



Cittaviveka

Newsletter – Summer 2020

Dear Friends,

Well ... what happened between now and the last newsletter? By now we've most likely all heard the phrase, 'the new normal' more than enough times, and it's a suitable expression in many ways. However, how long will the 'new normal' last before yet another new way of going about our lives begins, or before we simply manage to get back to something resembling the 'old normal'?

As for life here in the monastery, first and foremost we wish to express our deep gratitude to everyone for the continued support, both material and spiritual. All of the offerings of food and other requisites, along with the very frequent messages of concern and goodwill, have kept us alive and well in both body and mind. Thank you all very much, or as we say in our Buddhist tradition, *Sadhu Anumodana!*

March 24th was the day when we experienced the sadness of having to close the monastery to guests and visitors. When has that ever happened before? I have always thought that one of the strengths of our monastic tradition is the openness of our communities to receive people of all walks of life, all faiths (or none), on any day of the week. The words 'Sorry, we're closed' simply don't come to mind when I think about our communities.

In the last couple of months, with the gradual and partial lifting of the lockdown restrictions, we have been able to meet with our Dhamma friends and supporters when they've come to make offerings. Although still officially closed, we set out some benches near the front driveway, and many people took the opportunity to go over to the Ajahn Chah Stupa and pay their respects. It was uplifting to see people entering the grounds again, albeit in a very limited way.

As sad it was to be closed, it was simple. Whilst closed, the complexity for us was the need to adopt new protocols within the community that would keep us well and healthy. The need to have essential works done in the monastery by outside people means that we are not sealed off from the rest of the world. With at least a few members of the resident community considered to be 'at risk' if they were to contract Covid-19, the need for extra caution has been a feature of our daily routines.

Reopening

On July 23rd we reopened to day visitors, limited to just a few hours each day, from 10.30am until 1.30pm. People are restricted to only entering the Dhamma Hall for an hour or so before the meal-blessing, with a limitation as to how many people can be inside at any given time (currently 30 including residents). We do have outside areas that are available, and will endeavour to meet with everyone who comes, whether indoors or outdoors. The most important thing to convey is that you are welcome!

Possibly one of the most vivid differences people will notice if they visit is that, due to government guidelines, we are not able to share the meal-offering with visitors. So, when you come, please feel free to bring a picnic lunch with you, which can be eaten in our lovely outdoor areas, weather permitting. We suggest that if you are planning to come, and have access to the Internet, please check the monastery website for the most up-to-date information: www.cittaviveka.org/announcements

Festival Days

Unfortunately, it has been necessary to cancel three festival days that were scheduled to take place over the past months: Songkran (Southeast Asian New Year), Vesak (the commemoration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and final passing away) and the Tort Pha Ba (International Almsgiving Ceremony).

In terms of upcoming festivals, the big question is, what about Kathina? At this point in time, with so much uncertainty about what is safe, as well as what the UK Government will allow, we're planning on holding our Kathina Festival with a very small number of people on site, but presented online via live streaming video through a variety of apps. Cittaviveka doesn't have a robust or steady Internet connection, so we're presently researching how best to upgrade it. Let's face it, pretty much everyone with a mobile phone knows how to make a video now, so it should be possible!

In many ways we're planning on having a very traditional Kathina Festival, with a rice alms round, the opportunity to request the Five Precepts, Paritta Chanting, the offering of the Kathina robe and a Dhamma Talk. We'll have the usual festive decorations as well. However, these things will be experienced via communication devices. It won't be anywhere close to being the same as our previous Kathinas, with hundreds of people in attendance, but it's the best we can do during these strange times. We will keep you posted via our website, and be delighted if you can participate in some way.

The Monastic Community

The male monastic community is greatly benefitting from the new building – the Vihara – that was completed during the winter. On February 7th, Flint Construction handed the building over to us for use. We wish to thank everyone for all of the offerings of both the funds and skill that went into creating the Vihara: donors, builders and craftspeople, architects, volunteers, members of the Cittaviveka community ... the list goes on. It's a very supportive refuge for the male community, and we are grateful.

There have been a number of comings and goings since the last newsletter. A few people have joined the Cittaviveka community for the first time. Venerable Kittipaño joined us in June and plans to stay until after Kathina. Born in southern Thailand, he grew up in south London! He began his monastic life four years ago at Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand. He and his family have been well known to us for many years now. Other changes are the recent addition of Anagārikā Margit, who joins Ajahn Cittapala and Sister Tejasa in the nuns' community. On May 25th, Anagārika Sebastian became Sāmanera Cāgadharmo. Gabriel, Pamodha and Kosta, three members of the devoted lay team from the Winter Retreat, formally requested the Anagārika Precepts in a ceremony held on July 5th, Asalha Puja. Venerable Dhīrabodhi is currently experiencing part of his 'junior year away' at Sumedharama Monastery in Portugal, where he is spending the Rains Retreat. The rest of his year will be determined by travel restrictions, so we'll see where he lands. Sāmanera Jayamangalo left us to return to his native country Italy, after spending a year here. He is living at Santacittarama Monastery where he began his monastic life several years ago. Sāmanera Sucinno also departed to return to Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery in Northumberland, after spending extra time here because of the pandemic, which was our gain! We recently said goodbye to Anagārikās Miki and Annamari, who have rejoined the nuns' community at Amaravati.

Ajahn Sucitto is here for the Rains Retreat, and is taking a well-earned and extended period of retreat. We delight in being able to offer him retreat time like this, especially as he is frequently leading retreats for other people. Due to global travel restrictions, Ajahn Karuniko's travel plans have greatly changed, and he is still in Victoria, Australia. He's doing very well, and still plans to return to Cittaviveka on December 1st.

On behalf of the Cittaviveka community, I'll close by wishing each and every one of you all good wishes, and hope that we see you here one day soon.

Ajahn Ahimsako