

## Cittaviveka Newsletter April 2010



By all accounts the winter, in Britain and throughout Europe, was a hard one and many small creatures perished. Around Cittaviveka, the lanes were closed, rendered impassable through snow, so that no- one could get in for 9 days. There were other factors that made life tough. Controversies and feelings around the way that the relationship between the monks and nuns had been framed as a 5- point statement had been in the air since the autumn. This coincided with a separation between Bodhinyana Monastery in Australia and the group of 'Ajahn Chah' monasteries centred in Thailand - also around the topic of nuns, or more exactly around the process of induction into the Sangha. In a dual-gender community in which issues around autonomy and relationship are an ongoing topic, all these had their effects. Consequently and understandably, waves of confusion and dissonance rippled out through the lay community, and with many reports (often with conflicting 'facts' and interpretations) circulating through the internet, it was hard to keep up with, let alone ride out, the waves, and to handle the heart of the matter.

This of course is an ongoing process, and again I start the year with new resolves and attempts to manage a dynamic that feels very charged, essential – and possibly enlightening. Perhaps it couldn't be any other way. Over the past 30 years the ethos of our communities, rooted in the Buddhist tradition of N.E. Thailand, has merged remarkably well with the situation in the contemporary West. We honour those who have gone before us – the noble ones of this tradition, and the standards that have been laid down. This conveys a sense of human lineage- as our forbearers did, so do we - and offers continuity and belonging. And there's also the need to give consideration to contemporary conditions. Through holding both and looking into our own hearts, we can get a sense of what is wholesome to pick up - a Dhamma-practice that aspires to go further than reactions, views and opinions. What is most important is that our relationship to conventions and forms become clear, and that it is underpinned with respect. A willingness to meet, to consider differences and to accommodate or separate without enmity must be held as the key themes. With this in mind, societies and individuals can grow, proceed in accord with their kamma and live their lives as best they see fit. Then when that layer of reality settles, it's possible to see through the world of forms, and address the causative energies that generate it. What goes into creating self and other? In and out of meditation, I find myself entering in the modest practice of 'Breathing in.. breathing out.. May I be well, may others be well.' It helps.

This was also a winter that brought separation. First of all our long-term treasurer and back-up , Richard and Elaine, felt that in the current climate they could not continue to offer their voluntary support. Shortly after this, news came in that our old friend and former monk Savako had taken his life after years of intense depression. So this was a bitter blow; we had maintained connection through phone contact and visits, but somehow this, medication, and a range of treatments wasn't enough.

Life reminds us that separation is part of the norm – and in monastic life, scarcely a day goes by without a request for chanting for the dead, the dying or the bereaved. What softens the blow is when we can separate with care and stay with the Dhamma. In this respect when Ajahn Thitamedha announced her intention to leave the community (but not the robes) - at least for a few years - it was less of a shock. She has been here 16 years, and surely it's time for her to spread her wings. Sr. Jotipaṇṇa will also be going off, for a six-month sabbatical, May-October. Bhikkhus too: in a few months' time we'll be saying 'see you later' to Ven Narado and Ajahn Thanuttaro.

However the spring has brought some benevolent growth. Two women were recently given the Going

Forth at Amaravati, and we hope that in due course of time, we'll see them here. Meanwhile, Ven. Hiriko and Sr. Brahmavara have joined the community. On the lay side of things, we have two new volunteers - Graham and Jill – who have offered to oversee the finances and, as Richard has been offering time to induct them in procedure, we expect a fairly smooth transition.

Finances themselves offer a story of gain and loss, as is the way of things. We seemed to be arriving at a comfortable balance in the middle of last year, with a sudden bequest dramatically reducing the Rocana debt, and a plan to replace the nuns' Meditation Hall coming into activation... until the company that was constructing the Hall went bankrupt, thereby taking the £20,000 deposit we'd given to construct the pre-fabricated building, with them into insolvency. So whether the Hall can go ahead this year is uncertain. Also the fate of the replacement Western Paradise kuti for the senior monk is not yet clear. This is because there is also a legal need for a re-wiring of the electrical system in the Main House and the nuns' residences. Along with this, the local authorities insisted that we have a fire risk assessment, and consequently install more fire doors, notices and safety devices. All this requires professional skill, employment – and cost. Thus the finances are in deficit again. Sometimes one wonders if the odds are really stacked against living a simple contemplative life in the West. Just keeping in touch with all the areas is a major task.

Bearing all this in mind, all of us have reason to feel grateful that so far we do; so far there is the faith and the patience and the generosity to keep things going. There is the spring of the spirit, as it manifests through the lay and monastic communities. Internally it sustains contemplative practice, and externally the energy and faith comes forth as service; with much management now overseen by the lay community. Wonderfully it's all voluntary. From this spiritual root, as the season warms up, things start to open and blossom.

On May 30th we'll be celebrating Wesak, the day of the Buddha's Awakening with among meditations, talks and readings, the Going Forth into homelessness of anagarika Craig. Then on June 20<sup>th</sup> the next stage of the cloister will be commemoratively opened - this will include a gateway over the main entrance to the walled garden, and a bell-tower which will hold the 'Savako bell.' This day will be commemorated with a festival (Thod Pa Pah) bringing people together from many countries and ethnic communities. After that, as befits our woodland ethos, there will be a forest conservation week July 4-10<sup>th</sup>. This occasion will be similar to the autumnal 'forest work month' but with a greater emphasis on conservation. If you're interested in a few days' work with the community in the forest, please contact 'Forest Work' via the monastery.

Back on the contemplative side of things, this year we enter the three months' Rains Retreat on July 27th, after the Asalha puja full moon vigil. Please come and join us for the occasion!

*Ajahn Sucitto*

Our friend Graham Dean is composing a database of volunteers. If anyone has particular skills or would like to offer some of their time to support the monastery, Graham has offered to keep a record of contacts, so the Sangha can approach him when a need arises. Driving, cooking, decorating, publishing, sewing, gardening and many other offers are welcome.

Anyone interested can contact him via email at; [cbmvolunteers@googlemail.com](mailto:cbmvolunteers@googlemail.com)