



Cittaviveka

Chithurst Buddhist Monastery

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I returned from my two-months' walk through Britain on July 4th via an ordination at Amaravati, in which our 'home-grown' samanera Kondañño morphed into bhikkhu-hood. So that the two very inspiring events joined up – the going forth that had begun with me walking out of Cittaviveka on a rainy morning in late April with a rucksack on my back and the Going Forth into the training in bhikkhu conduct and interdependency. It was good to see how the two (or the three if one includes my own Going Forth as a bhikkhu 33 years ago) fitted together. In this Gone Forth life one can feel very much defined by a monastery, but what the Buddha laid down, and our wise teachers have stressed, is that we really live in a training vehicle, rather than in buildings. This vehicle, the Vinaya Discipline, is one that guides us in terms of our ethical standards, our material needs and our relationships. Now, as the community here settles in to the traditional Rains Retreat (Vassa) with its emphasis on meditation and study of the Vinaya, we attend again to developing skills in riding the vehicle along the unpredictable track of daily life. It's taking a little while to get everyone together – Ajahn Kovida and Anagarika Bryony are still out on their tudong as I write, Ajahn Thitamedha has just returned from teaching in Russia, and Srs Jotipañña and Sumedha are also out on walkabout. So we're slightly out of sync – most of the nuns will be entering the second Rains, while the male community has entered the first. The track isn't always so even.

Tudong – the long walk – is said to shake off attachments; however when I look back at the joy of living simply, camping in woodlands, being offered alms-food spontaneously on the streets of small towns and villages; and when I recall the days spent with established lay supporters – there's a certain urge to get out and do it again. Yet there's enough recollection of how physically tough it could get, with the body strained and stiff, blistered feet and all the rest of it, to feel very grateful for a roof over my head, a hot shower and the unsurpassed set-up that the monastery provides for formal meditation practice. And there is also the uplift of seeing that this samana life is appreciated by enough people to make a monastery of this size a possibility.

One of the most dramatic presentations of support came when I returned briefly during the two months just for the occasion of the International Thod Pha Pa (*tort pa-pa*). This surpassed all expectations by drawing around 1,000 people together in the act of offering the material support to roof the Cloister and help with the construction of the new nuns' Shrine Room. From a rational perspective you may wonder "How can offering money be such a happy occasion?" Or "Why drive all the way from France, why not just send a cheque?" But this line of thinking misses the point – you don't go sailing, or walk tudong, or travel from A to B. It's how you do it and who you meet on the way that's the heart of the matter. Generosity becomes doubly or trebly joyous when it supports a shared occasion, a meeting of old friends and a making of new ones, and participation in the life of a Dhamma tradition that dates back to the time of the Buddha. It's strengthening to know the breadth of humanity that shares the values of harmlessness, kindness, and purifying the mind. It always feels meaningful to be adding one's bit, either through tudong, ordination, meditation, service or fund-raising, towards making a gift to the future. The power of this is increased when we individuals come together; our efforts can sustain a Dhamma that will nourish those who are as yet unborn.

The Pha Pa was created because with only one Kathina a year, there weren't enough opportunities to experience what such occasions bring. But while I'm on the topic – planning for this year's **Kathina on October 18th** is already underway. This year it will be sponsored and organized through Mr and Mrs Makalanda and Mr and Mrs

Siriwardena, but as you are probably aware, the event is never brought to fruition by two families alone. The sponsors catalyse and lead the event, but it always brings together people from all the regions and ethnic communities who support Cittaviveka. This is one of its main purposes, so please come along! The only other point I'd make concerns what you give, because to be pragmatic about it, the most useful thing to give is what is most useful! We have plenty of tea, coffee, toothpaste, washing-up liquid, ball-point pens, and notepads. Having our own well, we never need bottled water. Periodically we give our surpluses of these things (as well as surplus food) away to charity shops, shelters, and nursing homes. This in itself is no bad thing, and we are happy to pass on what we don't need to those who do. However if you're interested in specifically helping the monastery, then please have a look at the Kathina list (which will be sent out in the next few weeks), or phone to ask what we're in short supply of – often it's general items such as hammers, screws, and brooms, but sometimes it's more specialised, like the bulbs that fit the Dhamma-Hall lights. The thing that is always universally useful is money. The samanans may not handle it, but building contractors, mechanics, and Insurance Companies have a steady appetite for the stuff. If you look at the Treasurer's Report, you'll notice that the monastery is in debt, and only covers its costs through the regular donations from other EST funds. You'll probably also see that the big item of expenditure is on maintenance – please note that all funds go to this purpose, unless specifically dedicated in another direction – to Rocana Vihara and the Nuns' Shrine Room for example. Regular small donations, say through a standing order, are ideal as they help the management draw up a realistic budget, and that budget provides the reference to expected income on which all our expenditure hinges.

As to why it should be supported, I guess it's because the monastery preserves a precious space of trust, peace and encouragement that continues to benefit many people. The central feature of that space is the integrity of all who live and visit here, but specifically that of the Gone Forth community. The Going Forth will receive another boost on August 20th when three of our residents will make the commitment to samanera (novice monk) training. This commitment is a significant one for anchoring the mind in Dhamma, and it gives me joy to sense that the monastery can continue to serve people's spiritual aspirations in this way. It takes in quite a range, too: this Vassa 25 people from 14 countries, speaking 11 languages have come together here for Dhamma-practice. We have a visiting Dutch mahathera from Sri Lanka, a Malaysian monk and a Portuguese monk from Amaravati both of five Vassas, along with an Irish monk who has spent 30 something years in Japan and whose straight Zen back is a joy to behold. In terms of lay visitors, the scope is even wider: at any meeting with guests I might find myself talking to guests from Estonia, Czech Republic, Austria, America, France and Italy. Cittaviveka is an established Refuge where Dhamma is freely available through talks, literature, and environment and it's good to think that something of that can go out and be shared to the wider world.

Although it's a place where the endangered species of silence, stillness and Dhamma-wisdom can flourish, Cittaviveka is also a place where wild animals – bats, deer, rabbits and badgers – can roam freely. This is partly thanks to many years of work in re-establishing native woodland in Hammer Wood. Much work has been done and is bearing fruit in terms of young trees and increase in wild animals. Last year a few new areas were cleared and planted, which I hope future generations will enjoy. As part of our gift to the future, we also support the natural world. And this year again there's the 'Forest Work Month' – actually a three-week session of tending the young trees, clearing undergrowth, stacking firewood and generally breathing fresh air. So there's an opportunity for four laymen to join the Sangha in this valuable and enjoyable project. Please write to 'Forest Work' at the monastery if you're interested in taking part!

*With many good wishes
Ajahn Sucitto*