

# I LIKE WHAT YOU DO !



*The villagers on their way to the meditation hall*

The news of another rice offering spread like a bush fire in Laydaungkan village. On the days of the distribution people flocked early to the gate of CMMC in order not to miss this precious opportunity. Young mothers with their small kids, teenagers wearing trousers (instead of the traditional longyi), or skinny old grannies were all eagerly waiting for the gates to open.

To organise this rice dana, Sayadaw U Indaka worked together with the village elders. First of all they provided a list of all the families living in Laydaungkan village. Last year we offered rice to 1190 families in Laydaungkan, this year there are 1430 families living in the village next to CMMC.



*Listening to the Dhamma talk*

The village elders distributed the paper tokens that a volunteer at the centre had prepared. Because of the big number of people, the distribution of the rice was held over three days. The first day coincided with the birthday celebration of the free medical clinic (more about this below).

Before the rice was distributed the villagers gathered in the meditation hall where Sayadaw U Indaka gave a short Dhamma talk. The talk was preceded by taking the refuges and the five precepts which is usually done before a Dhamma talk is given. Sayadaw urged them not to be forgetful in regard to carrying out wholesome and meritorious deeds. He then explained the benefits

of doing good deeds and refraining from engaging in bad deeds. In short, he encouraged them to live a good life and to have a good heart.



*Two young lads who had helped preparing the rice bags*

After the talk, young and old streamed out of the meditation hall and stood in line, excitedly waiting to get their share of rice. Early in the morning, a group of young men had carried the rice bags out of the store room and neatly piled them up at the side of the path. The villagers had to hand over their token to the token-collector who ticked the corresponding number on his sheet of paper. This was done to ensure that every family got their share of rice, but also to make sure that people did not come around a second time. This had happened several years ago when we started with the distribution of rice. People either came a second time, saying that they did not yet get their share, or they sent another member of the family to claim their share of rice.

A couple of young and strong men lifted the rice bags to place them on the heads of the women or on the shoulders of the men. In Burma, it is still very common that women carry things on their head. This can be anything from a basket filled with vegetables, or a pile of wood, or an earthen pot with water, to a big rice bag. Men, however, carry heavy things on their shoulders.

At the beginning of the distribution, we helped to offer the rice bags to the villagers. But very soon we let the young and muscular lads do this job - realising that we would have needed a three-week muscle-building training to be suitably prepared! Although the sight of women carrying things on their head is nothing strange in Burma, I was still amazed at the ease and lightness with which the women carried this heavy load on their head.



*A young mother receiving a bag of rice*

I had the chance to ask a few of the villagers about their lives and living conditions in Laydaungkan village. Here are three examples:



### **Ma Tin Tin Kain**

This young mother is 25 years old, married, and has two children. Since five years she and her family live in Laydaungkan village. Her husband works on a construction site, mixing cement. Her older son is seven years old and goes to the local school; he is in second grade. Her younger son has recently turned two years old. She has to cook five cups of rice every day for the four of them. (One cup equals an empty condensed milk tin; this is the standard measurement for rice in Burma.) And with a smile on her face she said that the bag of rice (10 viss) that she got now will last for about 15 days.

Hearing that, I asked her, "What will you do with the money that you can save for the next fifteen days?" The mother said, "I will save the money for my son who goes to school. With this money, I can buy him the necessary school materials such as notebooks, pens, or books."

[1 viss = 1.6 kg or 3.5 pounds]

*Ma Tin Tin Kain & son*



### **Daw Khin Shwe**

This lady is 70 years old and still quite healthy. Her husband passed away only five months ago, but she did not show any signs of unresolved grief about the loss of her husband. She has one daughter who is married, the couple has one child. Daw Khin Shwe lives with her daughter and family, and besides the four of them, there are three other people living in the same household. So, for the seven people living in the same household they have to cook 1 viss of rice every day. The bag with the 10 viss of rice will last them for ten days.



*The two friends: Daw Nyo and Daw Khin Shwe*

I asked her, “What will you do with the money that you can save because you do not need to buy rice?” She said, “With this money, I will be able to go to the monastery in Taukyan (a nearby little town, about twenty minutes by bus) and listen to Dhamma talks. I will be able to make a donation to the Sayadaw and the monastery. I also want to offer rice every day to the monks on alms round.” Her friend, Daw Nyo, was standing beside Daw Khin Shwe, listening to our conversation. She said that she usually joins Daw Khin Shwe when going to the monastery. She added that she always keeps the uposatha precepts during vassa. (The uposatha precepts refer to the eight precepts which include to abstain from eating after noon. Vassa is the three month period during the rainy season, it starts on the full moon day of July and ends on the full moon day of October.)



*Ma San San Nyunt and her daughter*

### **Ma San San Nyunt**

This woman is 36 years old, married, and has two children. She and her husband are from Danuphyu (Irrawaddy delta), ten years ago they came to Yangon and settled in Laydaungkan village. Her husband is a clerk and earns 40’000 kyats per month, an average salary for a clerk. However, this money is not enough to feed a family of eight people. Besides his wife and the two children, he has to provide everything for altogether eight people living in the same household, including a sick mother-in-law.

The older son is fifteen years old and goes to school. He is only able to attend school because an aunt from Danuphyu pays for the school fees and other expenses such as uniforms, notebooks, and so on. The mother worked by selling vegetables in the market before she got her second child; now her young daughter is seven months old. They have to cook 2 viss of rice every day to feed everybody in their extended family.

In the evening, I reflected on their monthly income and the money they have to spend to buy rice. If they buy 1 viss of lesser quality rice for 600 kyats, then every month they will

already spend 36’000 kyats on rice only. Besides eating rice they need something to go with the rice, and they need money to buy other things like clothes, soap, bus fare, medicines, and so on. How do they manage to get on with their lives?







## The Metta Clinic

Recently, the *Aye Metta Ayu Dana Clinic* (lit. “Cool-lovingkindness-life-offering Clinic”) celebrated its second birthday with a little ceremony. Judy Witheford, a Canadian yogi, and a couple of her friends were instrumental for the set-up of this free medical clinic which opened its doors for poor patients on 24 February 2008. The clinic stands on the grounds of Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre (CMMC) and is managed by volunteers from the centre under the supervision of Sayadaw U Indaka. Every Saturday two or three doctors treat about one hundred and thirty patients, on certain days the number goes up to one hundred and fifty. On Sundays, a group of about one dozen dentists offer their time and expertise to treat the villagers living in the vicinity of the CMMC. The average number of dental patients is eighty people every Sunday.



*The Aye Metta Ayu Dana Clinic*

In the past year (2009), the clinic has received financial support from both foreign and local donors. Besides the many individual donors who contribute towards the running of the clinic, there are a number of Vipassana sitting groups in Canada and the USA that offer ongoing support for the Metta Clinic.

Here are a few numbers for the year 2009:

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Total general patients: | 6493                                      |
| Total dental patients:  | 3946                                      |
| Total donations :       | 8266 \$, 1530 €, 200 RM, 10'483'770 kyats |
| Total expenditure :     | 1000 \$, 12'028'265 kyats                 |



*A young man getting local anaesthetic for pulling a bad tooth*

Among the most common ailments that the doctors have to treat are: intestinal parasites (especially in children), skin problems, respiratory disorders, general weakness, and blood pressure disorders.

The dentists offer a basic dental care which often means to pull a bad or rotten tooth.

On a Saturday in February a fourteen-year-old-boy was brought to the Metta Clinic. He had apparently been bitten by a dog six months ago and suffered from rabies. As his condition deteriorated the parents finally brought him to the Metta Clinic. The doctor immediately transferred him to a hospital as his condition seemed to be extremely severe. The Metta Clinic offered the money for transport and treatment, otherwise the parents would not have been able to take their son to a hospital.

On Sunday we got the news that the boy died on that very Saturday evening after the parents had taken him to the hospital. Any help came too late.

This is especially sad news because the death of this boy could have been prevented if he had come to the clinic earlier. But the people living here in the area are very poor and many of them are not educated. The parents were probably not aware that their son got rabies and that it could have been treated. Only when it was too late, did they finally take him to a doctor.

One day in early January, we approached Venerable Suvira, a resident monk of Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre, and asked him about the situation in Laydaungkan village. Laydaungkan is the adjacent village where the monks from the meditation centre go out for alms-round every day. I wanted to know whether there were people or families whose houses were in shambles or needed support of one kind or another. Venerable Suvira said that the condition of the houses seemed to be okay. But, he added, there was a house with a young disabled girl. Walking past that house every day, he thought that this girl was suffering from polio.

We asked him to find out more or to call the girl to the centre. A few days later, the mother, carrying her child in her arms, came to my room. She explained that her daughter, Thakyan Moe, did not suffer from polio. After she gave birth to her daughter the doctors diagnosed the baby with a swollen liver and said that she needed a blood transfusion. Her father donated the blood for his daughter. When she was four days old she got the blood transfusion and



*Thakyan Moe with her mother*



*Thakyan Moe's braces*

since then she is mentally and physically disabled. Now at the age of six, she cannot walk and her arm movements are impaired. She only speaks a few words, but apparently understands what people are saying. The mother who is only twenty-two years old needs to be with her daughter all the time. Her husband is selling duck-eggs at the local market.

We told Ma Wei Wei Myint, the mother, to come to the free Metta Clinic so that the doctor could refer her daughter to physiotherapy. Dr. Wei Lwin Oo referred the girl to one of the hospitals in Yangon which has the necessary equipment and trained physiotherapists. The Metta Clinic is paying for all the expenses to allow them to go into Yangon and get the physiotherapy (bus fare, plus all incurring fees in the hospital).

So three times a week, Ma Wei Wei Myint takes her daughter to the hospital for physiotherapy. Thakyan Moe also was given braces, which give the necessary support to her weak legs.

On a Saturday in early March, we happened to see the mother carrying her daughter in her arm when they came to the office to get more money for further treatment. Thakyan Moe seemed to be much more present than two months ago and she was even able to communicate by means of gestures and a few words. She even had an infectious smile on her face. The mother explained that she had learned to walk by holding on to a hand rail. With these words, the mother made Thakyan Moe stand on the ground, holding her hands. And as a matter of fact, Thakyan Moe was able to take a number of steps!



*„Like - like - like“*

The village lady with the green hat needed no words to express her happiness and gratitude, the hat did it for her,

„I LIKE very much what you do!“

With metta  
Ariya Ñani