



News from Amaravati – Winter 2016

Mudita

On December 5 2015, Luang Por Pasanno the abbot of Abhayagiri Monastery in the USA and Ajahn Amaro the abbot of Amaravati, were both given the royal ecclesiastical title of Chao Khun in a long and colourful ceremony held in Bangkok.

The preparations for the ceremony took place in the Emerald Buddha Temple, then Thailand's Royal Crown Prince made the customary offering of a ceremonial fan and certificate in the Amarindara-vinnicchaya Throne Hall in the Grand Palace. This was followed by visits to Wat Saket (Gold Mountain Monastery) for a mudita ceremony led by Phra Brohmasiddhi, who had put the Ajahns' names forward for the Chao Khun title. After this, Ajahn Amaro and Luang Por Passano together with a number of other monks, went to Wat Pah Amphawan (Mango Grove Monastery) in Chonburi Province, Ajahn Jandee's place and an Ajahn Chah branch monastery. The following day, there was another ceremony at Wat Pah Amphawan, then they went on to pay respects to the acting Sangharaja, Somdej Phra Maha Rajjamangalacariyaat at Wat Paknam in Bangkok. They then travelled to Ubon Province and Wat Pah Nanachat to take part in further beautifully prepared ceremonies attended by many local dignitaries and representatives. Apparently the flowers alone took hundreds of hours to prepare!

Amaravati held its own, probably simpler but heartfelt mudita ceremony for Ajahn Amaro on December 27. Joining for the occasion were Luang Por Damrong, Luang Por Khemadhammo and Tan Ajahn Maha Laow, along with other sangha from various monasteries in the UK; Thailand's Ambassador to the UK, Mr Kitthiphong na Ranong, and a number of lay supporters.

Luang Por Pasanno's ceremonial name is Chao Khun Phra Bodhinyanawiteht (Bodhiñānavidesa, พระโพธิญาณวเวศ) and Ajahn Amaro's is Chao Khun Phra Witehtbutthikhun (Videsabuddhiguna, พระวเวศพุทธคุณ).

The Chao Khun title (chao means 'peak' and khun is related to the word 'guna', or merit, excellence, virtue) is one of a number of clerical titles specific to the Thai sangha, given to acknowledge scholarly achievement, distinction in administration or as a general recognition of contribution to the Buddha-sasana. The term 'videsa' or 'viteht' means foreign country. Ajahn Amaro has mentioned that of the 61 titles given out at this year's ceremony, quite a number of the names included this term 'videsa' or 'viteht', recognizing the contributions of monks who live outside of Thailand, running temples in 'foreign lands' such as Guam in the South Pacific or indeed Amaravati and Abhayagiri in the UK and the USA.

Since his return from Thailand, Ajahn Amaro has remarked on more than one occasion that one can have a whole range of feelings and opinions about official titles and ceremonies, ranging from cynicism to unfettered delight or just plain bewilderment if one is not familiar with their meaning; or experience feelings of personal indifference to a measure of pride or self-satisfaction. But it is also a fact that to receive such a title is a significant honour, a 'pat on the back' as Luang Por Khemadhammo put it in his short talk during the mudita ceremony. Both he and Ajahn Amaro have noted that this is so both for those receiving the title, but also for the community they serve. The accolade extends in a gesture of appreciation to the community of monks, nuns and lay-people, recognizing everyone's practice and aspiration to spiritual qualities.

Reflecting on this, one can see these conventions as an expression of appreciation to be met with *mudita*, that is a simple joy at the goodness that has been manifested. We can all choose to do many things with our time, so to practice peacefulness, virtue and gladness, to cultivate spiritual qualities, is something to be celebrated, rejoiced in, and occasions like these are there to remind us of that.

As 2015 winds down, the mild weather and burgeoning daffodils in December are as out-of-kilter as the world's events, which seem dominated by conflict and uncertainty. Against this background of unsettledness, reflecting on *mudita* and the value of goodness opens the heart to others, counteracting a tendency to close up, to rely on positions or opinions that want to make things appear solid, familiar, predictable, secure. Rejoicing in the good fortune of someone else will also make us more empathetic to misfortune; make us more resilient to life's ups and downs, as they are. These beautiful qualities of joy and goodness are much needed in this world and in one's own heart. So for the coming year, may we offer you our good wishes for peace, contentment and joy.