

# Buddhist monks seek insight in Boulder Creek

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STAFF WRITER

A gong sounds at 3 a.m. The monks rise from their chairs, where they have spent the night in meditation or in slumber, and gather in the main room at the monastery.

There they meditate for an hour or so, then go their separate ways for study, rest or more meditation.

Every day begins like this at the Taungpulu Kaba-Aye Buddhist monastery in Boulder Creek, where six monks — five Burmese and a German — live an ascetic life in the forest tradition established by a Buddhist monk in Burma some 40 years ago.

The monks practice Vipassana, a form of meditation that strives for awareness and clarity of mind. They live in the forest, as do their counterparts in Burma. They also teach their meditation to those who come to the monastery to study. The practice includes group meditation and chanting, solitary medi-

tation and walking meditation. As Monika Landenhamer, the monastery housekeeper, put it, "The goal is to be mindful at every single moment."

After the morning meditation, at about 8:30 a.m., the monks do their walking meditation for a half-hour or so.

Meanwhile, Landenhamer and Bob Stahl, who pretty much runs the monastery and, as he says, does "everything from cleaning the toilet bowls to cooking," have begun their day.

They take breakfast up to the head of the monastery, 80-year-old Venerable Hlaing Tet Sayadaw, at 8:30 a.m., and by 10 are busy in the kitchen preparing the food for the "offering" to the rest of the monks at about 10:30.

In Burma, Landenhamer explained, the monks would

go through the village with their begging bowls, large round lacquered vessels with lids, and villagers would fill the bowls with food. The monks do not adhere to a particular regimen, such as vegetarianism, but instead eat whatever is offered them.

But a group of brown-robed monks begging for food in

Boulder Creek probably wouldn't bring the desired result, so food is cooked in the monastery kitchen, or sometimes families will come, bringing food for the monks with them.

When the meal is ready, a gong is sounded, and the monks line up with their bowls. On a recent day, they were served a chicken curry someone had made and brought to the monastery.

mashed potatoes, stir-fried vegetables, fried bread, fruit, salad, peanuts and cinnamon rolls. The monks eat only one meal a day, always finishing before noon, when the sun is at its highest point.

"We have to make sure they get something substantial," Landenhamer said.

After the meal, the monks have time to themselves, to take showers, wash their robes and take care of the monastery. Any food left over from their meal is taken to the forest to feed the bees, deer, birds and a host of resident cats.

Tom Williams, the president of the board of directors of the monastery, said its operation is paid for by donations. A large Burmese community has settled in Mountain View and San Jose, he said. In Burma, he said, it is not unusual for people to give 25 percent of their income to the monks.

As president, Williams is trying to make the monastery more solvent by offering retreats and overnight stays. On Saturdays, from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., the monastery offers group meditation for anyone who wants to come.

The Boulder Creek monas-

tery was opened in 1981. It occupies what was built as a private home and was most recently a school on 5.6 acres up the road from the Boulder Creek Golf and Country Club.

This particular form of Buddhism has been in the United States about 12 years, Williams said. The order of forest monks in Burma was begun by the Venerable Taungpulu Tawya Kaba-Aye Sayadaw, a monk who spent his days in meditation in the Burmese forests. He came to the United States in 1978 at the invitation of Bay Area Buddhists, and a monastery was established in a rented house in San Mateo.

In 1981, the group of American Buddhists had raised enough money to put a down payment on the Boulder Creek land, and the Taungpulu Kaba-Aye Monastery was born.

The monks themselves are friendly and open, happy to talk to a stranger through their interpreter and fellow monk, U Pandita. Their main observation about life in Boulder Creek is that, after tropical Burma, it's cold.

"We have to be very patient with the weather," U Pandita said.

The monks cannot work for money, U Pandita said, but must instead rely on offerings for food, shelter, clothing and medicine. Being relieved of the necessity to seek these things for themselves frees the monks to live religious lives, he said.

After their daily meal and personal time, the monks see students and answer questions, beginning about 2 p.m.

Between sunset and darkness, the monks gather again for chanting, and at night retire to their rooms, which have no beds. It is part of their asceticism that they do not lie down.

Instead, they continue to meditate sitting in their chairs. If they happen to fall asleep, the gong will awaken them again at 3 a.m.

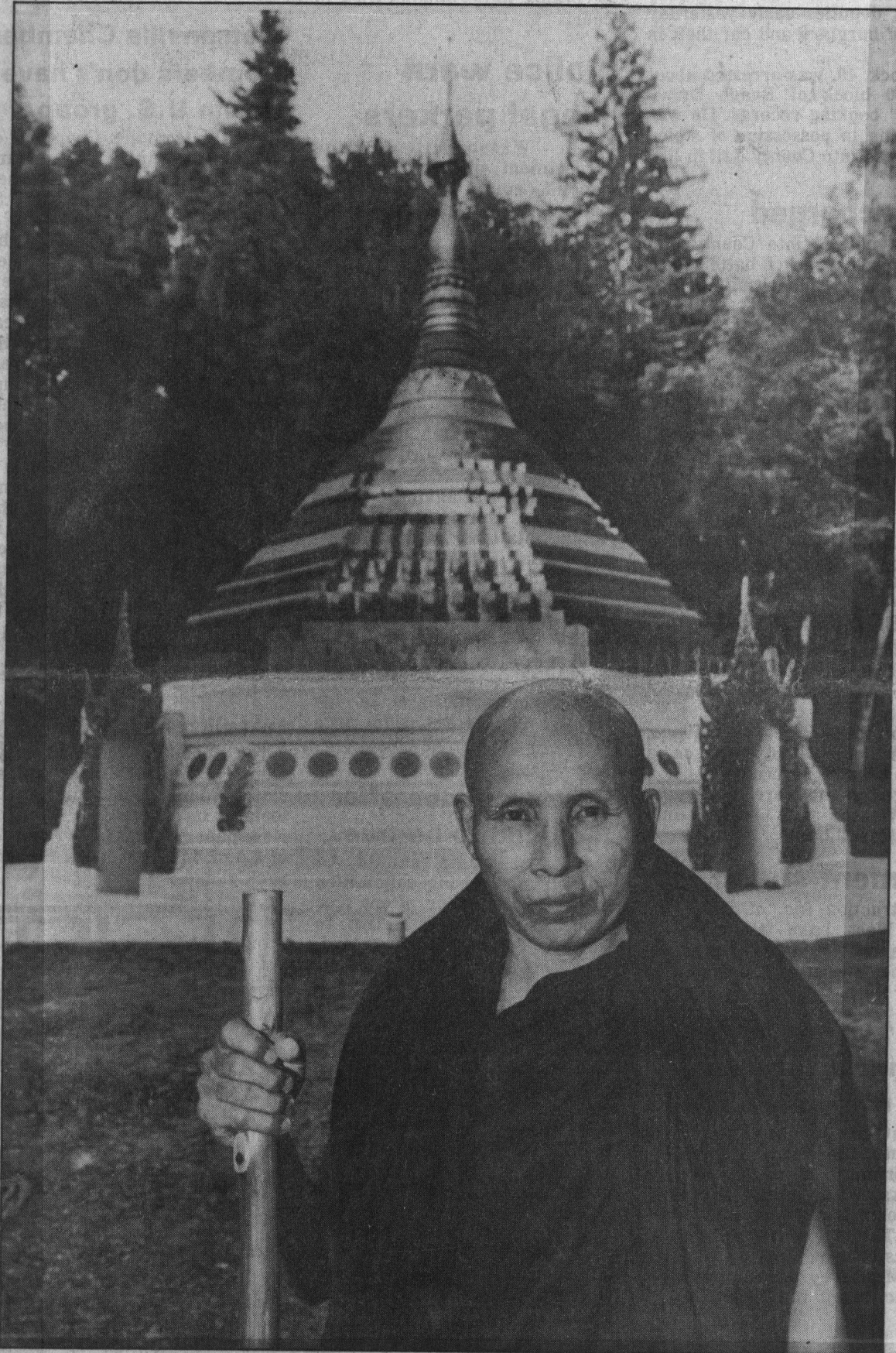


Pokkoku Sayadaw

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-pajaronian  
March 28, 1987

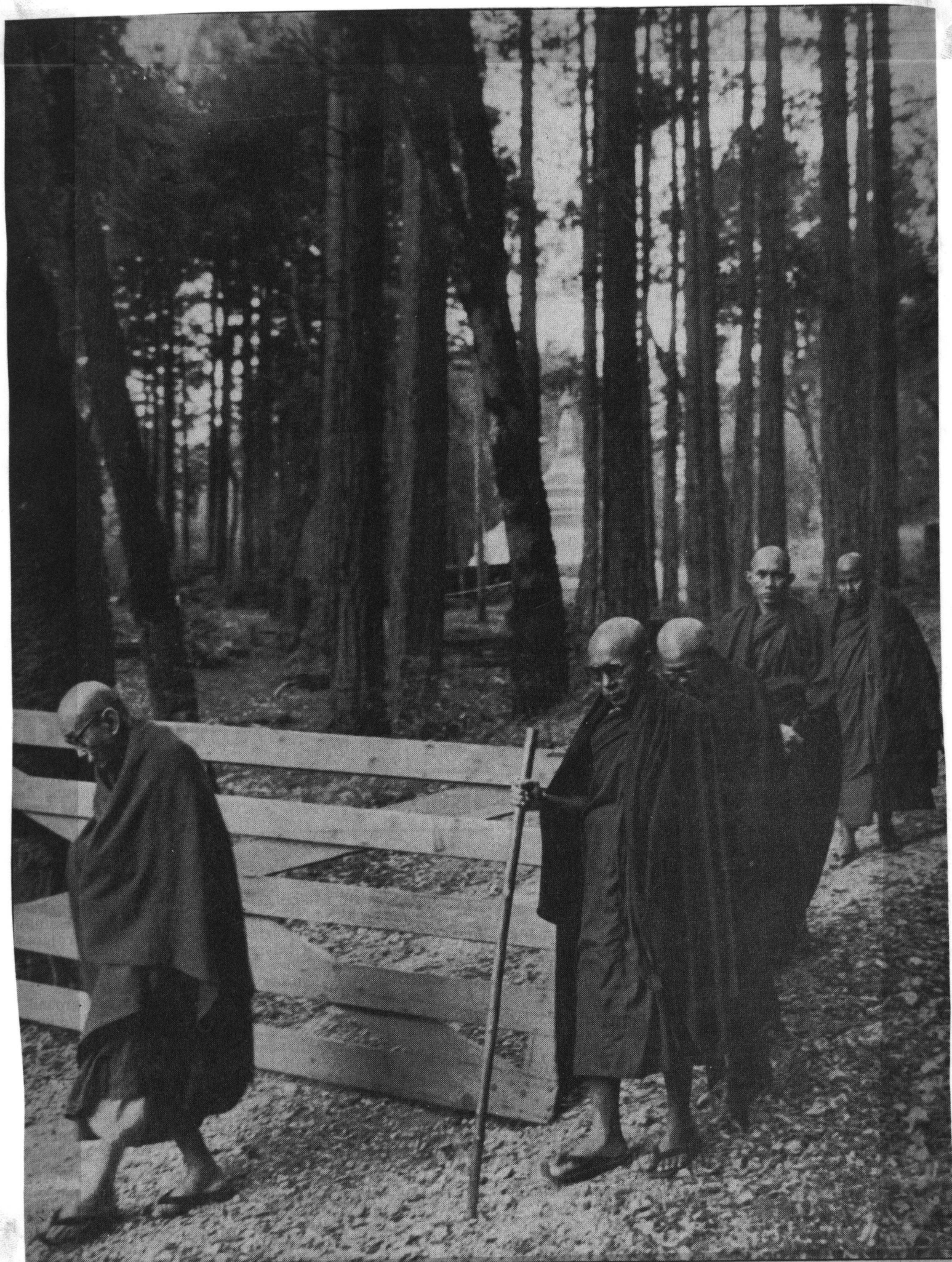
# Looking inward



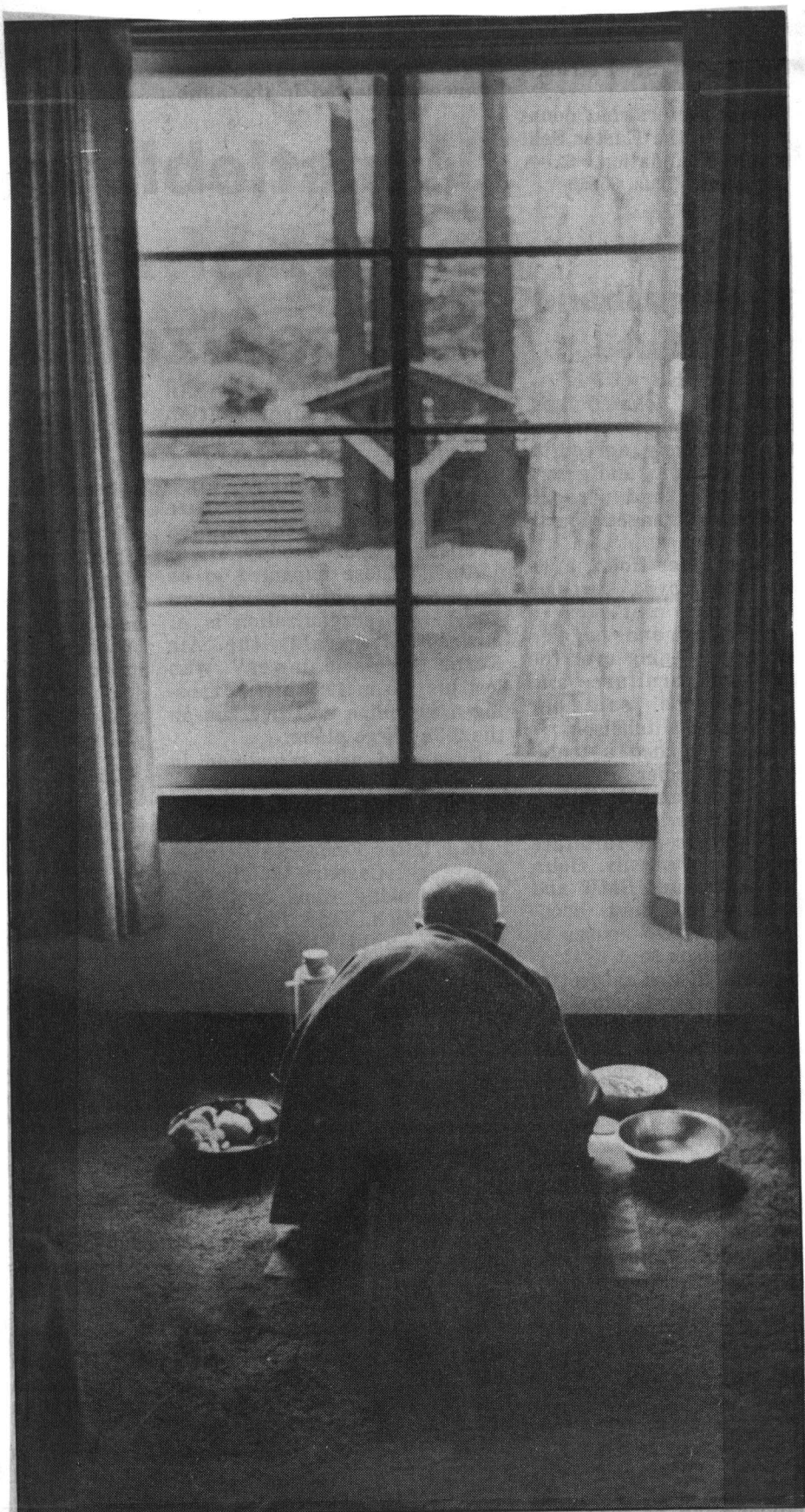
Pokkoku Sayadaw stands before the Golden World Peace Pagoda.

Chip Scheuer



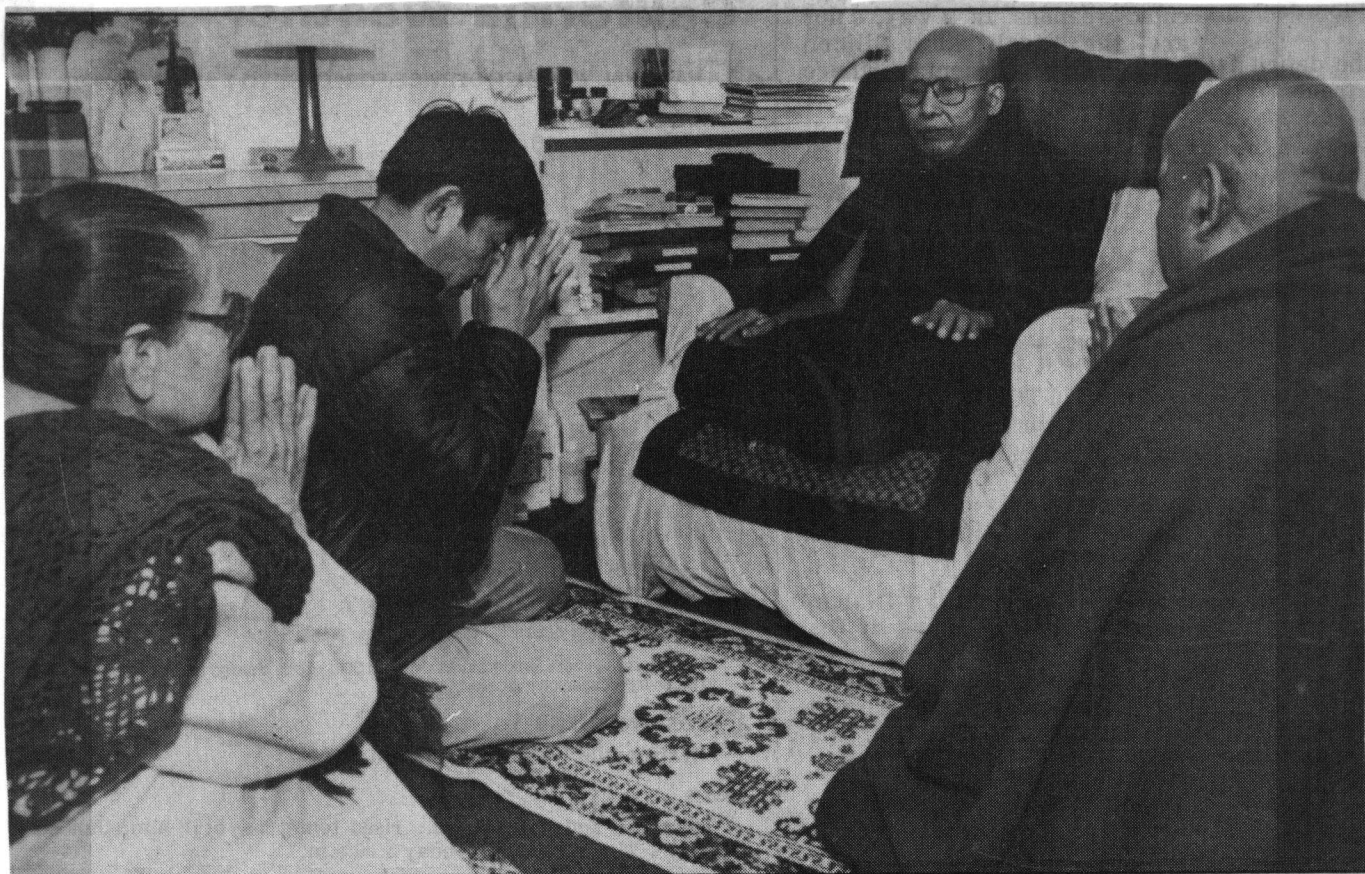


The monks, led by Hlaing Tet Sayadaw, practice walking meditation in the forest.

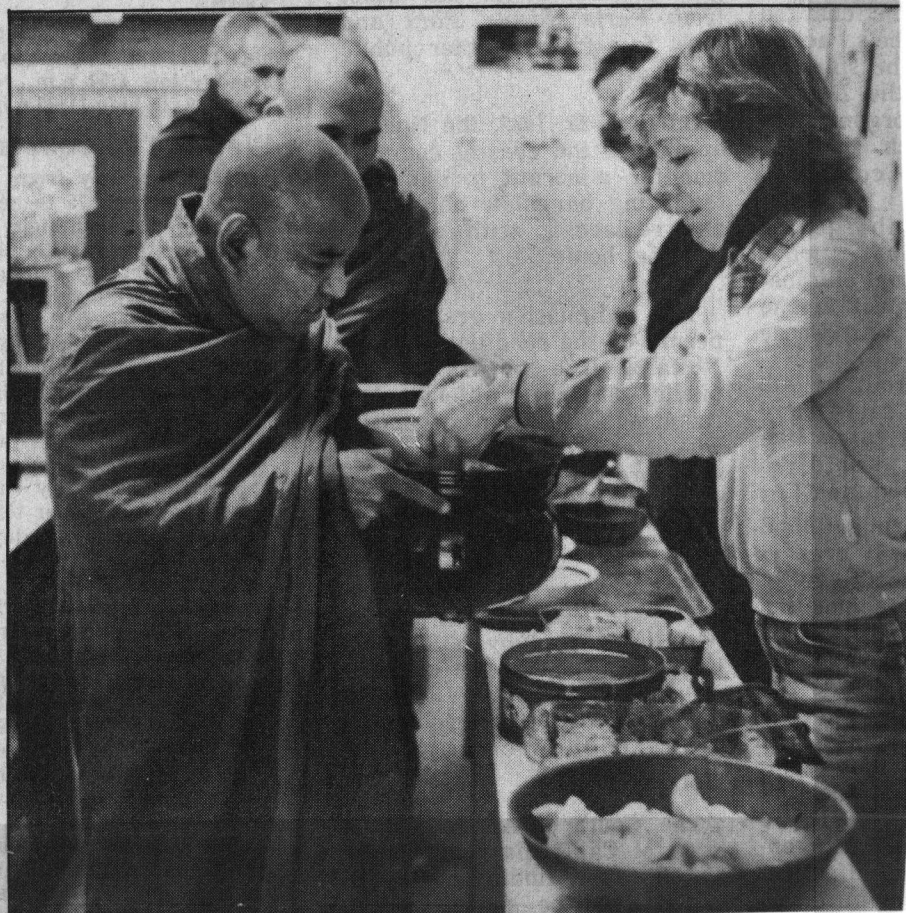


A meal is taken in solitude.





Photos by  
Chip Scheuer



Above, students gather  
in Pokkoku Sayadaw's  
room. Food is offered,  
right, at 10:30 a.m.