





This quote from Luang Por Sumedho comes to mind as the sangha and community at Amaravati are coming up to the three month rains retreat or Vassa (Khao Phansa in Thai), the time of year when we determine to stay in one place and live with each other, practising and studying Dhamma-Vināya together.

Living with other people is often not so easy. In the cortège of everyday villains, there’s the flat-footed elephant that walks the corridors or the usually quiet person that slams the doors every time they go through them. There’s many minor ways in which we can feel upset about each other and it’s easy to think like that about others, but in truth, this labelling is all about one’s inner moods.

If I’m trying to be quiet in my room, the bang of the door slamming might be incredibly irritating, but if I’m oversleeping, the sound of the door slamming might be welcome because I can still make it in time for early morning pūjā.

The same goes for the feeling of having to stay in one place and live with ‘them’ or being happy that finally we can all be together, as spiritual friends; or there can be a feeling of dread at the prospect of having to be in meetings and of the crowds at the weekends over the summer. Or there might be a feeling of joy at being able to study vināya and meet all these wonderful practitioners!

Then there are the more deep-seated difficulties of incompatibilities and differing opinions all of which can make living together very challenging.

How much we are affected and how we react is all going to be influenced by our personalities, previous experience and the environment we have been familiar with, but seeing the world as full of problems, full of things which are unwanted one way or another, people who are simply ‘not right’ is a very common theme, and not just in the monastery. In many ways, human beings all live in community, some of us more formally but we all belong to some group, by choice or by convention.

But being together in the Amaravati community, practising together, we have to find ways of living with each other and actively look to develop those skills that lead to harmony, because we do aspire to the beautiful qualities mentioned in the quote, and can’t avoid rubbing up against in other.

When seeing others, it helps to bring to mind their commitment to the precepts that govern outward behaviour or to the good things they do, the good qualities they have, rather than focusing on aspects of their behaviour which one finds negative. One can do this for oneself too, bringing to mind good qualities, times when we handled a situation well. Doing this for oneself also makes it easier to recognise these things in others, thereby understanding their point of view.

This opening up to others, seeing their qualities and opinions and respecting them as one would one’s own, is one aspect of this process of polishing and smoothing, a start to letting go of the feeling of living with others in a world of problems.