

# Sae Taw Win II News

Sae Taw Win II Dhamma Center 8769 Bower St., Sebastopol, CA 95472 [www.saetawwin2.org](http://www.saetawwin2.org)

## From Dr. Thynn's Desk

Winter 2006

As 2006 begins, I pause and contemplate the Center's seven-year journey as the adventure of an Asian-American woman/Dhamma teacher embarking on an uncharted sea, with no compass except the will to stay on course whatever the cost. Riding the waves and keeping balance has been my saving grace.

My students want me to highlight as "event of the year" my being one of the recipients of the award for "Outstanding Woman in Buddhism for 2005." I am obliged to comply, if only to help blaze a trail for the future of women in Buddhism. I would like to leave as a legacy for my own daughter and all the daughters in the Buddhist world this ideal: that as a wife, as a mother, whatever your role, you can make a difference. No doubt it takes courage to take risks, to not be taken for granted, to stand up and be counted. But more so, it requires wisdom to not falter, to not fall prey to ambition and the lure of fame. It is a tough journey for women from Asia to break out and break through stereotypes, but it can be done.

We do have a better chance here in the West, where Buddhism is still new and modern Western women have forged roles for themselves in many areas of life. I am glad to discover that within the context of American Buddhism, women have a better chance to lead than in Asia.

I am forever grateful to my master, the late Shwe Baw Gyun Sayadaw, for selecting me to bring his lineage to the West. That is a rarity for a woman in Burma, but for the Sayadaw and the Masters in our lineage, it is not unusual, as they place emphasis on Parami (one's spiritual virtue) rather than gender. To honor the Sayadaw's monumental work, I am writing a tribute to the Sayadaw's life and work, which will be available for those interested.

On another note: I am deeply grateful to each and every donor to our Matching Fund. I regret to say we are not as yet in a position to build a Dhamma Hall, but the monies from the Fund have helped balance our deficit to a great extent. This has allowed me to continue with the Center's expanded teaching pro-



Dr. Thynn giving her acceptance speech at the Buddhist Woman of the Year award ceremony in Bangkok.

grams without financial worries — a great blessing. I am also deeply appreciative of Dr. San Lin, my husband-turned-spiritual partner (parami-phyaet-phet), for supporting me with financial sustenance in my yogi life. Without his support for my personal needs, I would never be able to operate the Center, as the donations we receive are barely sufficient.

Currently there are four evening classes a week, and I am training a small group of senior students in teaching and leadership skills. I am also teaching intensive two-track workshops, which train students as well as teachers-in-training in Daily Life Mindfulness Practice. Abhidhamma teachings are now offered as a regular weekly class to my most senior group, in addition to an annual short introductory course for our out-of-town students.

We now have satellite groups and individuals in Hawaii, Holland, Texas, Florida, Australia, and India who track weekly classes through mp3 recordings posted on our website. In this way, the Daily Life Mindfulness practice is reaching more people in distant places. ∞ May you be happy and well ∞

## Impressions: Hawaii on the Cushion-Off the Cushion Workshop

As a Vipassana meditator trained in the Mahasi tradition, what most interested me in Dr. Thynn's five-day Honolulu workshop was how one attains the benefit of insight by observing one's reactions to external sensory stimuli without the kind of samatha or concentration attained in traditional meditation. What I learned awakened me to the potential of Dr. Thynn's program for self-transformation through its ability to be taught without the discipline of meditation. This opens the practice up to a much wider range of people who would not ordinarily meditate, and could have a profound effect on personal development and transformation in our country. I also came to appreciate the relationship of Dr. Thynn's teachings to classical Theravadin thought in terms of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the theory of Dependent Origination, and classic Abhidhamma philosophy.

In the Daily Living approach, because of the mental "noisiness" of daily activities, one does not have the benefit of the samatha (concentration) attained in traditional meditation. However, through focussed education and training in developing equanimity, or upekha, one is enabled to cut through discursive thought to identify and observe the four categories of mind states which lead to suffering such as pleasant and unpleasant feelings, likes and dislikes, judgments, and clinging.

In addition, the practice operates within the kind of daily living situations which are likely to generate the mind states under question. Thus, the Daily Living approach is focused on the specific mind states likely to cause suffering, and in the kind of environments most likely to produce those mind states. Given those conditions, it is just as possible to experience the insights that one experiences in meditation because one's mind has become focussed, receptive, and open.

In a quote by the Ledi Sayadaw, one of Burma's greatest Vipassana teachers, he notes that the path to enlightenment does not necessarily require samatha practice. But, with wisdom, or panna, enlightenment can be achieved. Dr. Thynn's approach is clearly within the Wisdom Path to enlightenment. I sincerely hope that her work continues to flourish and reach an ever-widening audience. There is a profound need for more of the wisdom of the Dhamma in our daily lives to alleviate suffering in the world, both within ourselves and in those around us. — *Gregory Pai*

It is not entirely necessary that in Vipassana Practice one achieve a tranquil state through samatha practices. What is crucial in the individual is *panna paramita* [the inherent quality of intelligence]. If a person has the necessary panna paramita and is ready for it, he or she can attain enlightenment even by just listening to a discourse. Hence, based on a person's panna paramita, enlightenment can be achieved while living a household life and contemplating *annica* [impermanence] within his or her own self, within his or her own home life. — Ledi Sayadaw (*Vipassana Dipani*)



*Hti Ceremony at new Cedi, Shwe Baw Gyun Monastery, Burma*

### *Cedi Benefactors*

Dr. Thynn built a new Cedi at Shwe Baw Gyun monastery during her current trip this winter, as part of her lineage work in Burma. She would like to thank the many friends, students, and family in America and Burma who donated funds toward the construction. The Cedi was completed and a crowning ceremony held on January 19th.

On the same day and at the same time, a ceremony was performed by Dr. Thynn's students in Graton at the Cedi at Sae Taw Win II, in order to spiritually link the two Cedis and the two Centers.



*Graton Cedi, California, USA*

## *STW Updates*

In March of 2005, Dr Thynn and four of her students traveled to Burma and Thailand. **Dr. Thynn was honored to receive an Outstanding Woman in Buddhism Award from the United Nations in Bangkok, Thailand.** She accepted the award in person, and afterwards introduced her students to her life in Burma, taking them to her "home" monastery, Shwe Baw Gyun, in the Meiktila area of Burma. The trip was a great success: you'll hear about some of their rich experiences in this newsletter.

In April of 2005, Dr. Thynn taught a **5-night Abhidhamma course** that was very well attended by local and out of town students.

**Carol Meredith's father Ned** passed away in July 2005. He was a good friend and supporter of the Center and Dr. Thynn. Carol's mother donated a memorial fig tree, planted near the cedi.

After the devastating tsunami struck the day after Christmas 2005, Sae Taw Win II immediately began a **tsunami relief fund drive**. Over \$14,000 was collected and dispersed to various groups; most of the funds were donated to Dr. Thynn's good friend Dr. Ariyaratne's organization, Sarvodaya, to assist in their rebuilding effort in Sri Lanka.

**Roger Burns** has come on full-time in the Center office as office manager. He has done major upgrades to the computer and audiovisual systems, which is a great help to Dr. Thynn in teaching classes and workshops. He has also been managing all the Center events, like Buddha's Birthday and Daily Life Practice workshops, with great skill, not to mention mindfulness. Dr. Thynn and the community are lucky to have him and the benefit of the talents he brings to the Center.

After the success of Dr. Thynn's March 2005 visit to Burma, she returned this December/January to sponsor the **construction of a cedi** at the monastery and to assume more of her lineage duties, including more Dhamma teaching. She has taken along many items to donate to the monastery village and village school, including school supplies. She will update us in due course.

**The Board launched two matching funds drives** in 2005, initiated by two generous — and anonymous — donors. Thanks to your response, we were able not only to match but to slightly exceed the original matching fund amounts. This generosity defrayed our rising operations expenses and allowed the installation of a badly-needed new hot water heater.

## **- Calendar of Events -**

### **March 10 -12**

*Daily Life Practice workshop for new and beginning students*

### **March 15th**

*New 12-week Beginning Class Series starts*

### **April 1-5**

*Five-night Abhidhamma course*

### **April 22**

*Senior student intensive workshop*

### **May 21**

*Buddha's Birthday celebration at Sae Taw Win II*

### **June 3**

*Change Your Mind Day event*

### **June 23-25**

*Daily Life Practice workshop for new and beginning students*

## **Buddhist Sunday School**

With Dr. Thynn's supervision and help, Muriel Aung and Dr. Tin Aung **are teaching** a children's Buddhism class, as an outreach program of Sae Taw Win II. The classes are on Sundays from 10 am til noon at the Sino-Burmese Buddhist Association of America's 10<sup>th</sup> Street Temple in San Francisco. The focus of the classes is on nurturing the children in Burmese Buddhist culture, traditions, and values. (However, these classes are not just limited to the Burmese community: they are taught in both English and Burmese, and everyone is welcome.)

The curriculum includes basic foundations of Buddhism: taking refuge in the Three Gems (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha), common prayers, the five precepts, chanting Metta, making offerings of flowers and water, and the proper ways of sitting and prostration. A long-term plan is to prepare the children for taking the "Exam on Buddhism," which is given annually at the Theravada Buddhist Society of America monastery in Half Moon Bay.



wedding picture that showed her in her wedding dress with that shawl around her shoulders. The teacher then handed me a beautiful piece of golden orange silk. She explained that this was a longyi that the Sayadaw had given her. We all felt deep gratitude and humility as her generosity showed the true meaning of dana.

We had a wonderful exchange with the many people we came in contact with – lots of giggles and laughter as we tried our best to communicate, walking down the streets arm in arm with women showing us the various pagodas, children holding our hands as we walked. Our water bottles remained magically full and when the heat became too much, someone would appear and start fanning us. Each meal was prepared with loving hands that nourished us in body, mind and spirit. The generosity and lovingkindness of the people will always be remembered. We were well provided for as if royalty by those who had very little by way of material goods, yet had hearts of gold. — *Carol Meredith*

Dr. Thynn holds an image of Shwe Baw Gyun Sayadaw in the center; Jan is on her left, Carol at the far right, and Roger and Jacqueline at the back.

The picture was taken after a procession and ceremony at the world peace pagoda, the construction of which was instructed by the Sayadaw just before his passing. The ceremony was performed to invoke peace and harmony locally and globally.



**Impressions of Burma, the golden land. . . .** Golden Buddhas and golden cedi domes were everywhere, reflecting the sun, shining out onto a dusty, hot countryside. Filling the roads and streets were the Burmese people, small and thin, riding bicycles, motor scooters, bullock-drawn wagons, and top-heavy, overcrowded buses. Shwe Baw Gyun, the village/monastery, is a remote, poor, primitive place that sits on a flat open plain surrounded by fields tilled by bullock teams and watered by rain. There are twenty-one cedis in the village, all golden, painted, or mirrored. Each morning before sunrise we were awakened by chanting monks and then a dhamma talk coming over the village loudspeakers.

The people of the village were a delight — they were full of smiles and warm welcomes. The children were sweet, trusting, and beautiful — sometimes shy, but almost always wanting their photos taken. They particularly enjoyed looking at the images of themselves in the digital camera — it was always a big hit. Even though their life is very hard and they were quite poor, meals, visits to homes, introductions to family members, and gifts occurred daily along with much visiting, talking, and laughing far into the night.

There was a steadiness, an acceptance, a calmness in the villagers that seemed to reflect their trust in the teachings of the Buddha and their Sayadaw. Their warmth and friendship was very special — it was golden, just like the shining Buddhas and cedi domes of their country. — *Jan Vannatta*

**“According to your ways.”** This was a phrase that I heard very often during our time in Burma. It was used by one of our hosts, our main host, really, our shepherd, U Myat Thu; a generous man with a kind face, whose bronzed skin gleamed beneath a cloud of white hair reflecting a ready smile marked by years of chewing the red-juiced betel nut. It was his charge to show us the sights in and around the Mandalay area; including Sagaing, Bagan and Mount Popa, as well as to stay at Shwe Baw Gyun and see to our needs there.

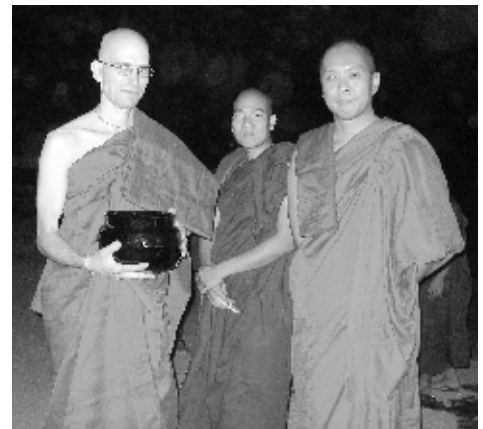
For me, our relationship with him reflected our trip as a whole. At first there was caution, then understanding, exhaustion and ultimately joy. He gave up two weeks of his life to be with us on a full-time basis, including waiting for me in a hot, dusty Mandalay for five days while I was ordained as a monk in Sagaing. His patience and dedication served, for me, as a base of confidence that I could relax into while in this unfamiliar land. As long as U Myat Thu was around, we were going to be okay.

I really got to know him in and around the temples of Bagan, the ancient seat of Buddhism in Burma. There we were joined in good company by U Tint Swe, a man of great stature, both in character and in form, being a former member of the Burmese national basketball team and the tallest Burmese I saw during our stay there. His presence added another layer of security as we began the trek amongst the thousands of ruins dotting the landscape. Each one beckoned us to stay and contemplate and feel the weight of the years they had waited for us. As we knelt among those honoring the Buddha I began to sense where the heartbeat of the people lay, the chanting of U Myat Thu rendering its rhythm. His voice adding to the echoes of those reflecting off the walls for centuries... The greatest beat was bellowed by U Tint Swe, as he led us in a resounding chant of success, to the delight and amusement of those pilgrims close by, “Aung be la hey, Aung be HEY!”

Burma, this land of ancient temples and strong spirit. This land of patience and resourcefulness. This land of generosity and humor. This land of blackouts and candles lit in prayer. The fire burns and we carry the torch home within us. — **Roger Burns**



Left: U Myat Thu (kneeling) and U Tint Swe (standing) lead a ritual at Ananda Temple in Bagan.



Right: Ashin Aloka (Roger) after receiving temporary ordination at Sitagu Monastery, Sagaing. With Ven. Ashin Punnobhasa, his guiding monk, and another friend.



Left: Carol, Jan, Jacqueline and Dr. Thynn prepare to enjoy one of many delicious homemade meals served to them at Shwe Baw Gyun.



Right: Dr. Thynn receiving her Buddhist Woman of the Year award in Bangkok.

MANY THANKS to these friends who kindly supported Sae Taw Win II with donations in 2004-05.

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