

# ***Cremation Events***

***Paying our last respects to the  
Venerable Acharn Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno***



***Forest Dhamma Books of Wat Pa Baan Taad***

*this booklet is a gift of dhamma  
and printed for free distribution only!*

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Luangta was a simple monk in saffron robes who reached enlightenment at the age of 36 years. He commanded great respect for his kindness, compassion, and generosity to mankind; in particular to his country, the Thai Kingdom where he was born.

On January 30th, 2011, at 3:53 am Luangta Maha Bua passed away<sup>(01)</sup>. After his death Luangta's remains were prepared, and then at 10am were transported from his kuti<sup>(02)</sup> to the upper part of the main sālā.

His body was placed in the center of the sālā with his head facing towards the Buddha statue. Everyone who had heard of his death, or was present at that time, had the opportunity to come and pay their last respects<sup>(03)</sup> to Than Acharn Mahā Bua. The news traveled fast and during the day, most all the well known monks of the Thai forest tradition came to pay their last respects, and ask for forgiveness. Western monks<sup>(04)</sup> who were living in Thailand also came to pay their respects to him. Then in the afternoon, HRH the Princess came, and paid her last respects before Than Acharn Mahā Bua was to be placed in a casket. The area was then closed off to the public. Before sunset at about 5:30 pm, a royal ceremony was



(01) HRH Princess Chulaporn and the monks payed their respects to Luangta shortly after he passed away.



(02)



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held to place Luangta’s body into a golden painted casket where it would be kept inside a coffin refrigerator<sup>(04b)</sup>.

The Cremation Ceremony of Than Acharn Mahā Bua was under Royal Patronage. This included 7 days of royal attendance and robe offerings in the evenings. Each night until the last evening before his cremation at around 7pm there was evening chanting<sup>(05)</sup>, then a talk from one well known senior monk (from the Dhammayut tradition). After the talk, cremation robes were given to 10 selected monks.

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The news of Luangta’s death spread like wild fire across Thailand, and all over the world, as Luangta was considered to be the most honorable and senior monk in the Thai *Kammattḥāna* tradition. He was also one of the last living disciples of the late Venerable Acharn Mun Bhuridatta. On the morning of his death, the monks went on their daily morning alms round as usual, as the crowd started to flow<sup>(06)</sup> into the monastery from all directions. The army controlled the crowd remarkably well. Volunteers were already working on the *sālā* area carpeting the platforms, hanging curtains, placing white cloth below the roof and wall fans on the wooden columns. Senior monks used hand-held megaphones to control the crowd; while the army was shoulder-to-shoulder, man-to-man. The crowd moved smoothly in two single files<sup>(07)</sup> up the main *sālā* stairs, paid their respects and then went down the side stairs. Nurses, army, police



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and helpers were giving out ammonia cotton in case anyone collapsed or fainted.

The date of the cremation was set by LuangPhor Lee, one of Luangta's most senior disciples, to be done as soon as possible (on

the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2011). Her Majesty the Queen Sirikit agreed to the date. In the beginning the officials from the Royal Court thought that the time for the royal cremation preparation was too short, and that it would be impossible to accomplish the preparations in time,



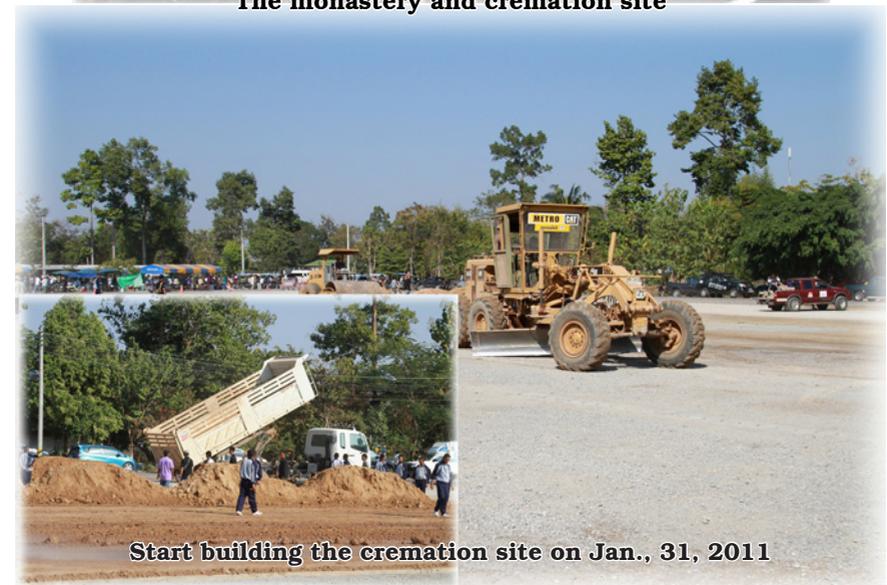
**view of main cremation site**



**Complete view of all areas for the cremation**



**The monastery and cremation site**



**Start building the cremation site on Jan., 31, 2011**

for normally a royal cremation is set about a year after the passing away. So they waited to see if all the work could be finished (p.6-p.9). Once they were convinced that it could be done, around the middle of February, the date of the cremation was formally fixed at the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2011.



**Lots of people helping to build the cremation site**



The cremation site in Feb. 2011

and March 2011

**Building & planing  
the cremation site in  
Feb. 2011**



The cremation site on the morning of 5th March 2011

The Thai people's generosity could be seen everywhere as free food and drink stalls were set up. They were sponsored by individuals, families, other temples, businesses and large corporations who were Luangta supporters. The army, police, workers, and monks worked around the clock as plans for the funeral pyre were finalized. Every day things changed; food stalls were moved to the outer gate of the monastery, and an information center<sup>(08)</sup>, and monks' registration booth were set up with condolence books. From a quiet forest monastery, sprouted an "instant office" with the latest technology. Laptops, printing and photocopying machines, laminators, cabinets and work desks all suddenly appeared. Mobile television stations were set up with 8 foot satellite dishes, Wi-Fi mobile vans appeared, as did portable ATM machines! Portable safes<sup>(09)</sup> were placed in Luangta's kuti as well as around the inner and outer sāla.

As well known senior monks from all over Thailand came to pay their respects, a senior monk would then announce who had come, and from which monastery. Every consideration was taken to ensure the safety of everyone. Ambulance and medical posts were situated at several locations. Even though the monastery gates were open until late, by 11pm the crowd had always gone, and the monastery would be quiet again for the residents and monks who were meditating inside. Many people camped out within the temple compound, as the police and army kept watch throughout the night.

The generosity was overwhelming. Young and old, the Thai people came with only one intention in mind, which was to ensure that everyone (the army, police, workers, helpers, and general public) had enough food and drinks. Every day they prepared<sup>(10)</sup> and cooked food, made desserts, and drinks; all for free, all to offer Dāna. Children as young as 4 years old would help their parents pour drinks. In the midst of the people preparing and distributing free food and drinks, there was chatter, laughter and joy. The magnitude of this act of generosity, where services were offered freely for over 6 weeks, cannot be found in any other country in the world.



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Sponsored tram-like<sup>(11)</sup> buses ferried people around; from the car park, to the food stalls, to the inner gate of the monastery every 15 minutes. Huge hot air balloons with Luangta's photo, and the Thai flag were flown in 4 different locations. Helicopters with cameras were capturing the crowd and preparation activities from an aerial view. It was remarkable. Everyone worked in unison helping to build the cremation ground, or planting lotuses in huge pots in a human-chain like manner, or polishing scented sandal wood that was cut to size to be used for the cremation pyre. The hours spent making the floral decorations for the enormous wooden umbrella, and the funeral pyre that sheltered Luangta's casket the night before cremation, were incredible. Every single detail was captured as everyone helped out in some form or another. Huge cranes, bulldozers and tractors were all used. Live reports and footage were telecast to the television, radio, newspapers and internet all across Thailand as well as abroad.

Monks and laypeople, who wanted to donate their skills and labor to prepare for the final ceremony, started pouring in after the death of the Venerable Acharn Mahā Bua. Each day visitors in the thousands came to Wat Pa Baan Taad, waiting patiently to be able to climb up the sālā stairs to pay their respects. Wat Pa Baan Taad was growing into a small city. People kept coming from all walks of life to help, and they just camped wherever they could find a place to sleep.

On the first gathering of the monks for reciting the Pāṭimokkha – the 227 rules of the monks – there were about 280 monks present. (The usual number of monks present at Wat Pa Baan Taad is around 60.) On the second Pāṭimokkha on Māgha Pūjā day, 750 monks were present, and on the day before his cremation, 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, there was the largest ever gathering of monks reported to recite the Pāṭimokkha together at around 4,700 monks!



Many things had to be finished before the cremation day. Hundreds of thousands of visitors were expected, and around 10,000 monks, so facilities had to be built from scratch to house both lay people and monks. 600 toilets<sup>(12)</sup>, roads to access Wat Pa Baan Taad, and parking lots were built. The cremation site was to be built elevated<sup>(page6-9)</sup>, so that all the people that were going to attend could see the cremation. A huge Umbrella<sup>(13)</sup> was made.

To provide food for the monks and laypeople, 1,400 food stalls<sup>(14)</sup> were set up by people who had come from all over the country. The food, the drinks, and everything was offered for free. Nothing in the whole new city of Wat Pa Baan Taad was allowed to be sold. Even free internet access points were provided. The city of Udorn Thani, 16 km east of Wat Pa Baan Taad, stopped all festivities until the cremation of Than Acharn Mahā Bua, and free rides from the city to Wat Pa Baan Taad and back were offered every half hour. Several tram cars were constantly providing people with rides within the new city of Wat Pa Baan Taad, during the heat of the day. Huge tents for shade had to be erected for the monks and the laypeople, to give them a place to sit for the ceremony. Firewood<sup>(15)</sup> had to be cut and prepared. For this cremation, straw flowers that are normally used would not be allowed, but instead little wooden sticks made of sandal wood were provided, that could then be placed on the funeral pyre.

This was going to be the biggest Buddhist ceremony ever held in Thailand. And it was being done with the help of the locals, the monks (coming from all over Thailand), government officials, royal officials, soldiers, police, and the big labor force of all the laypeople who had come from around the country to help. It was amazing to see how well this worked out. Just imagine providing drinking water, food, waste management, and toilets and washing facilities, to a population of about 30,000 people in Wat Pa Baan Taad, for the 5 weeks of the event. Not mention the free medical service. Ever since the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 there had been medical tents, doctors and nurses<sup>(16)</sup> and mobile medical units. However, on the last days before the cremation, it was reported that around 500 doctors and nurses, 20 ambulances and 3 helicopters were in service. In addition there were 9 medical tents, and 100 small mobile units. Also at the school of Baan Taad, a field hospital with 10 beds was set up. There was a huge parking lot for approximately 100,000 cars, and many smaller parking lots (rice fields were used



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for parking). Police and soldiers had to keep the roads clear and the traffic moving throughout the whole area of Udon Thani. 60 to 80 safes were placed around the area, where people could make their donations that had to be emptied on a regular basis. People working at the bank, set up a new office here at Wat Pa Baan Taad, receiving money, writing out cheques and more. A group of trusted disciples, overseen by a senior monk, situated at the kuti of Than Acharn Mahā Bua were counting and bundling money all day long.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, most of the people had already arrived, the large parking space was completely filled up, and there were traffic jams everywhere. Only cars with a special permit, the ones senior monks arrived in, trucks, vans and other vehicles that brought in goods, or moved out all the waste, were allowed to come into this city and leave it. However this was still too much, so on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March a special task force was set up that was controlling each vehicle coming in. It was already difficult for a person to move around on foot, almost impossible in a car. There was no space in the inner temple or the outskirts that was not already filled by people and tents. The people either brought their own tent<sup>(17)</sup>, or just slept in the open. Monks had to have two laypeople in front of them who would clear the way for them to walk. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of March monks needed police and soldiers, to clear a way for them to walk.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, the casket with the remains of Than Acharn Mahā Bua was moved<sup>(18)</sup> in the morning at around 10am, from the inner sālā to the cremation site outside. Later in the afternoon, the umbrella (klod) that would hang over the funeral pyre was decorated<sup>(19)</sup> and put up. In the evening the chanting was held outside near the cremation site. It was already filled up with people at that time. 10,000 monks were registered, and more than 100,000 people were going to spend the night at the city of “Wat Pa Baan Taad”. The evening chanting was probably the only one of its kind. More than 10,000 monks and laypeople chanted the



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traditional evening chant, together in unison<sup>(20)</sup>. After that all of them quietly listened to a recorded Dhamma talk of Than Acharn Mahā Bua. Once finished HRH the Princess was giving cloth (for robes) to 10 selected monks and another 99 donors were giving cloth to 99 selected monks. In the evening the decoration for the funeral pyre was cut out of banana stems. More than 50 artists<sup>(21)</sup> were working for more than 6 hours on it. This ornament had to be made fresh, for it does not last more than a day.

On the 5th of March 2011, the number of visitors<sup>(22)</sup> could not be counted, estimated visitors were more than 1,000,000 and there were approximately 15,000 monks. There were three areas where people were seated and could observe the events; within the inner temple around the inner sālā; then the actual cremation site, with the large sālā and special tents for monks royalty, government officials, ministers of the government, and other important people; and then the area outside of the temple, where the food stalls were located



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The completely finished cremation Pyre, 5th March 2011

including the big parking lot<sup>(23)</sup>. At all these places, loudspeakers, T.V. screens, or projectors with big screens were placed, so that people could see and hear the events. TV channels 3, 5 and 11 were giving live coverage of the events; and there was a broadcast over Luangta's TV channel. It was also transmitted live on the internet, accessible from [www.luangta.com](http://www.luangta.com).

At around 1pm, cloth for robes was given to 10 selected very high-ranking monks. More than 4 Patriarchs (Somdets)<sup>(24)</sup> monks and the representative monk of the Supreme Patriarch were attending as well.

At around 5pm, Her Majesty the Queen Sirikit arrives; she offers a set of five robes to 5 royal monks and initiates the cremation ceremony<sup>(25)</sup>. HRH the Princess, and her daughter offer another set of 10 robes to senior monks. Her Majesty the Queen Sirikit leaves, and then selected monks and government officials go up to the cremation site and put a stick of sandal wood on the funeral pyre as their last gesture of respect. Monks<sup>(26)</sup> that were living in Wat Pa Baan Taad, and monks who were his disciples, come up to the cremation site and put a stick of sandal wood on the funeral



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pyre (normally a straw flower is used) as their last goodbye and respect to the funeral pyre. In line with protocol, HRH the Princess Chulaporn then lights<sup>(27)</sup> the fire. As long as the fire<sup>(28)</sup> lasts (until the morning), a short biography of Than Acharn Mahā Bua is read, and then selected talks of Than Acharn Mahā Bua are played until 4am.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, at 4am the ashes and the bone fragments were gathered<sup>(29)</sup> from the cremation site and locked in a safe with 8 keys, for later distribution.

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## **Bone Fragments and Relics**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, a bag with bone fragments was given to HRH the Princess Chulaporn, and the rest was to be distributed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March. 8 different monks with 8 different keys were responsible for the safeguard of the bone fragments.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, the current abbot, Acharn Sudjai, and the other seven monks were selecting pieces of bone fragments:

About Distribution of the Remains of  
Than Acharn Mahā Bua.

– One part of the bone fragments were kept for the stupa to be built at the monastery of Baan Taad.

– One part of the bone fragments were distributed to a few selected monasteries which have stupas.

– One part of the bone fragments were given to monks who spent at least one rains retreat at Wat Pa Baan Taad, and who helped with the work of preparing the cremation.

– One part of the bone fragments were given to the monks who still reside at the monastery of Baan Taad.

– One part of the bone fragments were given to VIPs, like HRH Princess Chulaporn, the head of the Sangha and other selected persons.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of March, ashes from the cremation were given away to anyone who wanted them. From then on, ashes were only given to people who helped with the work of preparing the cremation.

As long as supplies last(ed), there is a mixture of bone fragments and ashes given to monasteries who have faith or connection to Luangta Mahā Bua. However the abbot has to prove, that the monastery is legal and that he is the abbot, and it has to be collected in person.



## **About Donations**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 alone, cash donations exceeded 48 million Baht and about 20kg of Gold.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 alone, cash donations exceeded 21 million Baht and about 9kg of Gold.

In the time from his passing away on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January to the morning after his cremation, the 6<sup>th</sup> of March:

A total of more than 335 million Baht of donations were collected and a total of 110kg of Gold was donated.

Luangta Mahā Bua specified in his will, that all of the money that was donated up to the time of his cremation should be given to the “Central Bank of Thailand”. He said, I am going to be burnt with wood, not with money. That also meant that none of the money donated could be used for preparing the ceremony itself. The money for printing his books that were distributed freely the whole time, for building the cremation site and all of other things that needed to be prepared and purchased, came separately from donors all over Thailand. This certainly exceeded another 100 million Bath.

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Just talking about the events that happened since the day he passed away to his cremation, I hope reflects the greatness of Than Acharn Mahā Bua and the kind of reverence and respect the Thai nation showed him.

To get a fuller experience of the events that took place, Video DVD’s have been recorded capturing the main events on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, 4<sup>th</sup> of March morning and evening and on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March. The main DVD of the cremation itself on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March and a documentary DVD, showing the preparation work leading up to the cremation, has subtitles in English and German.

These videos can be accessed at the website:

<http://www.luangta.eu/site/video.php>

**just a few strange pictures taken during this time**

