jampa gave in Germany before the pandemic was declared. Abbey online videos received over 800,000 views in 2020.

COURSES, RETREATS & WEEKLY TEACHINGS

Retreats, Events, & Courses

• Shakyamuni Buddha One-Month & Three-Month Winter Retreats

• Peaceful Living, Peaceful Dying Retreat—Ven. Sangye Khadro

• Emptiness and the Mind Perceiving It—Dr. Jay Garfield

• How to See Yourself as You Really Are Retreat—Ven. Thubten Chodron

• Young Adults Explore Buddhism—Ven. Thubten Chodron & community

• Green Tara Retreat—Ven. Sangye Khadro

• Gift of Forgiveness Retreat—Ven. Thubten Chodron

• Exploring Monastic Life—Ven. Thubten Chodron & community

• Sorting Out Tenets—Geshe Dadul Namgyal

• Pramanavarttika—Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe

• Chandrakirti’s “Supplement to the Middle Way”—Geshe Yeshi Lhundup

• Awakening the Kind Heart Retreat—Ven. Sangye Khadro

• 37 Practices for Troubled Times Retreat—Sravasti Abbey Community

• New Year’s Vajrasattva Retreat—Ven. Thubten Chodron & community

• Monthly Sharing the Dharma Days — Sravasti Abbey Community

• Monthly Medicine Buddha Pujas—Sravasti Abbey Community

Weekly Teachings

• Engaging in the Bodhisattva’s Deeds—Ven. Thubten Chodron

• The Foundation of Buddhist Practice—Ven. Thubten Chodron

• Spokane UU Buddhist Meditation—Sravasti Abbey Community

Talks & Teachings Outside the Abbey

In addition to the Abbey-sponsored programs, and despite travel restrictions, Ven. Chodron, Ven. Sangye Khadro, and other Abbey monastics gave over 60 Buddhist teachings and public talks hosted by other groups – mostly over Zoom. These included a series for Wihara Dharmakirti in Indonesia, ongoing classes for an Arabic-speaking Dharma group, and teachings in Spanish for Ganden Shedrub Ling in Puerto Rico. Additional host groups include Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore, Dharmadatta Community, Sandpoint (Idaho) Sangha, South Carolina Dharma Group, Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Singapore, Shantideva Center in New York, Tibetan Centre Hamburg, Friends of Sravasti Abbey-Russia, and more.
Presentations & Articles in 2020

In addition to Buddhist teachings, Abbey monastics gave over 40 one-time presentations and talks to a variety of groups: national and international conferences, primary schools and universities, interfaith vigils, local churches, businesses, and even a gun control webinar.


Abbey monastics were featured in or wrote articles published by the Canadian Broadcasting Company, Times of Israel, Northwest Dharma News, Dharma Drum Humanity Magazine, SpokaneFāVS, and Spokesman Review.

Caring for the Land

After 1,100+ hours of labor, the community finished a two-year cost-share forest thinning project on 7.2 acres of Abbey forest with support from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and local volunteers. We continued our ongoing effort to contain the spread of noxious weeds on the property and purchased 60 acres of undeveloped land adjacent to Tara’s Refuge, an investment in the future.

Prison Outreach

The Abbey typically corresponds with 1,000-1,500 people in U.S. prisons every year, but outreach was difficult in 2020 due to prison lockdowns caused by Covid. Many people focused on individual practice because most religious groups and activities were suspended, and medical care was lacking for Covid cases. Despite these hardships, over 150 incarcerated people signed up for the 2021 Winter Retreat from Afar.
**Monastic Rites & Education**

Abbey monastics performed all the Vinaya rites prescribed by the Buddha for a fully functioning sangha including the fortnightly posadha ceremony to purify and restore precepts, our seventh annual varsa (rains retreat), and the concluding pravarana ceremony, as well as a kathina ceremony for offering the robe of merit.

In addition to all the teachings previously listed, our monastic education program included weekly in-house Vinaya classes, an in-house Vesak Nyung Ne retreat, and weekly teachings on Buddhist philosophy with Dr. Jeffrey Hopkins. Some residents also received private instruction in classical and colloquial Tibetan and classical Chinese Vinaya translation.

**Books**

**Publications**
- *In Praise of Great Compassion* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Ven. Thubten Chodron, Volume 4 in the Library of Wisdom and Compassion series (Wisdom Publications)
- *Pearl of Wisdom, Book III*, compiled by Ven. Thubten Chodron (Sravasti Abbey)

**Translations**
- *Approaching the Buddhist Path* (Chinese & Russian)
- *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* (Spanish & Chinese)
- *Samsara, Nirvana, and Buddha Nature* (Spanish)
- *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* (Russian & Thai)

**Online Outreach by the Numbers**

- **YouTube Channel**
  510 teachings uploaded, 759,203 views
- **Vimeo Livestream**
  54,696 views
- **Insight Timer Meditation App**
  12,069 followers, 265,946 plays
- **2020 Retreat from Afar**
  264 participants, including 102 people in prison
- **Sravasti Abbey Friends Education (SAFE) distance learning program**
  373 students completed courses
What you told us
You understood that Dharma was the best medicine for 2020 and turned to Sravasti Abbey for support. Here’s a selection of what you said.

“I think of the Abbey community daily. You’re like a lighthouse beaming out a strong signal to all us ships at sea!”
—Jane Roos

“I stumbled upon your YouTube channel by chance and you have given me much solace and comfort in my distress. Thank you for keeping the Dharma alive and allowing us to truly take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.”
—Jason Yan

“I am rising to this time as a ‘learning experience,’ trying hard to see some positive in all of the turmoil. I close my eyes and ‘visit’ Sravasti Abbey often—peace in a chaotic world.”
—Veda Van Zee

“I just got back from the emergency room. I was so sick, but kept listening to your Dharma lessons on YouTube. They sure helped me make it through some rough hours today. At my sickest point I kept telling myself how fortunate I am to have found the teachings of the Buddha! Thank you for all you do!”
—Janet Hill

“The experience of talking philosophy with such wise, knowledgeable, careful, caring, and committed people was extraordinary, and one of the most rewarding teaching and learning experiences of my life. I will cherish both the memory and what I learned from you all in our interchange.”
—Professor Jay Garfield

“While we so miss the opportunity to spend time with you in person, I have never been so grateful for our connection to the Abbey as I am now. I watch the people around me, and they struggle. I give thanks every day for the tools I have to manage my emotions thanks to the Dharma. May you all continue to spread compassion, stability, and joy in the world until all beings are liberated.”
—Naomi Baker Delaloye

“Thank you for your profound and inspirational teachings; for offering moral leadership in a time devoid of leaders, and for your humor, brilliance, and insights.”
—Eric Stone
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Your gifts help shine the light of Dharma to help others. Only by working together can we create peace in a chaotic world.

“I know what you do there matters, so I want to help you continue to share the Dharma with the world. The example you live is a source of inspiration for thousands. I am in awe of the positive energy that all of you put out to the world every day!” —Howard Case

We value transparency in all our activities.

However, we no longer think it’s wise to publish financial reports or donors’ names on the web. Write the office for a complete copy of the Annual Report that includes the financial report and benefactors.
Thank you for all you give—time, material support, prayers, and good wishes. Your support as benefactors and volunteers brings ethics into action and sustains the Dharma. The Abbey community dedicates merit on your behalf daily and during our Lama Chopa puja twice a month. We love reciting your names out loud as we rejoice in your generosity.

Recent times have been hard. Yet we know firsthand that your generosity and kindness bring light into the world around you. We thank you—for showing up, for your offerings, and for your practice.