



## **Dear Friends of Cittaviveka, warm greetings,**

Here we are at the end of the year, and the flora and fauna in the Northern Hemisphere are becoming dormant or less active. For most of our communities in the West, we take the opportunity to use this period of enhanced quietude for our annual Winter Retreat, from early January through until the end of March. As in years past, apart from not having short-term overnight guests and the Sunday afternoon Q&A, and although we will be engaging less, we're open to visitors.

Winter Retreats are a good opportunity to spend time away in another community or setting. So, during the weeks leading up to it, there will be a fair amount of coming and going here at the monastery. Although for some of us, this can be slightly unsettling, it offers us an excellent opportunity to work with the key Buddhist reflections on impermanence and instability. 'Am I suffering from these changes?' Instead of trying to stabilise the conditions around us, we adapt mindfully to the flow.

## **Elders**

Over the summer and early autumn, Luang Por Sucitto was away from Chithurst for approximately five months in North America. After several days here in November, he was back out on the Dhamma trail, leading retreats and visiting some of our communities in Europe. He arrived back at Chithurst in mid-December, in time to settle in for the Winter Retreat. Ajahn Karuniko departed shortly after our Kathina in early November, visiting Asia, New Zealand and Australia. He is expected to return to Chithurst in mid-April. Similar to Luang Por Sucitto, during his travels he will be sharing Dhamma teachings, as well as connecting with a variety of monastic communities. He will also take some time for a personal retreat.

## **Precept Ceremonies**

November and December have seen three precept ceremonies take place here at the monastery. On Sunday, 24 November, Anagārika Craig formally requested the Samanera Pabbajja or novice 'Going Forth', during which he was offered the Pali name Varacitto, which means 'noble' or 'excellent minded'. When taking on the Samanera training, two very significant things change, among many others: giving up the use of money and wearing the ochre robes. One truly becomes an alms mendicant.

On Saturday, 30 November, long-term lay guest Tulipe formally requested the Three Refuges and Eight Precepts of the anagārikā training, with Ajahn Cittapala as the preceptor. The ceremony was woven into the regular Saturday evening programme, so there were many people in attendance, which offered added support to the event. Ajahn Cittapala then offered a Dhamma talk, further welcoming Anagārikā Tulipe to the women's monastic community.

Lastly, eight days later, after the midday meal on Sunday, 8 December, long-term guest Bram had his ceremony for taking on the anagārika training in a ceremony very similar to Anagārikā Tulipe's, as mentioned above. Anagārika Bram commits to dedicate himself to this training for one year. And like Anagārikā Tulipe, we welcome him to the community with warmth and care.

For all three of these ceremonies, with the technology at hand, we were able to live stream them via the monastery's YouTube channel, making it possible for family and friends unable to be here in person to watch and be part of it from afar.

## **Forest Work**

Our annual Forest Month took place from 13 November through 4 December, with several people coming to stay in the monastery or as day visitors to support caring for the precious forest we have here. Led by a core team of both monastics and lay people, our Forest Manager, Chris Matthews, guided people through various tasks. We're grateful for all of the good-hearted support our community received.

## **Upcoming Events**

On Tuesday, 31 December, we will have a meditation vigil to see out the old year and bring in the New Year. The evening programme will commence at 7.30 pm and include chanting and silent meditation. At this time, whether or not a Dhamma talk is offered is uncertain. Weather permitting, just before midnight, we will circumambulate the Ajahn Chah Memorial Stupa before ending the evening.

The following day, Wednesday, 1 January, Cittaviveka plans to once again offer the lay community the opportunity to participate in a Precept Renewal Ceremony, formally requesting the Three Refuges and Five Precepts commencing at 3:00 pm in the Dhamma Hall and led by senior monastics. People planning to participate may wish to bring a small bundle of candles (one or two), incense and flowers. A teatime Q&A with a senior monastic follows at 5.00 pm in the main house.

Thursday, 16 January, marks Ajahn Chah's 33rd death anniversary. On that evening, like New Year's Eve, we will have a meditation vigil commencing at 7.30 pm. The programme will include chanting, silent meditation and a Dhamma talk. Weather permitting, we will circumambulate the Ajahn Chah Memorial Stupa. The evening will conclude at midnight.

As for the usual festivals that take place in the spring — Songkran (Asian New Year), Wesak (recollection of the birth, enlightenment and final passing away of the Buddha) and a Tort Pha Ba (almsgiving ceremony) — those dates will be announced closer to the time.

## **Farewell**

This past year has seen the passing of two close friends of Cittaviveka, Margaret Robbins and Robert 'Tavaro' Brown. Margaret passed away on 12 April after a short illness, and Tavaro, whose health had been slowly declining, passed away on 17 November. Both have lived locally for many years, these two friends of our community were regular and dedicated Dhamma practitioners, and their presence will be greatly missed.

## **Gratitude**

This year's Kathina Festival took place on 3 November with a lovely atmosphere of joyful participation and generosity. An estimated 650-700 people attended and harmoniously spent time together enjoying the event. Even the weather cooperated! This festival highlights the symbiotic relationship between the monastic and broader communities. We wish to express our thanks to everyone who attended, as well as separate appreciation to the volunteers who made the event possible, in particular this year's Kathina sponsors, Aor Parsons, her husband Alan and their son Oak.

With all good wishes and season's greetings from the entire Cittaviveka community,

Ajahn Ahimsako

Abbot — Cittaviveka, Chithurst Buddhist Monastery