

Bhanté and Ed Pejack / Nimbu, Stockton

Posted on [December 18, 2014](#) by [Ed Pejack](#)

“Nimbu was a bit surprised to find himself in West Virginia at a civil war era mansion surrounded by several hundred mostly wooded acres and had attracted his attention several



weeks before when he learned of Claymont Court as a center of spiritual development, and of the Fourth Way. As it had happened, Nimbu was at a cocktail party in Arizona when someone pointed out a fellow who had once attended a spiritual retreat in England... for nine months. Nine months! Seeing that as quite a bit extraordinary, Nimbu worked his way through the cocktail party crowd, but unfortunately that individual had just left. Some inquiries later led to the information that this fellow, Gene, lived in a rather remote desert area. It wasn't easy but Nimbu and his friend tracked down that location, and soon were sitting in Gene's modest cottage. Gene would make rather expensive jewelry which was sold to Tiffany's in New York. Gene related how he had spent nine months at the Sherbourne retreat in England, but that there was a similar operation started by the same teacher, in West Virginia.

Being the month of August, Claymont was, at first, seemingly deserted. After chatting with a lone pottery maker on the road approaching the main house, enough courage was gathered to approach the formidable large mansion. A voice came out of a second floor window, “What do you want?” Whatever Nimbu muttered, it apparently was sufficient to achieve the response, “Nobody is here but you can talk to so-and-so.” Somehow Nimbu found a place down the road and through the woods and was invited in for tea. During the conversation, accompanied by a horrific rainstorm, something was said which gave Nimbu a jolt: “You are from Stockton, so you must know Bhante.” Nimbu's one-word response was, “Who?” His heart raced, and he thought, how can I be many miles from home in a chance meeting of a stranger and be asked

about someone with a strange name in my hometown? She said Bhante is a remarkable Cambodian Buddhist monk who has a temple in Stockton. Nimbu was pumped with surprise, curiosity and mystery.

Less than a week later Nimbu was back home with a friend, thinking about Bhante and the mysterious temple. (At the time Nimbu and his friend were fellow “seekers of the truth”, (as they envisioned themselves.) They were sitting in a restaurant sipping coffee and contemplating their predicament of finding the old monk, when something serendipitous occurred. Nimbu spied, at the other end of the restaurant, Father Murphy, a local Catholic Priest, ... and a slight acquaintance. To the waiter, Nimbu said, “See that priest over there?; bring me his bill”. Father Murphy wasn’t leaving just then, so Nimbu and his friend continued hashing over their usual deep (for them) philosophical questions of the universe and their spiritual path(s). Nimbu said, “There is a *Key* to all this, and we have to find the *Key*.” Then Father Murphy stopped at their table on his way out. They chatted briefly with Fr. Murphy and asked him if he knew Bhante and how to find him. “Sure, he said; he is at the temple on Carpenter Road, not far away, and he will be happy to see visitors.”

Next morning Nimbu and friend found the temple; actually it seemed a slightly decrepit prefabricated building. Nothing like the tall shiny gold covered temples Nimbu had once seen in Thailand. They were admitted by a lady, who, years later, they learned was Bhante’s grand daughter. They waited in the temple main room – for them a strange environment indeed. Full of Cambodian and Buddhist paraphernalia, artifacts, flowers and strange smells of spices and incense. Soon a man in orange robes came out of a side room, moving slowly and with a happy, magnetic smile. Right then Nimbu knew he was in the presence of someone with a profound presence. Extremely gracious, the monk offered a seat and tea and various Cambodian treats. They talked various pleasantries, and Bhante spoke of meditation, food, health, and other intriguing things. Bhante went on, “You are what you eat; you are what you drink...” and Nimbu’s mind raced along, thinking in a split second, that he understands the law of conservation of mass, laws of thermodynamics, and quite a bit of chemistry. He thought, it is no surprise to me that what material your body takes in will eventually construct your body of those materials. And Bhante continued....”You are what you *think*.” Now this was something new and profound. So my thoughts make me what I am? The power of thought hadn’t entered Nimbu’s education. What is the chemistry of *thought*? How could *thought* make me what I am? After a while, Bhante walked them to the door. He said, “Your job is to know yourself. You have to keep coming back until you know yourself.” He looked in Nimbu’s face and said “With meditation, you will find the *Key*.” Nimbu was a bit surprised at Bhante’s emphasis of the same word, *Key*, which Nimbu had used the evening before.

Nimbu soon found out more of Samdach Vira Dharmawara Mahathera, known to practically everybody as Bhante. He was reputed to be the oldest living Buddhist monk, about 102 at the time, born in Cambodia in 1889, and ordained in Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma. He was friend and advisor to Mahatma Ghandi, Nehru, Indira Ghandi , and the Dali Lama. In 1935 he went to India, and later in 1948 was given the Asoka Mission Vihara in Mehrauli, India by Nehru. He was known as a healer, using meditation, colored light and colored water in healing. Water would be placed in green glass bottles and placed in the sun for several days. The water then was supposed to have healing power. A bit open minded, Nimbu went along with the idea and often

placed green water bottles in the sun, and then drinking the water. Which prompts a side story here: On one occasion, Nimbu was engaged in demolition of an old wooden building. Throwing a large board onto a pile, the board flew up and scraped across his finger, driving a wood sliver completely through the center of one knuckle. The sliver had an inch sticking into the center of a knuckle and a quarter inch protruding out the other side. The finger joint could not be bent, and hurt like hell. Nimbu drove several miles home, and with pliers pulled out the wood sliver, then doused it with copious “green water”. Next day, Nimbu examined his fingers, and could not easily establish which finger had actually been injured; he had to examine closely to find a very small spot where the sliver had penetrated. Nimbu developed a good appreciation of Bhante’s healing, green water, and the power of mind. Depending on the disease, Bhante said other colors are needed. About meditation, he said meditation can cure every disease,... but not every patient.

Nimbu began making many visits to the temple, and soon a new large magnificent temple was rapidly constructed on the temple property with the donated aid of many local Cambodians. Over the following years Nimbu had the good fortune of sitting with him, either alone or with followers who would appear at any time at the temple. Bhante never used Nimbu’s first or last name, simply saying, when he arrived, Aaaah, Professor, as he liked to refer to Nimbu. Meditation was standard fare at Bhante visits. Breathing in...breathing out. ... Sometimes meditation was done while being bathed in green light, which Bhante considered as healing and soothing. Treat a random thought in meditation as an uninvited guest, he said. On one occasion, sitting alone with Bhante, Nimbu had a profound experience. Nimbu had the sense that his physical body seemed to evaporate and there he was with Bhante and Nimbu together in the spirit world. Bhante said, in spirit, I will show you my life. Like a three dimensional movie, Bhante and Nimbu journeyed through Bhante’s travels and life experiences; in the Indian jungles, teaching people, and getting worldwide acclaim. Bhante showed all his awards, honors and prizes, and looked at them all as “fluff”.

On one occasion, somewhat humorous, some Bhante followers and Nimbu once arranged to have Bhante come to his house to teach a meditation session to about 10 people. Bhante started by saying he wanted to sit on the floor, on a pillow. Then he wanted to sit on two pillows, then more and more pillows. Soon he was sitting precariously on a tower of pillows. Instead of sitting with the class, Nimbu became a bit apprehensive and thought that he must sit on the floor next to Bhante in case a pillow would come squishing out, or he might lean and topple over. Nimbu sat motionless the whole time, looking up at Bhante, muscles tensed, covered with sweat, ready to catch him. Later some of the students said how funny that was. At the door Nimbu had placed a small box labeled, *Bhante donations*. At the end of the class, there was a single 10 dollar note in the donation box. After driving Bhante back to the temple, and saying thanks and good night, Nimbu pressed \$100 into Bhante’s hand saying the group wants to make a donation. The \$100, of course, was the 10 from the box plus 90 from Nimbu’s own wallet. Bhante took the rolled up notes from Nimbu, and then Bhante pressed the notes back in Nimbu’s hand without saying a word. Being well aware that Bhante often accepted donations for the running of the temple, Nimbu was quite surprised, and began to get the sense that Bhante had objective consciousness.

As several years went by, Bhante began to move slower and slower. He said, “I am in the clutches of old age.” He began to walk less and less, then not at all, and then it was the wheel chair. Somehow he got summoned to a hospital for a “checkup”. Then came pharmaceuticals-

never before taken by him, and soon admission to a hospital. Word got around to the international community that Bhante was not well, and followers came to the temple from all over the world. Bhante began to speak less and less. But one day, alone with Bhante, Nimbu said, “Bhante, my mother died.” Bhante was not speaking at the moment, however a single tear rolled down his cheek. That meant so much to Nimbu.

A definite expression of joy came from Bhante one day in the hospital, when they said, Bhante, we are taking you home. Home was then on a pleasant street in a house that the many generous followers had rented for him. It was there on June 26, 1999 that, alone with his primary caregiver, after breakfast, he breathed out and didn't breathe in, ... and began his transition. What all the disciples knew but dreaded had come to be. Bhante was 110 years old.

Preparations for the funeral were unlike anything Nimbu had seen. *White*. Most of the disciples wore completely white; for men, white shoes, socks, pants, belt, and shirt. And shaved heads for men and women. Hundreds of new people, monks, followers, officials, and diplomats appeared at the temple. The temple became a beehive of activity. Packages of personal items were wrapped as gifts for the monks. The next thing that indelibly impressed upon Nimbu's memory of those days was the *roar*. The roar of the gas burners at the crematorium. Bhante's casket was wheeled to the open door of the huge furnace, with super bright flames inside. The actor Steven Segal, was right behind the casket, beside Nimbu, who was pleased and comforted by the way Segal emanating strength, placed both hands on the casket and guided it with intention into the fire.

Months later Nimbu and some disciples went to India to arrange details for the construction of a stupa at the Asoka Mission. There were many meetings with officials and senior monks to satisfy various protocols. Nimbu was a bit handicapped, to understate it, during this time, as he had received there an insect bite on the knee, which after a few days required walking painfully with a cane. Soon the leg went from red to swollen, and finally the leg was colored purple from groin to ankle, and grey in the middle. And extreme pain. Nimbu was dying. An email sent to his son said to pick him up at the airport and then go straight to the hospital. Alone in a room at 9 PM the hospital ward was totally quiet, and the ward doctor was making his rounds and eventually got to Nimbu's room. He called for his tools and a helper. While Nimbu hung onto the bed rails and bit into a towel, he cut and squeezed, and saved Nimbu's life. In the following weeks, Nimbu poured “green water” into the large hole in his leg.

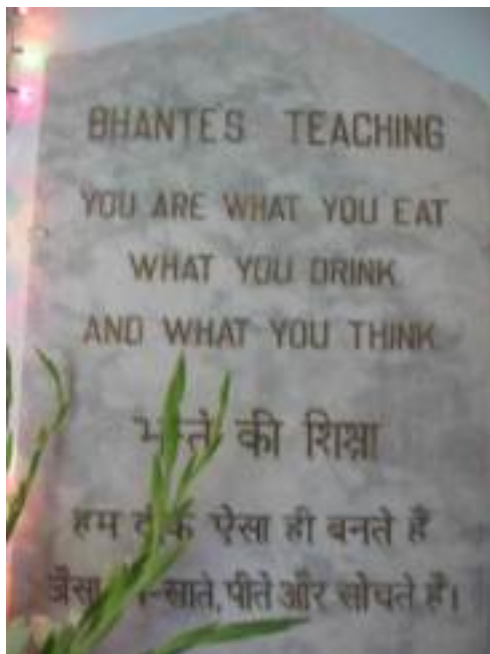
Three and a half months later Nimbu was back in Mehrauli, India at the Asoka Mission. The hole in his leg had healed over, and there was no effect on the knee. Nimbu had to return to India, but some people thought he was crazy. Meanwhile the main structure of the stupa at Asoka Mission had already been erected, and work proceeded on the entrance and interior. Nimbu went to a stone yard and bought large slabs of granite and marble, then hired a stone cutter to hand engrave some of Bhante's prayers and sayings for the inside

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of the stupa. On one slab is written, “You are what you eat. You are what you drink. You are what you *think*.” Soon it was New Year’s Eve 1999, the end of the millennium. It was cold at the Asoka Mission with no heat or hot water. With some monks, followers, local friends, and gifts of food and drink, a huge bonfire was built near the stupa and they cooked, drank, and talked on into the so called next century.

In the decades following, Bhante’s temple in Stockton has grown immensely. The temple has a large collection of sculpture (done by resident monks), lotus pond, and an impressive gate



and wall. Occasionally Nimbu visits and stands where Bhante used to take his “sun bath”, yet he cannot bring himself to go into Bhante’s old private room.

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A decade after Bhante's transition, Nimbu had a dream of Bhante. In the dream, Bhante was sitting on the ground with white powder all around. He was petting two small kittens. As Nimbu approached closely, he saw the white powder as ashes, and Bhante and the kittens were completely engulfed in fire. Some people were standing around in amazement. Nimbu moved closer but the heat was intense. Nimbu retreated to a nearby building, then returned to see Bhante sitting on the ground with some uninterested bystanders at a nearby table. Nimbu got real close to Bhante's face to see if Bhante would recognize him, and said, "Bhante, are you ready to come home?" Bhante looked at him intensely for a few seconds, then Bhante's eyes lit up and he recognized Nimbu and smiled and put his hand on the back of Nimbu's head and said something.