

Newsletter



AS IF BESTOWING A BLESSING OF PEACE, the beginning of 2011 has brought, as ever, the cool quiet of the three-month Winter Retreat to most of our Western monasteries, including those in Britain. And as spring now dawns, the monasteries will be preparing for the usual increase in activities and movement.

Much has happened since last year's *Forest Sangha Newsletter* was published in January 2010. That's a long period in traditional FS Newsletter terms: it's now been over a year since that publication, while for so long there were FSNs coming out every few months. As most of you will know, around that time (February last year), in what was the biggest news by far for our Sangha in Europe perhaps since its inception, Luang Por Sumedho announced his wish to relinquish his duties as abbot of Amaravati, along with his other responsibilities.

Luang Por is now 76. Citing his long-expressed wish to be less of a central figure in decision-making – and the difficulty of achieving this for someone of his stature – Luang Por has said he wishes to inspire an alternative model for 'ageing abbots', other than the one prevalent in our tradition where abbots and senior elders can be expected to stay in charge of things right up until the moment they die.

To make this possible, Luang Por had invited Ajahn Amaro to take his place as Amaravati's abbot. This was agreed by the monastic community last April, when after meeting with the monks and with the nuns at Amaravati and with the Elders' Council, Ajahn Amaro was heartily welcomed to take up Luang Por's invitation. Leaving behind all that he'd established as co-abbot of Abhayagiri Monastery in California, Ajahn Amaro arrived at Amaravati last July with a bowl bag, a small suitcase and an open mind. And – in order to facilitate this leadership transition, Luang Por had informed us he would be leaving the U.K. at the end of November.

Needless to say, this has represented a huge change for all of us associated with the monasteries to which Luang Por Sumedho has been so central. The months leading up to his departure – for Thailand, initially, though he is delighting in the uncertainty of having no plans – saw a continuous sequence of 'last visits' and goodbyes, to monasteries and by friends and supporters. This issue of the FSN is dedicated to Luang Por's departure, sharing a few images and words from that time. Sangha members were all invited to offer any early memories or present thoughts concerning Luang Por's influence on their lives that they might wish to express, by way of contributing to this issue... and though it was a busy time, and many aren't generally inclined to submit written pieces for publication, some of the Sangha were indeed able to contribute and their pieces have been included.

As things evolve, it remains to be seen how Sangha community news will end up being published. The plethora of publishing avenues now available to our local monastic communities, via local newsletters and the Web, means news about monastery activities and the comings and goings of Sangha members is often shared there. The FSN will for the time being continue to be published on an annual basis – though the next issue will probably be released towards the end of this year. The present issue will be my last as editor, as I will be making way for Ven. Ahimsako who will be taking things forward from here. So I'd like to thank you all for your kind comments and various pieces of feedback, your patience (for our mailing list glitches and email correspondence inadequacies) and for your attention these past few years.

sabbe sankhara anicca

With metta,
Jayanto Bhikkhu

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