

LOOKING AHEAD

No 24

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, พระโพธิญาณวิเทศ) and Ajahn Amaro's is Chao Khun Phra Witehtbutthikhun (Videsabuddhiguna, พระวิเทศพุทธิคุณ). 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.

Retreat Centre Information

Booking opens six calendar months before each retreat start date and you can apply for up to three retreats in any one year. Waiting lists are no longer closed at 50 and if you can attend at the last minute it is always worth applying, as we often receive late cancellations which can be difficult to fill.

Full information about attending retreats, how to book, what to expect and what to bring, is available on the Retreat Centre webpages at: www.amaravati.org/retreat-centre/

You can also change your personal details, your email address or cancel your retreat on these pages by selecting 'Manage your details' or 'Cancel your retreat'.

If you have any queries about monastic retreats that cannot be answered by visiting the webpages, please contact the Retreat Centre at retreats@amaravati.org.

For all other retreats (ALBA, BWN and Family Events) use the contact details listed for the organiser below.

Monastic Retreats

Dates for 2016	Duration	Teacher	Booking opens
1-3 April	weekend	Ajahn Anando	1 October 2015
8-12 April	5 days	Ajahn Jayanto	8 October
23-30 April *	8 days	Ajahn Viradhammo *	23 October
6-15 May **	10 days	Ajahn Amaro & Joseph Kappel - 'Seamless Wellbeing: Protecting the World through Sila' **	6 November
3-7 June	5 days	Ajahn Dhammanando	3 December
24-28 June	5 days	Ajahn Cittapālā	24 December
22-24 July	weekend	Ajahn Ahimsako	22 January 2016
29 July-7 Aug. ***	10 days	Ajahn Candasirī ***	29 January
12-16 August	5 days	Ajahn Amaro & Ajahn Ratanawanno Thai Language Retreat	12 February
16-18 Sept.	weekend	Ajahn Brahmavarā	16 March
23 Sept.-5 Oct. **	13 days	Ajahn Amaro **	23 March
14-16 October	weekend	Brother Nicholas & Ajahn Mettā Buddhist/Christian Retreat	14 April
21-25 October	5 days	Ajahn Nyānarato	21 April
11-20 November	10 days	Ajahn Vajīro	11 May
9-11 December	weekend	Ajahn Bodhipālā	9 June
27 Dec.-1 Jan. 2017 *	6 days	Ajahn Sundarā - New Year Retreat *	27 June

* Previous silent meditation retreat experience required

** This retreat is for experienced meditators. Attendance at a previous 10-day retreat required

*** Previous silent meditation retreat experience recommended

Amaravati Family Events

Family Events are held in the Retreat Centre, with camping available during the long August Camp. They are led by the monastic sangha in cooperation with a group of lay coordinators and helpers. There are five retreats held each year, including a retreat for 13-19 yr-olds. The weekend in July is intended as an introduction for new families thinking of applying for the longer camp in August. The theme for 2016 is 'The Life of the Buddha'.

27-30 May	Rainbows Weekend
8-10 July	Family Weekend
20-28 August	Family Camp
25-27 November	Young Person's Retreat (13-19 yrs)
2-4 December	Creative Weekend (18 yrs +)

For bookings and information visit: www.family.amaravati.org

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA)

The ALBA was started in 1994, as a way to offer the lay community that frequents Amaravati a forum to connect with like-minded

people. ALBA runs a series of days of practice and short retreats at Amaravati, led by experienced lay teachers.

Days of Practice: 9 Jan, 6 Feb, 5 March, 21 May, 18 June, 10 September, 5 November, 17 December.

Retreats: 15-17 April, 15-19 July, 7-9 October.

For bookings and information visit: www.buddhacommunity.org

Buddhist Women's Network (BWN)

The BWN was set up in 2004 by women who are associated with Amaravati. It provides an opportunity to develop spiritual friendship and support for practice. These events are led by experienced lay women and include periods of sitting and walking meditation, sharing and discussion. Beginners and those new to this tradition are welcome.

Days of Practice: 6 March, 19 June, 11 September, 18 December.

Weekend Retreat: 28-31 October.

For bookings and information please write to:
buddhistwomensnetwork@gmail.com

News and Announcements

Winter Retreat

The winter retreat will run from January 3 to March 31. Unlike the 3-month Vassa retreat, which is a tradition that comes from the time of the Buddha and is a time for being in community as well as the busiest time of year for us in terms of guests, visitors, engagements, study and work; the winter retreat is simply a part of the monastery's yearly rhythm of activity and seclusion, with the monastics putting down their duties and outside engagements to practise formal meditation in noble silence as a group or in solitude. For the monastery, this is generally a very settled time with minimal outside activity.

One story has it that the idea for the retreat came in the early days of Amaravati, during a bitterly cold winter when the monastery ran out of funds to pay for heating. Luang Por Sumedho decided to use the situation to close the place down and have 2 months of retreat time. This, expanded to three months, has been part of the routine every year since.

Staying Overnight & Visiting

There is no overnight accommodation available and the guest monk/guest nun will not be answering booking or other queries from January until the end of March. Guest bookings will resume in April 2016.

The Retreat Centre is closed, with the first retreat of 2016 taking place in early April. You can however, still make bookings online as explained under Retreat Centre News on the facing page.

Visitors are very welcome to come to participate in the meal offering at 11 am; attend the weekly Saturday afternoon meditation workshops; spend some quiet time; use the library; attend the moon day talks; the daily readings in the sālā or join in the group meditation in the Temple. The schedule below provides further information.

Winter Retreat Group Practice Schedule

Jan 3 – 16	All day group practice.
Jan 17 – Feb 7	Afternoon & evening group practice
Feb 8 – 29	Open schedule
Mar 1 – 15	Morning group practice
Mar 16 – 31	All day group practice

Daily schedule

5.00 am	Sitting and morning pūjā
8.30 am	Meditation instruction* and sitting
9.30 am	Walking
11.00 am	Meal offering
2.00 pm	Sitting
3.00 pm	Walking
4.00 pm	Sitting
5.00 pm	Tea
6.00 pm	Dhamma reading in the sālā
7.30 pm	Evening pūjā and sitting

On lunar observance nights, there will be a Dhamma talk and late night vigil after the evening sitting. Group practice takes place in the temple.

*8.30 am meditation instruction is offered Jan 3-16 and Mar 16-31 only.

The monastic community is expected to practice Noble Silence, though Ajahn Amaro or another senior monastic will be available to receive visitors in the sālā after the meal as usual.

General Monastery Enquiries and Office Hours

From Jan 3 to March 31, the office is open from 8.30-11.00 am, Mon-Fri only. At other times, there is an answer phone for leaving messages. The monastery secretary will check messages regularly but only reply to those deemed absolutely urgent. General enquiries will be filed away to be answered once the winter retreat is over. Note the website is generally not updated during the winter.

Building Works

The construction of the nursing facility for elderly and infirm sangha members is due to start Jan 11. The main shell should be up by April and the work complete by October. The construction site will be located at the front of the monastery, in the old orchard. Builders will be on-site during normal working hours on weekdays. There will be some additional traffic for deliveries to the site as well as some changes to parking arrangements. If you are visiting, please take care and follow any notices that are put up.

Caroline Leinster, the English Sangha Trust Secretary is the contact person regarding the building works, especially during the period January-March inclusive, when the monks and nuns are on retreat and life at the monastery is generally at its quietest.

You can reach Caroline by ringing 01442 843721, or emailing her at: est@amaravati.org

The chosen name for the nursing facility is Aroga Kutī. Aroga means 'freedom from sickness' in Pāli.

Further information about Aroga Kutī and the Amaravati long-term plans will be posted on the website at amaravati.org/rebuilding-amaravati

Introductory Meditation Workshops

Saturday afternoons 2–4 pm

Meditation instruction for beginners with an opportunity for questions and dialogue.

Everyone is welcome – there is no fee and no booking is necessary.

From January to the end of March, classes are led by experienced lay teachers and will be held in the sālā.

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Amaravati Monastery, St Margarets, Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ, UK

Monastery Contact Details

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Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ
Office: +44 (0) 1442 842 455
Retreat Centre: +44 (0) 1442 843 239

See News and Announcements for office hours and contact information over the winter retreat period.

Stewards

The English Sangha Trust (EST) is a registered charitable trust which stewards funds to support the sangha at Amaravati and Cittaviveka monasteries. Contributions can be made to the English Sangha Trust c/o Amaravati or online: www.amaravati.org/support

Notable Dates

Ajahn Chah Memorial Day – Jan 16
Māghā Pūjā – Feb 22
Elders' Council Meetings – 19-20 April
Vesākha Pūjā – May 20
Vesakh Festival – May 22
Ajahn Chah's Birthday – June 17
Āsāḷhā Pūjā – July 19
Vassa Begins – July 20
Pavāranā Day (End of Vassa) – Oct 16
Amaravati Kathina – Nov 6

Website

For Dhamma resources, audio files, retreat information and more visit: www.amaravati.org

Lotus Volunteer Group

For the many ways to help out at Amaravati visit: www.lotusvolunteergroup.amaravati.org

Looking Ahead is a newsletter from Amaravati. You can pick up a copy at the monastery or receive it directly by email or by post. Please send your email and/or home address to: <abmnews@amaravati.org> or post it to Amaravati. Please indicate whether you wish to receive Looking Ahead by email or by post.

Lunar Observance Days 2016

Jan	● 2 (Sat)	● 8 (Fri)
	● 16 (Sat)	○ 23 (Sat)
	● 31 (Sun)	
Feb	● 7 (Sun)	○ 15 (Mon)
	○ 22 (Mon)	
Mar	○ 1 (Tue)	● 7 (Mon)
	● 15 (Tue)	○ 22 (Tue)
	○ 30 (Wed)	
Apr	● 6 (Wed)	○ 14 (Thur)
	○ 21 (Thur)	● 29 (Fri)
May	● 5 (Thur)	○ 13 (Fri)
	○ 20 (Fri)	● 28 (Sat)
Jun	● 4 (Sat)	○ 12 (Sun)
	○ 19 (Sun)	● 27 (Mon)
Jul	● 4 (Mon)	○ 12 (Tue)
	○ 19 (Tue)	● 27 (Wed)
Aug	● 3 (Wed)	○ 11 (Thur)
	○ 18 (Thur)	● 26 (Fri)
Sep	● 1 (Thur)	○ 9 (Fri)
	○ 16 (Fri)	● 24 (Sat)
Oct	● 1 (Sat)	○ 9 (Sun)
	○ 16 (Sun)	● 24 (Mon)
	● 30 (Sun)	
Nov	○ 7 (Mon)	○ 14 (Mon)
	● 22 (Tue)	● 29 (Tue)
Dec	○ 7 (Wed)	○ 14 (Wed)
	● 22 (Thur)	● 28 (Wed)

On lunar observance days, there is usually a pūjā at 7.30 pm, followed by a Dhamma Talk and late night vigil. The schedule may vary during the winter retreat, please contact the office for details if you are unsure.