

CREATIVE WEEKEND

Amaravati 5 - 7 December 2014



The theme: “Hands and Feet”

What was happening during this weekend?

About ten years ago, Creative Weekends at Amaravati were requested by a Family-Camp mother who was longing for adults to have a weekend where they could meditate, have some Dhamma-input and the opportunity to express themselves in a playful way — without having to look after their children!

This year, the weekend was designed to raise awareness of the way we relate to our hands and feet — and how our relationship to the world and to ourselves is manifesting through the way we use them. Nearly all day long our hand and feet are busy. But are we really consciously aware of what they are communicating to us? Most of the time we seem to be caught in ideas and judgements, using our hands just automatically in order to “get something done”; and using our feet to “get us somewhere”. True?

Do you feel the sensations in your hands while you are reading this?

We like to cuddle babies and cute animals and are surprised how soft and delicate their hands and feet can be. That are moments when we really “listen” to the sense of touch and relate in a way that is connecting — to ourselves and to others.

And what does the Buddha say about our relationship to physical sensations, feelings, emotions and thoughts which arise from sense contact? — The idea was to explore the Dhamma-theme of the 5 khandhas, the “5 Groups of Clinging”, in the context of the creative sessions. And to have guided formal meditation, in which we can get in contact with the inner stillness and “that which knows”, so that we become more attentive to what is happening in our bodies and minds. To support that, Noble Silence was kept for half of the weekend. And then, of course, we had phases of talking: Dhamma-contemplation, discussion, questions & answers and sharing ...

Moving the hands in Meditation:

LP Teean's "dynamic" Meditation

Some participants of Creative Weekends are not used to the usual meditation retreats at Amaravati. They wish for more guidance and methods to support them with staying awake and aware for what is happening in body and mind, especially during an early morning meditation session.

So one meditation-method we used is LP Teean's meditation with a succession of 14 simple hand movements. The focus of attention is on the physical sensations, sometimes including subtle emotions

which can arise with the sense of movement and touch. This meditation is usually very calming if done for half an hour or so.

Below is a drawing by one participant who just loved it. It gives an overview over these movements — and also an impression of the feeling tones and joy which can arise from moving one's hands and touching one's belly and heart-area.





Blind-folded walking meditation in pairs: What do you do, when you can neither see nor speak?

On Saturday, the traditional walking meditation was done in a different way: blind-folded and in pairs, one person with open eyes leading and the blind-folded one following. We started inside to give both partners time to attune, first on even ground and then with obstacles (over zafus and around chairs). Then we continued outside. In the sharing afterwards, they acknowledged the need to develop trust from the heart; and sensitivity in one's hands to pick up the subtle signals from the back of the person leading. It seemed that the person leading needed to be even more mindful, because they were observing the quality of the ground *and* communicating changes, i.e. by little hesitating movements. They didn't even have time to think! Whereas the person following would go through phases of anxiety and lack of trust, usually fuelled by thoughts about what *could* happen... There was a lot of joy arising from finding the trusting heart, and relaxing into an embodied connection with each other.



Again blindfolded: working with clay

What happens when we can't see what our hands are doing? We have to rely on our tactile sense. That, for most participants, was more enjoyable than to be able to *see* what they were creating. — Why? It seems that the eyes are strongly connected to the critical faculty of the mind, which tends to constantly compare and criticize what we are doing. While they were working blindfolded, the inner critic had no power; later they shared that they were simply enjoying the moment-to-moment sense of touch, play and imagination — like children who haven't developed visual criteria yet. So they were happily absorbed in the present moment experience and not judging what they were doing.



Creative session with clay on Saturday night:

Blindfolded and in silence: Let your fingers form a little planet with valleys and hills ...



But these “holidays” from the inner critic had a beginning and an end: As soon as the participants took their blindfolds off, the usual judgement was coming back — and with that, in many cases, the belittling of what their hands had formed (a little planet). And even worse: the old verdict some had heard in school: that they were not good in art, not creative, couldn't do it... — that came back too!

That was unpleasant. *And* it was a memorable teaching: Do we have to believe what the inner critic is saying? Or can we just be aware of the sensory world? And are we free to listen to the heart which doesn't pass judgement? What the heart does have, is an inner *knowing* of what *is*; and of what feels right and what doesn't; what is painful and what is without pain and fear. Can we stop and listen to that, be guided by that?

Contemplating the Dhammapada, verse 401:

“As water slides from a lotus leaf, so sensual pleasures do not cling to a great being.”

Sunday was the last day — time for looking back, sharing and closing.

The morning session gave space for looking back at what had been important and insightful: making a drawing/painting/installation which could serve as an inspirational reminder for later. Photos of this session and some of the results can be seen on the next pages.







