

Sangha Gathering, Amaravati May 26-31st.

'So long, bhikkhus, as you will assemble frequently together and assemble in large numbers, so long bhikkhus maybe expected to prosper, not to decline.'
[A.7.23]

Following the words of the Buddha quite literally, over 100 male and female samanās of the Ajahn Chah lineage met recently at Amaravati, between May 26th and 31st. They came from viharas in twenty-nine countries, spanning the globe from British Columbia to New Zealand. The assembly was presided over by Luang Por Liem, Luang Por Sumedho and Luang Por Khemadhammo and supported by members of the international lay community; it was further heightened by the visit of Tan Chao Khun Bromasiddhi, the abbot of Wat Saket and administrative head of the North-East region of Thailand, with an entourage of around thirty bhikkhus.

What was this meeting about? What was talked about and decided? There were twice daily exhortations from the senior members of the group that maintained a steady alignment to the principles of Dhamma-Vinaya. There were a range of meetings, from organized meetings that included all samanās from anagārika/ās to mahatheras, to meetings that were for abbots to share their views. There were informal gatherings over tea or in the campsite. Topics ranged from environmental concerns and living frugally, to how to best sustain Luang Por Chah's approach to Dhamma; investigation of contemporary developments in 'mindfulness' teachings and the ethical consequences of lay teachers offering instruction to the military. Or, to take another topic: 'Do our technological devices and websites threaten the simplicity of the samana life, or do they make things simpler when one is operating as part of a global body bringing Dhamma-Vinaya into the world?' There were many more topics, in fact too many to cover in the five-day period.

The discussions drew no final conclusions, nor were they supposed to. Nothing was decided, except to support the application of other monasteries as branches on Wat Pah Pong, and to meet again in three years' time. But that wasn't the point of meeting. The point of meeting, of speaking together and being together was to create an occasion to step out of our local concerns and recognize the field of Dhamma-Vinaya that we support and are supported by. It may not sound like much of a reason for travelling, but it is through tapping into this field that we are strengthened far beyond our personal means. The main point of a Sangha meeting is simply to meet, but it gives us the strength to return to our local communities and our ongoing work with a renewed sense of confidence.