



**Offering Support to
Ajahn Thanasanti
&
Awakening Truth**

A Guide for the Lay Community

January 2010

Supporting Ajahn Thanasanti & Awakening Truth

Ajahn Thanasanti, as a ten-precept Theravada Buddhist nun in the Forest Tradition, has chosen to live in a way that may mystify many people raised in the West. Her lifestyle of renunciation not only requires her to live on faith — utterly dependent on others for her very survival — but also offers a unique opportunity for laypeople to deepen their understanding of the Dhamma through direct service.

While supporting monastics is an integral part of life in a Buddhist country like Thailand, it demands an adjustment for Westerners culturally attuned to self-reliance and independence. The process of reflecting on how, when, or even if, to offer support to Ajahn Thanasanti and her mission is, in itself, a fruit of the reciprocal, interdependent relationship between the monastery and the Sangha.

Monastics are trained to be content with what is offered, whether it is shelter for a night, a meal, or any of the Four Requisites (food, shelter, medicine, and robes). Please consider not only how your offering may serve Ajahn and her work, but also how it may serve you. As with *dana* (donations; see below), you are invited to investigate how you value the teachings in right relationship to your financial capacity.

The following suggestions are intended to help laypeople feel at ease when hosting or visiting Ajahn Thanasanti. In all cases, if you have a question about anything, please feel free to ask her for guidance.

Etiquette

- *Añjali* is a lovely gesture of respect that can be used when greeting a nun. The gesture consists of placing the palms together at the heart level. You may also bow slightly and smile if you wish!
- You may use either the title ‘Sister’ or ‘Ajahn,’ a term of respect for a nun of more than ten years standing. As of 2009, Ajahn Thanasanti had been a nun for 18 years.
- An invitation to offer requisites (*pavarana*: pronounced pa-var´-ana) can be made at any time. This involves asking Ajahn to let you know if there is anything she needs that you could offer. It’s helpful to be specific about what you have in mind, e.g., “Please let me know if you need transport to the retreat center,” or “I would like to offer to take you anywhere you need to go during the time of your stay,” or “Please let me know if you need any medicines/sandals/a toothbrush.”
- The monastery standard is that a nun should have another woman with her, if at all possible, when conversing with a man in a private or secluded place — including while driving — and during interviews. However, while establishing a monastery and until there is sufficient support to maintain this standard, exceptions are being made as necessary.

Teaching & Receiving Dhamma

- Ajahn Thanasanti, like all monastics, may teach Dhamma only when invited to do so.
- When Ajahn is giving a Dhamma talk, listeners should sit in a way that is attentive and respectful. It is customary for the teacher to sit on a slightly raised mat or chair.
- It is polite to avoid pointing the soles of the feet toward a Buddha image or any person when sitting.
- When listening to a Dhamma talk it is respectful to remove any headwear (unless for health reasons one needs to cover the head).
- Ajahn Thanasanti offers individual and group interviews to both men and women.

Transportation

- Even if Ajahn is traveling with an attendant with a car, hosts are asked to arrange for transportation to/from Dhamma talks, daylong retreats, interviews, appointments, and rejuvenating trips to natural places. This is both practical and gives Ajahn the welcome opportunity to spend time with members of your community.
- Please check with Ajahn whether she'd like to talk about Dhamma or drive in silence.
- If possible, it's best for Ajahn to travel in the company of at least one woman.

Shelter

- Hosts are asked to provide a simple private room in any household that includes a woman unless Ajahn is traveling with her attendant or another nun; they can share a room, if necessary. A private bathroom, while not essential, is ideal. In warm weather, a tent or other outdoor sleeping space is often welcome.
- Ajahn travels with her laptop and is happy to have WiFi access and occasional printing and faxing.
- Ajahn is highly attuned to when she's available for interaction or needs to rest; do let her know when you may also need quiet time.
- Please do not feel that you need to entertain her!

Rejuvenation & Entertainment

- Nature and meditation are Ajahn Thanasanti's key healing resources. Offers to take her to beautiful natural places where she can walk and/or be still are warmly welcomed.
- Monastics from the Forest Tradition refrain from activities that may make them look undignified in public, so they do not participate in yoga classes and the like. Bike riding is allowed only for necessary transportation, not for sport.

Meals & Afternoon Tea

- In the Forest Tradition, monastics may receive meals only between dawn and noon (1:00 pm during daylight savings), so Ajahn needs the nourishment most people get during an entire day in two early meals! Her level of intake varies from day to day. She cannot consume food or drink, other than water, unless it is explicitly offered by body (i.e., physically handed to her or placed in the alms bowl), speech (e.g., saying, “This is for you, please help yourself”), or other arrangement (e.g., a note indicating that a particular item has been offered).
- Breakfast can be offered to her directly, or if that is not possible (e.g., you've gone to work or are still in bed; sometimes she's up and hungry very early!), food can be left out the night before with a written invitation for her to help herself. You can leave milk and juice in the fridge or direct her to heat something up in the microwave; just put this in the note. If Ajahn is traveling with an attendant, she can take care of this.
- Vegetarian protein is most welcome. Please minimize cooking with garlic, however, if possible.
- There are certain ‘medicinal allowances’ (or ‘allowables’) that can be offered after noon. These include tea, juice, hard cheese, miso, crystallized ginger, dark chocolate, sugar, honey, and soymilk. Some hard cheese and vegetable juice (like carrot juice) or fruit juice in the afternoon is ideal. Most days Ajahn needs a little something in the afternoon or early evening, so please remember to offer it — whether at the house or away — if you can!
- Through the miracle of the Internet, well-wishers may also make [meal offerings](#) by proxy, wherever in the world they are!

Money & Dana

- *Dana* means ‘generosity’ in both Pali and Sanskrit. In Buddhist tradition, the teachings are considered priceless and so every effort is made to see that they are accessible to everyone interested. *The highest form of generosity is to take the teachings to heart and put them into practice; that is the greatest way that the teachers can be repaid for their teaching.* It is also true that in order to live, teachers’ basic needs must be met. The Theravada tradition supports itself only on the free-will donations of those who offer. Giving *dana* is meant to purify and transform the mind of the giver who has benefited from the teachings and is used to support the teacher’s material needs as well as her ongoing spiritual development. In addition to material needs that can be offered directly or sponsored with donations, there are many ways that your time, effort, and skills can be offered so that the Sangha may continue, the vision of Awakening Truth may become a manifest reality, and others can benefit from the teachings.
- Ajahn cannot receive, carry, or use money, although money substitutes, such as transit tickets, frequent flyer miles, or gift cards, are acceptable. If you wish to offer something for her personal use, the item can either be offered directly or funds can be given to her attendant or a layperson who can purchase the item and offer it to her. [Meal purchases](#) and tax-deductible donations are most welcome and can be made via [PayPal](#) at <http://www.awakeningtruth.org>. <http://www.awakeningtruth.org>.
- The host of a talk or retreat may give any *dana* collected in the form of cash or check to Ajahn’s attendant, send a [check](#), or make a [PayPal contribution](#) to [Awakening Truth](#).
- Ajahn can often use help with transcription, text or sound editing. Please contact info@awakeningtruth.org if you can help in this way.
- Bringing the vision of Awakening Truth to fruition is a complex undertaking, and offerings of skills, knowledge, and contacts to help develop the infrastructure, funding base, and organization (including outreach, graphics, web development, computer support, data base management, logistics, land acquisition, grantwriting/grantmaking, and more) are much needed and highly welcome. Please contact info@awakeningtruth.org to offer your support.

Much metta! May your offerings bring you abundant joy and return many-fold for your own benefit and for the benefit of the world!

Gratefully adapted from the [Guide for Laypeople](#) at www.saranaloka.org