

MANIFESTATIONS OF GENEROSITY



Cluster of pagodas at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon

About one month ago I got back to Burma, my spiritual home. Like every year, I cannot help feel immense gratitude for the spiritual richness I find in this country. And every year I am deeply saddened to witness the daily struggle of many people to get even the most basic things needed for survival, let alone for a decent life.

One of the first things we did in regard to our dana activities was to visit the nunneries in the neighbourhood of Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre (CMMC). We wanted to check their present situation and assess further needs. Of course, we also wanted to see how your donations from last year were used.

In every nunnery, we were heartedly welcomed and showered with profuse expressions of appreciation and thanks. It is such a pity that you could not be with us and witness their joyous gratitude yourself!

Here are a few examples of how your donations from last year were used:

Sasanasukhacari Laputta Nunnery



The two sisters: Daw Uttama and Daw Uttara

The nuns from this nunnery needed proper toilets and an area for bathing and washing clothes. After receiving the money last year they immediately started with the construction of the toilet-shower complex. They have built two toilets, a big water tank and a concrete area for bathing and washing their clothes.

The two head nuns and sisters, Daw Uttara and Daw Uttama, are extremely pleased to provide their 11 nuns with a convenient and clean space for bathing and washing clothes. The toilets have a septic tank and they looked very clean when we inspected them. Stuck on the wall between the two toilets we saw the plaque containing the names of the donors – our names are inscribed there as representatives for all of YOU.



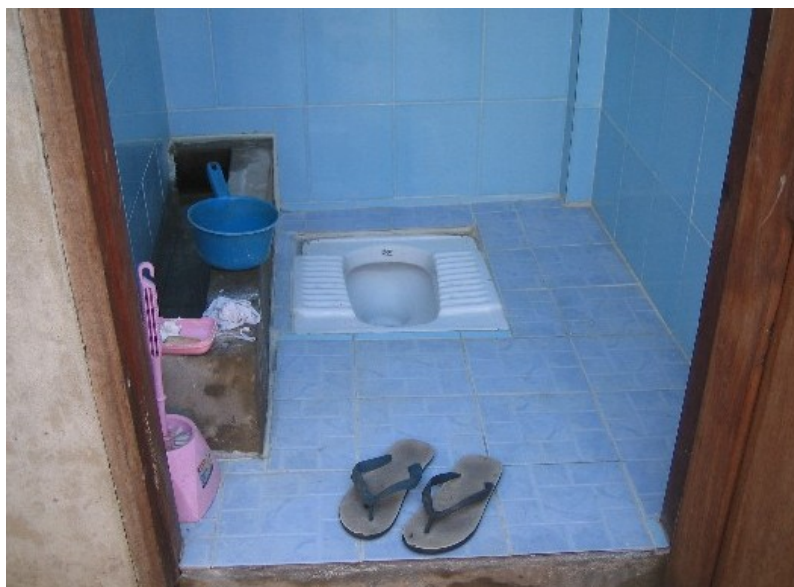
Daw Uttara in front of the new toilet-bathing-washing area

Last year when we were offering the donation to the nuns, our group consisted of Daw Vira Ñani, Carol, Marjo, Narayan, and myself. That is why the plaque contains our names and each of you is contained in ‘Dhamma friends from all over the world.’

For the nuns, the six of us were the visible manifestation of generosity extending to places and countries many of them had never heard of.



In Burma, it is custom to write the name of the donor(s) on the item offered to a nunnery, monastery, or even to a public building. This is done as a sign of appreciation toward the donors, and it helps remember who offered what. And with that, the nuns or monks can develop thoughts of loving-kindness and gratitude to the donors whenever they use a specific thing. On top of that, it is a means for other people to rejoice in that person's generosity and feel truly glad about the donors' good heart, compassion, and kindness.



The inside of the new toilet

Chanmyavati Nunnery



*Daw Paññasiri, Daw Kesarañani,
Daw Theri; behind them the nun
reciting the Patthana*

Of the nunneries that we offer dana to, this is the furthest away from CMMC. It is located in the northern end of Shwe Natha village, about a half hour's walk away. To get there we walked across the fields behind the pagoda at the end of the dirt road which starts right next to our meditation centre. The morning we went there, from afar we heard the voice of a nun chanting the Patthana over a loudspeaker.

This is a common sound heard all over Burma, especially during the cool season. Many monasteries and nunneries organise a so-called “Patthana Recitation Ceremony” during which the seventh book of the Abhidhamma, the Patthana, is recited. Usually, the recitation of the book is done without breaks, monks or nuns taking turns of

reciting for half an hour or one hour at a time. In this way, it takes about 5 days (reciting 24 hours a day) to go through the whole book.

As we soon realised the sound came from the Chanmyavati Nunnery. When we got to the gate of the nunnery, we were ushered into the main building. The altar was decorated with many flowers and a great variety of fruit had been offered in front of the Buddha statue. One nun was sitting at a small table in front of the Buddha statue and reciting the text. She did not seem to be disturbed by the talking that was going on behind her. One-pointedly focussed on her work, she calmly chanted the words explaining the causal relations between phenomena.

Daw Paññasiri, who has been a nun for 39 years, is the abbess of this nunnery which provides not only food, shelter, and robes to the nuns living here, but also a thorough spiritual education. Nine of the 16 nuns staying at Chanmyavati Nunnery study in Yangon, the remaining younger nuns are taught at the nunnery. Daw Paññasiri and Daw Kesarañani, her assistant, immediately invited us to stay and have lunch with them. But as we had other things to do that day, we had to decline their generous invitation. However, they pressed us to come for each of the next two days for lunch, when the recitation of the Patthana would still be going on. We finally agreed to come for lunch on the last day of the Patthana recitation. This made them very happy – and us too!



The new building at Chanmyavati Nunnery

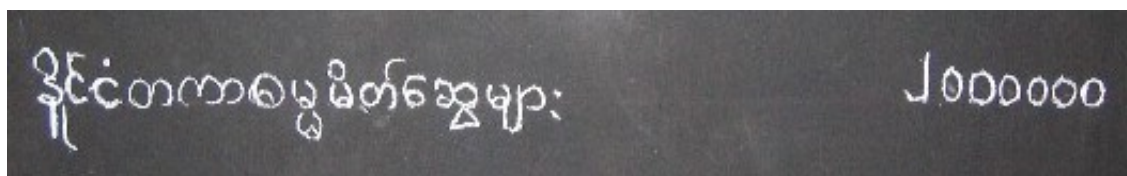


The new building



The present building

Already from afar we had noticed the skeleton of the new building that they had intended to build last year. They very badly need a proper building for the nuns to stay. The present sleeping quarters for the nuns is a simple bamboo structure that is actually falling apart. Given the rapid



"Dhamma Friends from all over the world" - 2'000'000 kyats

deterioration of bamboo buildings I doubt that it will make it through the next rainy season (June – September).

Daw Paññasiri explained that with the donation we made last year they were able to put up the roof. Later when we inspected the new building, we noticed the name of our group on the blackboard which contains all the names of donors contributing to this new accommodation building.

Mya Thitha Oo Nunnery

Last year we came to know Daw Sucari while visiting another nunnery. At that time she was staying there to get all the necessary things together to start build her own nunnery. She struck us as a sincere and competent nun, having a clear vision of what she was going to do. Her aim was to offer a suitable place for nuns so that they can study and practice the Buddha's teaching.



Mya Thitha Oo Nunnery from behind with the kitchen

When we approached their nunnery, we saw a new brick building that needs yet to be completed. But at least they have the walls and the roof. At present, Daw Sucari lives there together with five other nuns. Later on, five more nuns will join them.



Daw Sucari (third from right) and her nuns

They showed us their little plot of land behind the building which they turned into a very neat and meticulously well-maintained vegetable garden!

All the nuns are very happy to live there and look forward to have the building completed. Your donation was an important and vital contribution for setting up this nunnery.

Sasanaramsi Nunnery

This is the nunnery that has sprung up behind CMMC last year in March. In the meantime, they changed the name from Dhammanimmitarama Nunnery to Sasanaramsi Nunnery. *ferred them way they needed it most.*

Now, there are altogether 24 nuns living here; four of them are teaching the younger nuns. Three of the elder nuns have completed the Dhammacariya exam. On top of that, they take part in special examinations held by a Buddhist organisation in Yangon. The examination is conducted in three parts, and for each part 5 Buddhist books have to be memorized. On the day of examination, the nuns (and monks) have to recite a certain passage before a monk.



The nuns of Sasanaramsi Nunnery; on the floor is the picture and certificate of the exam

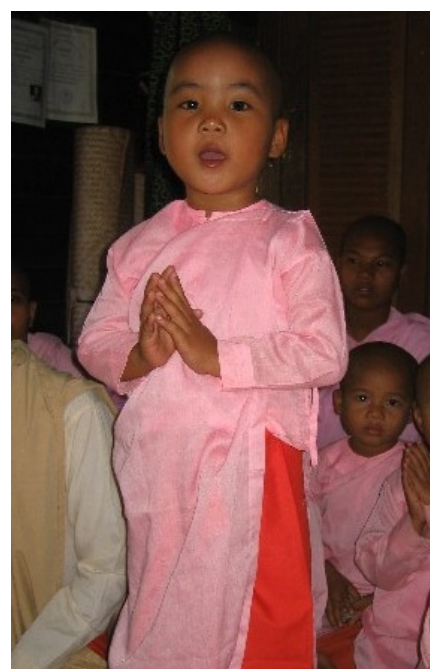


The young nuns are proud to show their exercise books

If they can recite the text without stopping once or without repeating a word, they pass the examination with distinction. If they stop for more than three times, they fail. On the wall of the building we saw the enlarged picture of Daw Malasingi taking part in that examination. She also showed us her certificate and the special stamp that she got.

Each morning and evening we can hear the nuns chanting and memorizing their texts. It is a very lively place brimming with 'Dhamma-energy'. The two youngest nuns are four years old and one of them, they explained us, is very bright and intelligent. Daw Malasingi made

her stand up and recite a text. The little nun, Ma Kulanandi, folded her hands in añjali and without hesitating recited a text in Pali. Who knows, she might become a well-known nun scholar!



The little star: Ma Kulanandi

The Metta Clinic

The Metta Clinic has become a well-known and integral part of Laydaungkan, the village next to CMMC. Every Saturday and Sunday is it teeming with activity: patients, doctors or dentists, and nurses are filling the clinic with life. Every Saturday, the doctors treat more than 100 patients, and around 60 to 80 patients are treated by a group of a dozen dentists on Sundays. It is truly amazing to see the much-needed work that is done by these Burmese doctors and dentists who offer their time and expertise for free. All of them have declined to accept the stipend that the Metta Clinic initially offered them.

Your donations are used to pay for the medicines that are given to the patients, to pay staff for cleaning the rooms, to pay the local nurses who assist the doctors and hand out the medications, and to pay for expenses (such as transport and treatment) when patients need to be referred to a hospital.



The dentists working in the Metta Clinic

Pho Pho: The three-and-a-half-year old girl with polio



Pho Pho - a determined and smart little girl

Two years ago we got to know about this little girl with polio. At that time, she spent most of her day standing in a dirt hole up to her neck. In Burma, people believe that the earth element helps kids with polio to get stronger and later to be able to walk. As such it is not a 'cruel' thing to have the kid placed into the earth hole.

On January 2nd this year, she appeared in front of my kuti – and she was walking all by herself! I was overjoyed and moved to tears – how wonderful that she is able to walk.

With the help of our extended network of supporters, last year a meditator brought a walker that was offered by the Ability Foundation. With this device, Pho Pho learned to walk and it looks like she is enjoying her new ability to move around freely.

She can walk quite well although she is limping a bit and falling down every now and again. But she immediately stands up and continues to walk. She is very determined and she also seems to be quite domineering. When her older sister, Thet Thet Wei, got a present from Daw Virañani, Pho Pho walked up to her and took the present out of her sister's hand.

Thet Thet Wei was our first ‘serious’ patient after the free Metta Clinic opened on 23 February 2008. She came with a severely infected arm, and it turned out that her bones had not healed properly after a surgery for a broken bone she had had six months before. Because of the bad condition of the arm and the pain she could no longer go to school. The parents were too poor to pay for another surgery. The Metta Clinic referred her to a hospital and paid for the second surgery. She is now fine and can use her arm again. On the picture you see her with a beautiful necklace that was donated by Noemi, a five-year-old Swiss girl who gave away her ‘treasure’ for a ‘poor kid’ in Burma.



Thet Thet Wei and her sister Pho Pho

This is a first update on our Burma-Dana-Activities in 2010 – more of these updates will follow in the near future. It is only thanks to your generous support that we are able to extend our help to those in need. Many of you have contributed in the recent years, many of you continue to support our activities each year, and some of you have contributed for the first time this year. Each update will be sent out to all the donors who support our activities since we started three years ago. In addition, all the Burma updates will be placed on the this website: www.ven-ariya.spaces.live.com.



With innumerable ‘mangalas’ (blessings) to all of you!

With metta
Ariya Ñani