

DANAS IN THE DELTA



A village in the Irrawaddy delta

During my stay in Burma we organized two danas in the delta. These danas needed a lot of organization and preparation in order to get the offerings to those places. As before, we could count on Chanmyay Myaing Sayadaw's organizational skills and expertise. Especially the first dana was a maha-dana, a donation that included eight different things to be offered to people in five villages.



Rice, potatoes, onions, beans, washing powder, candles, Burmese medicines (the oil barrels are not on the picture)

We offered 2 viss of rice to every person in these five villages. The remaining offerings were per household, they included: 1 viss of oil, 1 viss of potatoes, 1 viss of beans, 1 viss of onions, 1 packet of washing powder, 1 packet of candles, and three kinds of Burmese medicine. (1 viss = 1.6 kg)

The rice could be bought in Twante, all the other things were bought in Yangon and then transported to Twante with the monastery truck. It took three trips with the truck to Twante to get



Where the danas went

everything there. From Twante all the things were transported by boat to Seik Gyi Village, the biggest of these five villages. Everything was brought to the little monastery in Seik Gyi Village where the locals packed the potatoes, beans, and onions into 1 viss-bags. On the day of the donation everything was neatly prepared, packed, and ready to be distributed.

VILLAGE	HOUSES	POPULATION
Kyun Thi Village	192	880
Kyi Su Village	110	396
Seik Gyi Village	369	728
Tau Ku Village	172	880
Kyun Kalay Village	95	300
	Total Houses: 938	Total Population: 3184

On January 18, 2009, we left Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre very early in the morning. It was about a two and a half hour's drive to the town of Twante. The first thing we did upon arrival was to have breakfast in the house of some devotees. They offered us mohinga, the traditional Burmese breakfast dish which consists of fermented rice noodles with soup. After eating the delicious mohinga – everybody liked it – fruit and cakes as well as coffee were offered by the very generous devotees.

Then we went to the jetty where a boat was ready to take us to our destination. It was about a one and a half hour's ride on the boat. As we were passing villages on the way we noticed that many houses had still the blue (or yellow or white) tarps with which people had fixed their roofs or walls after cyclone Nargis had hit the delta.



Loading the boat for Kyun Kalay village

We were heartily welcomed in Seik Gyi village! It was teeming with people and activity. Many people from Seik Gyi village, Kyun Thi village, and Kyi Su village had gathered at the little monastery. Because Kyun Kalay village was too far away for everybody to come they loaded their share of the offerings on smaller boats. Later on that day, the people of Kyun Kalay village got their share of rice, oil, etc. Unfortunately, we could not be present for the distribution in that village.

Before the distribution could start we had to engage in another – somehow important, or at least necessary – activity, namely to eat lunch! The devotees from Twante had prepared many curries and taken them to Seik Gyi village. As we were regarded very special guests, guests of honour, they wanted to offer a good and decent meal. It would have been difficult for the people in Seik Gy village to cook such a big variety of curries. The food was indeed very delicious and many local people watched us eating. This is nothing unusual in Burma.

When people offer food to monks, nuns, or other special guest, the hosts never eat together with the guest but they stand or sit by the side of the table and watch the guests eating. They also make sure that the bowls are always filled with curries. After eating the main dish they take away the plates, remove the bowls with the curries, and bring smaller plates for the dessert. Usually, the table is too small for everything to be placed on the table at once. So then, they bring all the plates with the dessert which usually includes fruit, cakes, jelly, and lapet. Lapet is another typical Burmese dish that one cannot find outside Burma. Lapet is made from fermented tea leaves and it is eaten together with peanuts, different fried beans, and fried garlic. Lapet is not only eaten as a dessert but also as a snack at any time of the day. It can even be eaten with rice instead of a curry.

Finally, the distribution of our offerings could start. All the villagers gathered on the ground floor of the monastery and Sayadaw started the ceremony with the recitation of the refuges and the five precepts. This was followed by a short Dhamma talk (given by Sayadaw) and a few words of rejoicing by myself. Then we took our position at and besides the table with the offerings. Daw Virañani, Carol, Marjo, and Mimmi distributed candles, washing powder, and the Burmese medicines. I handed them a plastic bag filled with the potatoes, onions, and beans.



Daw Virañani, Mimmi, Marjo, and Carol.....



.....distributing candles, washing powder & Burmese medicine

The people were called by name and one by one passed in front of us receiving this much needed support. When all the bags were distributed and the table empty, the distribution of the rice and oil started. Again each family was called by name and they came forth to get the allocated amount of rice and oil.

We were told that cyclone Nargis had destroyed one hundred of the one hundred and sixty houses in that part of the village. Because of our limited time we did not have a chance to wander around in the village to see the condition of the houses. But I got the impression that everybody in the village had a place to live.

Wherever I looked, I saw happy and smiling faces. For these people this day must have been an especially auspicious day. To get so many things at once must have been a rare and joyous event. In order to show their



Daw Ariya Ñani distributing oil



The villagers' offering to us

gratitude they offered us some local produce such as gourds, bitter gourds, bananas, corn, flowers, and plants. In the following week, the kitchen in our centre cooked delicious curries with these vegetables.

Seik Gyi village has a primary school with ninety students and five teachers. We briefly walked over to the school where all the kids were waiting for us. The school is a simple wooden building with one big room which means that the five teachers teach in the same room! This is not uncommon in rural Burma. We had brought some wafers and candies for the kids. Already the sight of these goodies made them excited and their eyes shining! Very happily they received these goodies – and a short time later the path in front of the school was decorated with green and pink wrappers.....! Of course, they do not yet have an environmental consciousness as we Westerners have. It will take some time for them to learn and understand that plastic does not disintegrate as banana leaves or bamboo fibers do.

We could not stay until the last grain of rice and the last drop of oil had been distributed because we had to move on to Tau Ku village. The local Sayadaw and some villagers accompanied us to the river and waved us off. On the picture you can see that the Sayadaw is standing on a tree stump, a 'memorial' from cyclone Nargis.



The Sayadaw standing on a tree stump



Welcome in Tau Ku village

The welcome in Tau Ku Village was impressive: the villagers stood at the bank of the river carrying big bundles of straw. Because the shore was a bit muddy, they covered the ground with straw so that our feet and slippers did not get dirty!

In Tau Ku village, the distribution of rice, etc. was done in front of the house closest to the river. All the villagers had already gathered, eagerly waiting to get their share. First we were led into the house where they offered us something to drink, a gesture of hospitality one cannot reject. After a short while we went outside and took our positions. Here we distributed everything in one go: somebody measured the amount of rice a household was to receive and the others distributed the remaining things.



Marjo handing out rice



..... and Carol distributing onions

It was such a joyous thing to hand out all these different things, knowing that each item was a precious and helpful thing for these people. I was so immersed in handing out candles or rice or onions that I was not aware of how fast the time was going by. I was very delighted to be able to put these things in peoples' hands or bags and I wish you could have seen their big smiles and shining eyes!

If it had not been for your generous support, we would not have been able to organize this dana. Therefore, at this place I want to express my deep gratitude and appreciation for your precious support. Some of you have more than once offered a valuable contribution for our activities. I do not take it for granted that donations keep flowing in, but the fact that they do shows that many of you deeply care for the Burmese people. And this makes me extremely happy because the Burmese people „have grown into my heart,“ as we say in German.

In the late afternoon, we took the boat back to Twante. We stopped at the monastery where the local organization of this dana had been done. We offered rice and oil to the monastery and the same eight kinds of offerings to the villagers living near the monastery. As a



The 'mob' in Twante

special treat we had organized wafers and candies for the kids. They were extremely excited to get these rare treats

and when we started to distribute the wafers and candies the kids started to push and fight. We repeatedly told them to queue up and wait until it was their turn, but they would not listen to our words. Some of them tried to get the sweets two or even three times. Finally, we had to tell them to sit down and not move until we had distributed all the goodies. This last offering to the kids was a stark contrast to all the other offerings which were

carried out very orderly and systematically. But, of course, it was a very memorable event and I could well understand the kids' frantic and uncontrolled behaviour.



Villagers in Seik Gyi village

The second dana in the delta took place on 28 February 2009. We went to Dedan village which is past the town of Dedaye and not too far away from the sea (see map). Some devotees welcomed us at the entrance of the town of Dedaye and following their car we drove about forty-five minutes to the south-west of Dedaye. There we had to get into a narrow boat which took us to the monastery of Dedan village. It was about a twenty minutes' ride on narrow and picturesque canals.



On the way to Dedan village



Dedan monastery

When we got off the boat, they lead us to the monastery - or to what was once a monastery. It had been severely damaged during the cyclone. Only parts of a few walls were remaining, everything else had been destroyed. The monks had made a makeshift 'monastery' with tarps and tin sheets. In the front part of the open room we could see a couple of beds. This was the 'private' space of two of the monks residing there. Fixed on one of the wooden poles I noticed a little plastic basket in which the tooth paste and the tooth brush were put away. The living conditions are incredibly basic. There are eight monks and two nuns living in that monastery.



Inside the monastery



*Inside the monastery, in the back:
Sayadaw's 'room'*

The people of the village had already gathered in the 'monastery' and the rice and candles had also been prepared. As usual, Sayadaw started the dana-ceremony with the recitation of the refuges and the five precepts which was followed by a short Dhamma talk. First we offered the things to the residing Sayadaw and to one of the nuns (the other nun had gone to Bogalay for a few days). And then the people could come forward to receive a bag of rice and two packets of candles. We also offered a few bags of rice to the monastery as well as some money to buy additional food. When we learned that they were making a foot path from the road to the monastery, we offered some money to complete the path.

All too soon we had to leave. The small boat took us back to the road. There they showed us the beginning of the foot path going to the monastery. We could see the beginning of the path on the other side of a small wooden bridge. The path had not yet been finished, it consisted of big chunks of dirt. I wanted to check it out and so I walked over the bridge. When I made the first step onto the path, I noticed that the earth was still quite soft. I stayed on the very right side of the path where the earth seemed to be a bit firmer. Behind me were Sayadaw, Daw Virañani, U Ba Wun, and the devotees from Dedaye town. Sayadaw stepped on the path on its left side - and immediately sunk into the muddy earth with his right foot! U Myint Kyaw had to hold his arm so that Sayadaw could pull out his foot. It took some exertion to get his foot out, but



People going home after the dana

his slipper stuck deep in the mud. U Myint Kyaw had to dig it out with his hands and then wash it in the nearby water ditch. A lady from the nearby house who noticed what had happened came with a towel and cleaned Sayadaw's muddy foot. It was a rather amusing incident and we all had a good laugh – even Sayadaw!



The new path



*Sayadaw made it safely
back to the bridge...*

The two danas in the delta amounted to fourteen millions kyats or about twelve thousand US dollars. Without you we would not have been able to organize and carry out these danas – and without us you would not have had the opportunity to directly and personally benefit a great number of needy people in Burma. May you rejoice in your goodness and derive much joy and happiness from your generosity. May it brighten up your heart whenever you think of the Burmese people who have eaten 'your' rice, washed their clothes with 'your' washing powder, or are now living in a house offered by 'you.'

With metta
Ariya Ñani



Our group and the devotees from Twante with Tau Ku Sayadaw

PS.

Last year we offered money to U Chando, a monk living in Sinchayyar village near the town of Laputta (in the delta), to repair the monastery and the gate and to build new houses for the villagers. In March, he came to our centre and brought pictures of the new houses as well as the monastery and gate that had been repaired or rebuilt. At least the monastery buildings have been repaired and people could move into their new houses. However, U Chando said that the supply of clean drinking water for the monastery and the villagers is another project that needs to be taken care of.



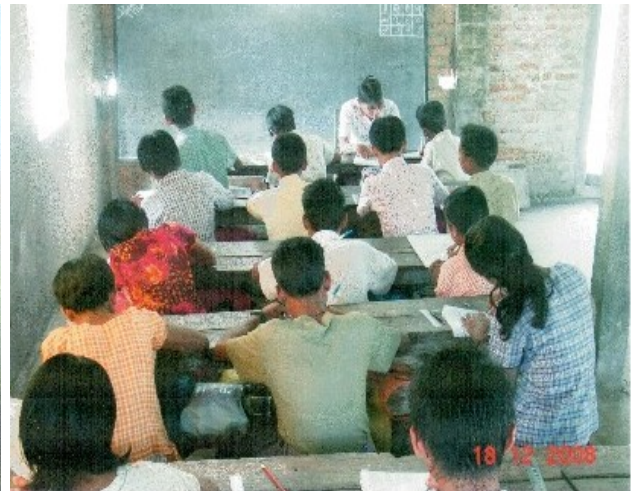
The monastery - after Nargis destroyed the roof and entrance



The roof and entrance have been repaired



The new houses in Sinchayyar village



The school has also been repaired



The monastery gate lying on the ground



The new monastery gate