

DANA IN THALEBA

30 JANUARY 2009



In the tent for the dana ceremony, Thaleba

In late January 2009, we travelled to Thaleba. Thaleba is the native village of Chanmyay Myaing Sayadaw and some of the monks and helpers who stay at the Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre (CMMC). Thaleba is situated in Upper Burma, it is about a three-hour's drive from Mandalay to the north-west. Our group consisted of Chanmyay Myaing Sayadaw (Myanmar), U Aggadassi (Mexico), Daw Virañani (USA), Marjo (Ireland), Marianne (Australia), Heidi (Macau), Mimmi (Myanmar), Ma Thwet (Myanmar), U Ba Wun (Myanmar), and myself (Switzerland).

We had it all very neatly organised: Some of our group went by car to Mandalay, some of us took the early morning plane to Mandalay. A car was organised to pick us up at the airport in Mandalay and then drive us directly to Thaleba just in time for lunch. Well, that was the plan. Unfortunately, we got stuck at the airport in Yangon due to thick fog. No plane was allowed to start until the fog had cleared. With more than two hours delay we finally took off. But that was too late to make it to Thaleba in time for lunch. Poor people in Thaleba who must have prepared a sumptuous meal for us!!!

We stopped at a restaurant on the way and had lunch there. When I strolled through the back yard I noticed that some of the Gango trees had already flowers. Usually, the Gango trees flower in March. As I looked up at the beautiful flowers the lady from the restaurant came over and offered me a bunch of these beautiful and fragrant flowers.



The Jasmin Building, offered by the Firefly Mission Singapore

When we finally got to Thaleba, we were welcomed by all the students and teachers who stood at the side of the road. As there are more than six hundred students at the school in Thaleba we passed a long row of girls and boys. For me it was quite a sight to see them standing respectfully at the side of the road with their hands in anjali (folded in front of the chest; this is a sign of respect) and chanting metta phrases. When I passed them, I was very touched and I wanted to hug each of them. Of course, that would not have been appropriate under those circumstances and, therefore, I offered them a big smile as a response and wished them to be happy and well.

When we reached the school, they took us to the new building where they had arranged for us to stay. Last year the Firefly Mission in Singapore had offered this two-storey building.

In the later part of the stroll around the village into their house. They local snacks like peanuts, a special cake/cookie made beans. I considered myself and, therefore, not allowed evening. The others soon a hard time to reject the every house.



Ma Thwet's family

afternoon and in the evening, we Many of the people invited us offered us some Chinese tea and fried fish from the nearby river, of rice flour and sugar, or fried to be very lucky that I was a nun to eat in the afternoon and started to be so full that they had snacks that kept being offered in

The next morning started as we had finished the previous day: with visits to peoples' houses. But the time was limited as we had to go back to the school for THE big event of the day, namely the dana-ceremony.

We had organised that all of the 612 students of the school got new uniforms. In December, the green fabric for the longyi (sarongs) and the white fabric for the blouses were bought in Mandalay and brought to Thaleba. Then a couple of skilled women in Thaleba sewed all the uniforms to be ready for the distribution on January 30.

Another urgent need was a water tank for the school. The water needed for drinking and flushing the toilets had to be carried in buckets which was hard work for the students. We decided to offer a water tank and a water pump on the premises of the school. After the decision had been made in early January they immediately started to build the water tank. By the time we visited Thaleba we could see the structure of the water tank.



The new water tank under construction



The students are silently waiting

U Aggadassi and Heidi brought some stationery to be distributed to the students. This included: a little bag with a pen and a pencil, an eraser, a pencil sharpener, a note book, a ruler, coloured pencils, and a colouring book.

When we came to the school, the students were already sitting under the temporary tent, waiting in great anticipation for the ceremony to start.

The ceremony started with great pomp: to the sounds of gongs, drums, and oboes Sayadaw and some local Sayadaws were led to their seats in the front of the tent. As it is tradition Sayadaw started the ceremony with the recitation of the refuges and the five precepts. This was followed by speeches given by different persons: the headmaster of the school, the local Sayadaw, Chanmyay Myaing Sayadaw, a person from the local authority, and myself. In my speech, I pointed out that the

uniforms, the stationery, the water tank, the water pump, and lunch were offered by Dhamma friends from all over the world. These offerings were not only offered by our group of foreigners present that day, but well-wishers and benefactors from every corner of the world were contributing to these offerings. I asked the students how they could say „Thank you“ to all the benefactors who were not present. It was easy to say „Thank you“ and express their appreciation to those well-

wishers present in Thaleba on that day. [As a matter of fact, we heard many words of appreciation and on the day we left, they gave a bottle of local honey and a shawl to each of us. On top of that we received bags of locally produced fried beans.] I suggested that each time they wear the uniform or use a pen they could radiate metta (loving kindness) to the donors. In that way, they can express their gratitude toward the benefactors and at the same time they cultivate a good wholesome mental state which is beneficial for themselves.



A student receiving his uniform

Then finally, the distribution of the offerings started. I think the students were really looking forward to this moment. But I have to say that I was amazed by how still the students could sit during the whole ceremony. Here in the West, the kids would have been fidgeting and doing all sorts of naughty things. They were told to queue up, first the youngest students and at the end of the queue the older students. Then they filed one by one in front of us, and each of us handed them one of the offerings.



Students receive pens, rulers, notebooks, a colouring book, etc.



A happy day for all



Mimmi



Marjo



Marianne



U Aggadassi



Heidi

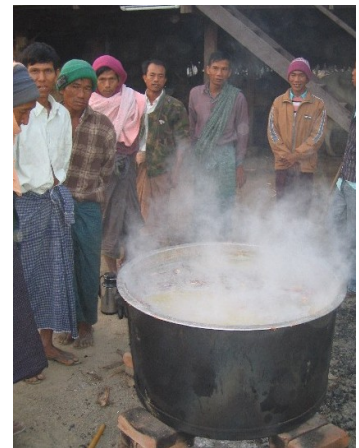
When we were done with this, it was time for lunch. A group of village people had prepared a special meal for the students: rice, fish curry, bean soup, mango pickles, and chilies.



The students are radiating metta to the meal donors before eating

In order to be ready for lunch time, which was at eleven o'clock, they had to cook the rice the night before. Imagine to cook rice for more than six hundred students and teachers! And you must know that even small kids can easily eat two or three heaped plates of rice.

The donations for the uniforms, the water tank, the water pump, and lunch for all the students amounted to 4'771'000 kyats (a bit more than 4000 US\$).



The villagers behind the huge pot with bean soup

After lunch we crossed the river Mu on a small boat and went to Kyaugone village which is the native village of one residential monk and one helper in CMMC. We passed the village and went straight to the newly established pagoda. The pagoda was built with much support of the villagers. They contributed to this beautiful structure with

voluntary work such as baking bricks or carrying sand. It is situated in the middle of fields, away from the busy-ness that even village life can produce. The local people and a couple of monks invited us to help paint the last remaining bits of the pagoda. In this way, we got the rare opportunity to paint a pagoda.



The pagoda in Kyaugone

The remaining part of the day was similar to the previous afternoon: visiting peoples' houses in Kyaugone and Thaleba and eating snacks, at least for those who were able to eat!



Thaleba and Kyaugone are situated on the river Mu



Two grandfathers watching the ceremony from a distance.....

Although I have been to Thaleba a year ago, I was still overwhelmed by so much hospitality in that remote village. Or probably it is just BECAUSE they are so remote that they have kept this human trait of hospitality so alive and intact! These village people are working very hard in the fields

(planting peanuts, rice, and different kinds of beans) and at home (carrying water from the river, doing a lot of work by hand; they have no electricity), and yet they smile and share what little they have.

Interestingly, the ground is not only fertile to plant a variety of crops but Thaleba village and some neighbouring villages are also fertile

ground to produce a number of learned monks. Among these monks are Thamaney Kyaw (a disciple of Sayadaw U Pandita) and Sayadaw U Jagara (who passed an exam which only a small number of monks are able to pass).

On the following morning we left very early because we wanted to go to the famous Po Win Daung Caves near Monywa. These caves were only recently opened to tourists. Many of the caves are in poor condition, but they have incredibly beautiful and precious wall paintings as well as unique Buddha statues. The wall paintings reminded me a bit of the wall paintings in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries or thangkas.



Wall painting, Po Win Daung Caves

May all of you rejoice in the support and help that has been made possible through your generous and heartfelt donations! May each thought of rejoicing brighten up your day and bring happiness and peace into your heart.

With metta
Ariya Ñani