MIA Update 2025 (3)

Refugees & Generosity & Food

The Shwedagon Pagoda is the spiritual heart of Myanmar. It is said that the two merchants Tapussa and Bhallika brought eight hairs from their encounter with the Buddha and enshrined them in a pagoda. The current size of the pagoda dates back to 1774. Whenever I visit the pagoda, the platform around it is filled with people: families with their children, nuns, hermits, pilgrims from other parts of Myanmar, monks, elderly people, young couples – although it is a sacred place, the atmosphere is light and full of life and at the same time reverent and pious.

The political situation in Myanmar is still difficult – out of consideration for the work MIA is doing, I will not go into details about politics in this update. In last year's MIA update, MIA Update 2024 (2), I described the situation like this:

"The situation in the country is dire and the villagers from Sayadaw's village are still not able to return to their village. They stay at various monasteries and meditation centres, but are longing to go back to their homes and lives as they have known it. The adults want to work in the fields again growing peanuts, sesame seeds, peas, or water melons and look after their animals. The kids want to roam around the village and go down to the Mu River, play with their friends, and go to school. But that is not possible, not yet. When will it be possible? Nobody knows, but everybody hopes that it will happen soon."

The villagers still stay in various monasteries and meditation centres and would love to go back to their village. We supported a total of 174 IDP's (Internally Displaced People) staying at the Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centres in Yangon, Takon, and Pyin Oo Lwin.

Offering the dāna to the refugees in Yangon

They are helping with the cooking or cutting wood

Most of the refugees who are staying at the Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre in Yangon

About Generosity

I learned the joy of generosity from the Burmese people! They seem to have an innate disposition to generosity that I found contagious. So many times I was impressed and amazed to see how important the practice of generosity for many people is and how it is implemented into their daily lives. This is evident in the morning when monks and nuns go on alms round and people step out of their homes to offer some rice, fruits, or sweets. For example, mothers hold their babies in one arm and take the infant's hand to do the offering. This is how children learn it from a very young age.

During all the years that I lived and practised at the meditation centre in Myanmar, I witnessed countless times the joyous offering of a meal to all the meditators, resident nuns & monks, and volunteers. Since I was a nun at that time, people offered me robes, sandals, soaps, sweets, shawls, or a sweater for the cool season. At first, I found it difficult to accept these offerings from people who were not rich by Burmese standards. But of course, I could not refuse their offerings and gradually I learnt to accept them with grace and gratitude and to rejoice in their generosity and meritorious deeds.

The gratitude of the nuns who received donations from MIA has been immense this year. Due to the very difficult situation they are in, the nuns openly told us that they were longing for the donations from MIA so that they can keep going. As a sign of great gratitude and deep appreciation for the essential support, they showered me with many gifts: bananas, pomelos, avocados, water melons, oranges, dragon fruits, grapes, cookies, milo, ovaltine, tea leaves, peanuts, dried shrimps, or oil. I wish I could have shared these things with you. Most of these things I distributed to the helpers and refugees at the centre.

Gifts from the nuns (above), donations for small nunneries (right)

About Burmese Food

Burmese love their food! And like everywhere in the world, a common topic of conversation is about food. Those of you who have been in Myanmar will recognize some of the dishes or desserts, and it will be familiar to see a table full of different curries or a big selection of desserts.

Mohinga - a traditional breakfast dish or snack that is eaten any time of the day

Paratha - a breakfast dish, one of my favorites

A generous meal offered by the Mingalagonwei nuns

The desserts.
At the bottom of the picture is the Burmese version of cheese cake: a spongy cake with grated cheese on top!

A selection of fruits and rice cakes, plus a Swiss chocolate

Your ongoing support of our MIA projects is precious and heart-warming to us and is much needed and appreciated by the nuns and other recipients in Myanmar. We are grateful that with your generous support we can continue this humanitarian work – a team work where everyone is needed and plays their important role.

SADHU, SADHU, SADHU !!!

Ariya Baumann (March 2025)