



News from Amaravati – Spring 2016

Deep Foundations, Careful Growth



Ajahn Amaro writes: “The earth moves; Hertfordshire clay is well known for its capacity to demonstrate this mobility so the foundations for the Aroga Nursing Kuti, currently under construction, are buried deep. The eighteen pilings reach some fifteen metres (nearly 50 feet) down into the ground so that, regardless of the expansions and contractions caused by the water in the soil, the building will rest as a solid, well-integrated unit.

The winter retreat season at Amaravati serves a similar purpose. The three months of committed presence, and communal engagement in routines of formal meditation, function as firm pilings; the qualities of resolution and patience, energy and attention engendered by the practice of Dhamma serve to hold the structure of the Sangha together amidst the many travails and turbulences of the conditioned world. If the foundations are firm and deep, the earth can move as much as it wants and the structure will be undisturbed, as the Venerable Subhūti put it in the first verse of the Theragāthā:

I stay in a roofed hut; it is very comfortable.

The wind does not disturb me.

Dear rain cloud, rain as much as you want.

My mind has become perfectly still
and is liberated from all defilements.

I live with great energy.

Dear rain cloud, rain as much as you want.

Venerable Kiribathgoda Gnānānanda Thera, (trns)

About 60 people have been resident over the course of the winter retreat this year, being a mixture of nuns and monks, novices of Eight and Ten Precepts, some long-term lay residents, a group of lay people serving as the 'winter retreat support team' and a more fluctuating assembly of Retreat Centre helpers, carrying out the annual renovations and deep-cleaning. During these three months, there has been an atmosphere of great harmony and enthusiastic commitment to meditation and the various tasks involved, however, that should not be taken to mean that it has always been easy. There are often internal struggles with the mind as well as differences of perspective amongst the various residents and one's fellow Dhamma-farers. This is to be expected but, if at these times, wisdom is applied appropriately then such frictions can be a direct source of incisive understanding, liberation and well-being. It is like sharpening a knife, leaning the blade carefully into the grinding wheel at the optimal angle and pressure so it gets a fine cutting edge.

Similarly the spring season has, overall, brought a steady and fruitful growth to the Aroga Nursing Kuti. We had a richly rain-blessed ground-breaking ceremony on January 3, the contractors moved in on January 11 and, at the time of writing, the brick walls have begun to rise. It has not all gone smoothly. After the foundations were laid and the fine oak frame erected, some difficulties arose in meeting the high standards required for an energy-efficient building. We thus made an immediate thoughtful pause, looked closely at what was needed, and now things are proceeding on track and on schedule once again, with no loss of resources.

This is how the practice of Dhamma progresses most successfully, whether it be mind-training or building construction: chanda – there is a need and an interest to engage in a task; viriya – energy is applied to the work; citta – you think through what is necessary for success; vimaṃsa – you review the results of what has been done and adjust accordingly.

It is a delight and an honour to see and be part of this process in action; to witness so many people giving their time, attention and good-hearted energy to training their minds as well as serving the needs of others, and to see the Aroga Nursing Kuti arise from the Hertfordshire clay. The inner work is what maintains Amaravati as a genuine 'Deathless Realm', while the outer will provide a dwelling place for Luang Por Sumedho to stay in whenever he might be visiting and for the well-being of all other ailing and elderly monks, far into the future."