



# Cittaviveka

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## Spring 09

In these days of global recession the so-called real world has been looking more ungrounded and ephemeral than ever. When corporations that were 'worth' \$200 billion are declared bankrupt overnight, the collection of manipulated fantasies and gambles that dominates the world gets rudely exposed. And with it the cruelty of its greed, which has such real and painful effects on people's lives. But even as people start to see the 'greed-myth' of global finance, and the 'hate-myth' of 'the war on terror' as they really are, there can still remain the delusion that this is the real world and there is no other.

However, at Cittaviveka monastery, we try to uphold a different set of values. Sharing, fewness of needs, compassion, and integrity. Impractical? Yet it works, as it has for millennia, because this world-view is more closely related to the realities that sustain human life, and when people see it, those with a little dust in their eyes know it's the real thing. People here are ordinary - ordinary sorrows, joys and warmth - and that's what makes it even more real. The unusual element is that here we have the privilege of living in a way that cuts off the poisonous impingement and messages, and allows people to live and act from the heart. And the results for this quarter are: a modest growth rate (up to 20 monastics and six lay people); full employment in cultivation of mind; a stability of views and outlooks; regular influx of generosity and appreciation; general well-being and sporadic delight. Not bad at all.

The monastery and all those in it are now coming out of the 'suspended animation' mode of the three-month retreat. Actually it's fairer to say that animation wasn't suspended but directed to aims and efforts that are not always apparent to the external senses – except as a palpable atmosphere of collectedness. On weekends things would liven up a little with visitors bringing food offerings and coming for the weekend Dhamma-talks; but the sense of gathering, of enthusiasm and of sharing in what the resident community are involved with adds energy to the atmosphere. This complements the periods of solitude that characterised most of the twelve or so weeks. When one is reminded of the humanity that we all share, with its struggles, aspirations, and dogged persistence, there is a widening of perspective that keeps the practice from getting stale.

This year we were using teachings on the five aggregates to guide the retreat, as these five - form, feeling, perception, activities and consciousness – make up our everyday experience whether we're meditating or not. The key aggregate is 'activities' (*sankhara*) – the area of impulse and intention that takes us into what we're doing and how. These activities speak in a range of tones, from the urgent 'got to get it done' to the persuasive 'another one of these and I'll be satisfied' and the undermining 'it's all right for some, but never going to work for me.' You may have heard them and a few more. Being mindful of these activities is a way to understand the kind of kamma that following them can create, simply because mindfulness and awareness penetrate past the voices to feel their underlying harshness or gladness or agitation. Mindfulness and full awareness give you a chance to not be seduced by activities – in your own mind, or in the media. You can know for yourself directly whether you're laying down bright or dark kamma – with its results. So the focus on mental activities is an invaluable one for everyday life, and something not to bury under being too busy. The very flurry that occurs that makes it feel that we don't have time to meditate is one of the main reasons why we actually *need* to meditate: who wants to be acting from a base of flurry, agitation and compulsion? Scarcely a day goes by in the monastery without being asked to chant blessings on behalf of people who are dying or have died. It reminds us of what we're all hurrying towards – and the need to make this very day, this very moment, something that is bright and worthwhile. Recession or not, meditation offers an opportunity to find one's good intention, and feel the value and the brightness of that. Unlike everything else, it doesn't have to leave you.

After the retreat, things start moving. One of the first moves will be to induct a new member into the community, as one of our long-term guests has proved himself to have the consistent capacity to taking up the anagarika training. In a similar vein, samanera Kondañño will be taking up bhikkhu ordination – at Amaravati on July 4th, and it's likely that there will be one or two samanera ordinations in the summer.

Another major move will be that of Ajahn Upekkha, who after 21 living as a siladhara, will be leaving with the intention of living as a nun on her own in London. She hopes to be able to serve with hospice work and, if things develop, create a situation wherein she can offer guidance on meditation. You can contact her directly here if you are interested in her plans. On similar lines, Ajahn Thānasanti is expected back here in late April but she is intending to set her affairs in order before leaving for all stations west, including America and Australia. We send our good wishes with them both.

It is also the season for wandering. The sight of samanas in the world is an offering; it can serve as a reminder that ways of living in the world based on harmlessness, faith and honesty are possible. This year, I'll be having a couple of months of leave to undertake a wanderer's practice, generally going west, but staying in England. For me it's a way to celebrate my coming 60th year; returning to the roots of the samana's lifestyle feels very appropriate. I expect to leave towards the end of April, and return at the beginning of July. However I have arranged to return to the monastery for the Pha Pa (see below) as this is an international event that I wouldn't want to miss.

Meanwhile there will be business as usual at the monastery. Apart from the Dhamma-presentations around the weekend, the bigger events will be the Wesak gathering and celebration on Sunday May 10th, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Fund-Raising gathering (*Thod Pha Pa*) on June 14th. As you may know, the gathering is an occasion when people from many nations come together to offer support for the Sangha – most specifically to sponsor the construction of the covered walkway and the purchase of Rocana Vihara. (Contrary to previous expectations, the Rocana debt is not yet paid off, but reduced to the region of £100,000.) The walkway serves as a walking meditation path, and also to shelter people from the elements as they move between the Dhamma Hall and the Main House – an important function in the British climate. This year we hope to add the section immediately over the main entrance where people come in and out of the walled garden area. Last year's Pha Pa was a very warm and happy occasion, with people from Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Burma and Japan to name but a few. Groups even bussed in from France to be present for the day. (If you'd like a free DVD of the occasions so far, please contact one of the names at the end of this letter.)

With the majority of the community being relatively new to the training, then it's always important that there are more experienced monks and nuns to guide and mentor. So our outreach is limited. Mostly we visit local groups, have parties of school groups here, do one or two international teaching tours, and give regular teachings at the monastery. However we have moved a little further on in our technology, and thanks to know-how from one of our lay residents can now send out podcasts. This means that if you have internet access you can download a Dhamma-talk at home. We are also upgrading our website to include more teachings in audio and text format to be available. All this takes a while, because most of us, myself included, don't have a clue with regards to all this, and it takes input from the lay side of things to move the hardware along.

However, if you can, I'd still recommend coming for a visit. There are dimensions that can't be experienced through tape, text or audio-file. And for me, still after all these years, it's about real people being ordinary—clearly and really ordinary.

*Ajahn Sucitto*

For details of Pha Pa and a free DVD please contact:  
Phouang Prasith 01903 531031 or 0773 335 8225  
Pichit Rhatdanaglang 01273 473906 or 0790 018 0926  
Phongsak Kaewsakun 01273 733246 or 0794 436 1817  
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